

In the
Indiana Supreme Court

In the Matter of the Approval of Local
Rules for St. Joseph County

Supreme Court Case No.
23S-MS-239



Order Approving Amended Local Rule

The Judges of the St. Joseph Circuit and Superior Courts request the approval of an amended local rule for caseload allocation in accordance with Indiana Administrative Rule 1(E). Attached to this Order is the proposed amended local rule.

Upon examination of the proposed rule amendments requested by the St. Joseph Circuit and Superior Courts, this Court finds that the proposed rule amendments at LR71-AR1-107 comply with the requirements of Indiana Administrative Rule 1(E), and, accordingly, should be approved.

IT IS, THEREFORE, ORDERED by this Court that amended Local Rule LR71-AR1-107, for the St. Joseph Circuit and Superior Courts, set forth as an attachment to this Order, is approved effective September 1, 2023.

Done at Indianapolis, Indiana, on 8/30/2023.



Loretta H. Rush
Chief Justice of Indiana

LR71-AR1-107

Appendix A to Local General and Administrative Rules, 100 Series
Caseload Allocation Plan
For Courts in St. Joseph County, Indiana

I. Organization of the Courts of St. Joseph County:

As of July 1, 2015, the Courts of St. Joseph County are organized and assigned judicial officers as follows:

- (1) St. Joseph Circuit Court – one (1) judge and three (3) magistrate judges;
- (2) St. Joseph Superior Court – eight (8) judges and four (4) magistrate judges; and
- (3) St. Joseph Probate Court – one (1) judge and three (3) magistrate judges.

II. Designation of Judicial Officers to Hear Civil, Criminal, and Juvenile Cases:

- (1) Judicial Officers Designated to Hear Civil Cases: Civil Cases (other than small claims matters), shall be heard by the judge and the magistrate judges of the Circuit Court and by the judges and/or magistrate judges of the Superior Court designated by the Chief Judge of the Superior Court to hear civil cases;
- (2) Judicial Officers Designated to Hear Felony Criminal Cases: Felony criminal cases shall be heard by the judges and/or magistrate judges of the Superior Court designated by the Chief Judge of the Superior Court to hear felony criminal cases;
- (3) Judicial Officers Designated to Hear Small Claims Cases: Small claims matters shall be heard by the judges and/or magistrate judges of the Superior Court designated by the Chief Judge of the Superior Court to hear small claims matters;
- (4) Judicial Officers Designated to Hear Traffic and Misdemeanor Cases: Unless otherwise assigned to a felony criminal court for judicial economy because a defendant has pending felony, misdemeanor, and/or probation revocation matters, traffic and misdemeanor matters shall be heard by the judges and/or magistrate judges of the Superior Court designated by the Chief Judge of the Superior Court to hear traffic and misdemeanor matters.
- (5) Judicial Officers Designated to Hear Paternity (JP), Delinquency (JD), CHINS (JC), Juvenile Status (JS), Juvenile Guardianship cases (GU), Termination of Parental Rights cases (JT), and Adoption Cases (AD): shall be assigned to the Judge of the Probate Court unless the Judge assigns the matter to be heard by a magistrate judge of the Probate Court. Notwithstanding any other provision of this rule, cases designated ES, EU, GU, and TR may continue to be filed in any of the courts consistent with traditional practice in St. Joseph County.
- (6) Judicial Officers Designated to Hear Title IV-D Cases: Pursuant to LR71-FL00-430 et seq., Title IV-D Cases may be assigned to the Title IV-D Court and heard by a magistrate judge of the Circuit, Superior, or Probate Court designated to preside over Title IV-D hearings.

III. Protocol for Assignment of Cases Among the Courts of St. Joseph County:

(1) Civil cases (other than small claims, JD, JC, JS, JM, AD, and JT): With the exception of paternity cases (JP) discussed in subparagraph 5 above, and cases traditionally assigned to the Probate Court as the court with traditional exclusive jurisdiction over juvenile cases (CHINS, delinquency, dependency, adoption, etc.) or to the Circuit Court (license reinstatement, name changes, health department enforcement cases, TS and TP, etc.), civil cases (other than small claims) shall be assigned randomly among the judges and/or magistrate judges of the Circuit Court and the Superior Court designated to hear civil matters. "Small claims" means SC cases and all EV cases filed on the small claims docket. The cases are assigned as follows:

- A. Circuit Court shall receive a total of 60% of all upper civil filings and Superior Court shall receive 40% of all upper civil filings.
- B. Four (4) civil judges in Superior Court shall receive as follows: the three Superior judges sitting in South Bend shall each receive approximately 28% of the 40% of the upper civil filings, and the judge sitting in Mishawaka shall receive approximately 16% of the 40% of the upper civil filings.
- C. Circuit Court shall have a Mishawaka Division with one (1) Circuit Court magistrate presiding and a South Bend Division with the Circuit Court judge and two (2) magistrates presiding.
- D. Superior Court shall have a Mishawaka Division with one (1) Superior Court judge presiding and a South Bend Division with three (3) Superior Court judges and four (4) magistrate judges presiding.
- E. Civil cases (other than small claims cases) may be filed in Circuit Court and Superior Court in South Bend or Mishawaka, Indiana as follows:
 - (a) The City of Mishawaka, the School City of Mishawaka, or a resident of the City of Mishawaka where all defendants are residents of the City of Mishawaka shall designate all of their cases for filing with the Mishawaka Division of Superior and Circuit Courts. The Clerk shall assign these cases on an alternating basis to ensure equal distribution of those filings between the Mishawaka Divisions of those courts.
 - (b) All attorneys and business entities with their principal places of business and all individuals with their principal residences located east of Logan Street but within St. Joseph County may either:
 - i. file their civil cases (other than small claims cases) without designation, in which case they will be assigned randomly to the Mishawaka Division of the Superior and Circuit Courts or one (1) of the three (3) judges of the civil division of the Superior Court or the judge of the Circuit Court; or
 - ii. file their civil cases (other than small claims cases) for filing in the Mishawaka Division of Superior and Circuit Courts in which case they will be assigned on an alternating basis to ensure equal distribution of those filings between the Mishawaka Divisions of those courts.
- F. For all civil case filings other than small claims cases not designated for filing in the Mishawaka Divisions of the Circuit and Superior Court, a seventeen (17) case

assignment rotation cycle shall be utilized with each seventeen (17) cases assigned as follows:

Ten (10) cases for Circuit Court (approximately 60%)

Seven (7) for Superior Court (approximately 40%), with 2 out of 7 going to each of the South Bend Superior Court judges and 1 out of 7 going to the Mishawaka Superior Court judge.

Circuit Court shall from time to time designate three (3) cases (17.65% of the Circuit cases) or four (4) cases (23.53% of the Circuit cases) of each of the ten (10) Circuit Court cases in each assignment rotation cycle to go to the Circuit Court magistrate judge sitting in Mishawaka to which direct filings will be added to achieve whatever total percentage of cases the Circuit Court judge wants in the Circuit Court Mishawaka Division.

The Chief Judge of the Superior Court shall, from time to time, reallocate civil cases from the Mishawaka Division to the South Bend Division to ensure there is an approximate weighted caseload allocation among the four (4) judges of the Superior Court's Civil Division.

(2) Felony Criminal Cases: Except for criminal cases that must be assigned to the Circuit Court by L71-CR2.2-303.1 or -303.2, felony criminal cases shall be assigned randomly and equally among the four (4) Superior Court criminal judges.

- A. All felony Superior Court judges may refer a level 5 or 6 felony drug cause for Drug Court assessment upon the filing of a Drug Court preliminary approval checklist by the Prosecutor's Office. Upon successful completion of the assessment process as determined by the Drug Court team, acceptance to the Drug Court Program, and the e-filing of a signed Drug Court plea, the cause shall be transferred to the Superior Court judge assigned to Drug Court and the cause shall be given a "D01" designation.
- B. All felony Superior Court judges may refer a case for Veteran's Court assessment upon the request of the State or the Defendant. Upon successful completion of the assessment process as determined by the Veteran's Court team, acceptance to the Veteran's Court Program, and the e-filing of a signed Veteran's Court plea, the cause shall be transferred to the Circuit Court and the cause shall be given a "C01" designation.
- C. In felony cases involving intimate partner domestic violence, all felony Superior Court judges may transfer the case if the Defendant has been approved by the Prosecutor's Office and Adult Probation for participation in the Domestic Violence Court Supervised Recidivism Reduction Program ("DVCSRRP"). Transfer will occur only after a signed DVCSRRP plea has been e-filed. The cause shall be transferred to the Superior Court judge who oversees the DVCSRRP and the cause shall be given a "D08" designation.
- D. At the request of a Superior Court criminal judge, a magistrate judge of the Superior Court may preside over a felony trial or felony hearing(s).

However, and notwithstanding this method of random assignment, in all felony criminal cases, except MR cases, where co-defendants are charged, cases shall be reassigned to a single judge or magistrate judge, as follows: (a) where co-defendants have been equally assigned to different judges, the judge having the lowest assigned cause number shall be assigned/reassigned all co-defendant cases; or (b) if co-defendants have been unequally assigned to different judges, the

judge having the greatest number of co-defendants shall be assigned/reassigned all co-defendant cases. Additional case reassignment may occur pursuant to Local Rule 303.3(8). The Chief Judge of the Superior Court may reassign MR cases or other felony cases where such reassignment is in the interest of judicial economy or dictated by the weighted caseload balancing requirements.

(3) Small Claims Cases: Superior Court has a Small Claims Division with two (2) locations: South Bend and Mishawaka. All small claims cases shall be assigned to the Small Claims Division in South Bend and assigned to that Division at the South Bend location, except for the following:

- A. All small claims cases filed by the City of Mishawaka, the School City of Mishawaka, or a resident of the City of Mishawaka where all defendants are residents of the City of Mishawaka, shall be designated for filing in Mishawaka and shall be assigned to the Small Claims Division of Superior Court in Mishawaka.
- B. All small claims cases filed by attorneys and business entities with their principal places of business and individuals with their principal residences located east of Logan Street but within St. Joseph County may, at the filer's discretion:
 - a. File their small claims cases without designation, in which case they will be assigned to the South Bend Small Claims Division; or
 - b. Designate their small claims cases for filing in the Mishawaka Division, in which case they will be assigned to the Small Claims Division's Mishawaka location.
- C. The four (4) Superior Court magistrates work equally for each one of the eight (8) Superior Court judges; therefore, for case allocation reporting purposes: each Superior Court judge is assigned: 1/8th of all small claims cases assigned to the Small Claims Division's South Bend location. The Superior Court civil judge sitting in Mishawaka is also assigned all:
 - a. All TR cases designated for filing in Mishawaka;
 - b. All EU, ES, and EM cases designated for filing in Mishawaka; and
 - c. All adult GU cases designated for filing in Mishawaka

(4) Traffic and Misdemeanor Cases: Superior Court has a Traffic and Misdemeanor Division located in South Bend. All TM, CM, IF, and OV cases shall be assigned to the Traffic and Misdemeanor Division. All CM, IF, or OV cases in which a jury demand is granted shall be assigned to the Superior Court in Mishawaka for all further proceedings.

The four (4) Superior Court magistrates work equally for each one of the eight (8) Superior Court judges; therefore, their handling of all traffic and misdemeanor cases shall be assigned as follows for case allocation reporting purposes:

- A. 1/8th of all CM, IF, and OV cases (less new misdemeanor cases sent to Mishawaka Traffic and Misdemeanor due to jury trial requests) will be assigned equally to each of the eight (8) Superior Court judges.
- B. In addition, the Superior Court judge in the Mishawaka Division will also be assigned, for case allocation purposes, all CM, IF, and OV cases transferred to Mishawaka Division for jury trial requests.

- (5) Mental Health Cases: All MH cases will be divided equally among the four (4) Superior Court civil judges.
- (6) Paternity, CHINS, Delinquency, Dependency, and Adoption Cases: All paternity, CHINS, delinquency, dependency, and adoption cases shall be filed in Probate Court.
- (7) Separate petitions for specialized driving privileges shall be filed in the St. Joseph Circuit Court; however, petitions for post-conviction relief (PCR) or requests for relief from suspensions entered in a pending criminal cause of action shall be filed before the court that issued the judgment of sentence or interlocutory suspension.
- (8) Protective Order (PO) Cases: Petitions for civil orders of protection alleging domestic violence (DV), sexual assault, stalking, or harassment shall be filed in the Circuit Court and assigned to the Civil Protective Order Court, except for the following matters:
 - a. Cases filed directly with a Court that has already assumed jurisdiction over a dissolution of marriage, paternity, child in need of services (CHINS), or delinquency proceeding involving the parties;
 - b. Cases filed as plenary cases in South Bend. Plenary cases shall be randomly assigned based on subparagraph (1) *supra*. PO cases may be filed at Courthouse 1, Mishawaka Courthouse, and Probate Court in St. Joseph County, the Family Justice Center, and any other place designated by the Judicial Executive Committee (as defined in DR04-AR00-3). PO hearings shall be set according to a written schedule that shall be developed by the Judicial Executive Committee or by the regularly presiding judge of the applicable court. Workplace violence cases shall be randomly assigned based on subparagraph (1) *supra*.

IV. Exceptions to the Protocol for Assignment of Cases:

- (1) Mass Filing of Collection Cases (other than small claims): Upon request and designation by the Judge of the Circuit Court and the Chief Judge of the Superior Court, a lawyer or law firm may be approved to make mass filing of collection cases (other than small claims). Unless otherwise directed by the Judge of the Circuit Court or the Chief Judge of the Superior Court based on weighted caseload balancing requirements or otherwise, cases filed by a lawyer or law firm approved for mass filing shall be assigned to the Circuit Court.
- (2) Special Judge or Transfer: Nothing in these local rules shall be interpreted to prevent a party from taking a change of judge or requesting transfer of a case as otherwise authorized by statute or rule of court.
- (3) Temporary or Permanent Assignment of Cases: Nothing in these local rules shall be interpreted to prevent the regularly presiding judge of a Court from assigning a case on a temporary or permanent basis to a Magistrate Judge, Special Judge, Senior Judge, Temporary Judge, Judge Pro Tem, Referee, or another duly appointed judicial officer.
- (4) Caseload Balancing: Nothing in these local rules shall be interpreted to prevent the Judge of the Circuit Court, the Chief Judge of the Superior Court, or the Judge of the Probate Court, from reassigning a case for the purpose of caseload balancing based on the weighted caseload criteria or other caseload balancing criteria.

(5) Emergency or Exigent Circumstances: Nothing in these local rules shall be interpreted to prevent the Judge of the Circuit Court, the Chief Judge of the Superior Court, or the Judge of the Probate Court, either jointly or individually, from assigning a case based on an emergency or exigent circumstances.

V. Authority and Effective Date:

- (1) This Caseload Allocation Plan is adopted pursuant to the requirements of A.R. 1 (E) and LR71-AR1-107.1
- (2) The effective date of this amended Caseload Allocation Plan is September 1, 2023.