

# **CRIMINAL COURT PROCEDURES AND PREFERENCES**

## **Division A—Judge Baker-Carper**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The Rules of Judicial Administration encourage the speedy, just, and inexpensive resolution of cases. These rules require the trial court to monitor and manage its docket to achieve this goal. In furtherance of this goal, information on the Judge's procedures and preferences is provided for the benefit of attorneys and parties appearing before Judge Baker-Carper.

### **SECTION 1 - COMMUNICATION WITH THE JUDGE'S OFFICE**

#### **1.1 Communication with Judge Baker-Carper**

Impartiality is the most basic principle of judicial ethics. This means that all parties to a pending case must be included in all communications with the Court regarding the matter. The Judge is restricted by principles of judicial ethics from communicating about pending cases outside of hearings or documents filed in the court file and served on all parties. These restrictions apply equally to the Judge's Judicial Assistant (the JA). The JA cannot deliver messages about substantive matters from a litigant or any other person to the Judge. However, communication with the JA for scheduling purposes is permitted.

#### **1.2 Communication with Judge Baker-Carper's Judicial Assistant (JA)**

At the risk of stating the obvious, the JA does not consider arguments or decide legal matters; such is the exclusive province of the Judge. Consequently, the practice of arguing the merits of a case to the JA, or including the JA on e-mail exchanges in which disagreements between the parties are aired, serves no purpose and is prohibited. Furthermore, the JA is an extension of the Judge. As such, intemperate communication should be avoided.

### **SECTION 2 - MOTION PRACTICE**

#### **2.1 Form and Content**

In general, all motions and responses, unless made orally during a hearing or trial, should be in writing and should state with particularity the grounds and the relief sought. Motions and responses should include all authorities relied upon, either in

the body of the motion or response, or in a separate memorandum of law. However, citation to legal authority is not required for routine motions that do not raise substantive legal issues, e.g., motions for continuance, motions to transport, etc.

## **2.2 Certificate of Good Faith Conference**

Before filing any motion, the movant must confer with opposing counsel in an effort to resolve the issue(s) raised by the motion. This does not envision an exchange of ultimatums but rather a substantive conversation geared toward resolution of the matter in good faith. Additionally, counsel are expected to respond promptly and professionally to inquiries and communication from opposing counsel in this and all matters concerning the litigation.

## **2.3 Specially Set Motion Hearings**

Specially set hearings (bond, suppression, motions in limine, Williams Rule, “straight up” or “open” pleas, etc.) are scheduled by e-mailing the JA at [RandolphR@leoncountyfl.gov](mailto:RandolphR@leoncountyfl.gov). The JA will assist the parties in scheduling a hearing date. If the parties cannot agree on a hearing date, the procedure in Section 2.3.1 will govern.

### **Motions will NOT be scheduled for hearing unless:**

- the motion has been filed with the Clerk;
- the movant has included a statement in either the motion or the notice of hearing that a “good faith effort” has been made to resolve and/or narrow the issues, but the effort was unsuccessful. See Section 2.2;
- the movant has consulted with opposing counsel regarding the total amount of time needed for the hearing prior to e-mailing the JA. In this regard, counsel should be realistic in assessing the amount of time needed for the entire hearing (not just one side). Hearings may be recessed and continued if the allotted time expires before the hearing is concluded;
- the movant has consulted with opposing counsel regarding convenient hearing dates after receiving available dates from the JA.

### **2.3.1 No Agreement on Hearing Dates**

If the parties cannot agree on a hearing date, the movant shall notify the JA, who will bring the matter to the Judge’s attention. The Judge will then schedule the hearing at the convenience of the Court. **The movant must provide a Notice of**

**Hearing to the JA unless the defendant is in custody. In that instance, the JA will prepare an order setting hearing and transport for the Judge to review.**

### **2.3.2 Timing of Hearings**

Motions, particularly motions to suppress, child hearsay, Williams Rule, etc., must be filed *and* heard prior to trial. The Court considers jurors' time to be extremely valuable and will make every effort to ensure their time is not wasted. The Court considers it a waste of jurors' time to have them sitting in the jury room not hearing testimony because there is argument at trial on motions that could have been presented prior to trial. This is highly disfavored. Unless otherwise determined by the Court, motions will not be heard on the day of trial.

## **2.4 Materials to be Provided to the Court Before Hearings**

Please be aware that the Court is not automatically copied with the motions and supporting documents filed by the counsel. Because the Judge strongly prefers to read all submitted documents in advance of hearings, it is the responsibility of counsel to provide the Court with a courtesy copy of any and all documents (motions, memoranda, authority, etc.) at least 72-hours in advance. See Sections 2.4.1 and 2.4.2. Please do not send original motions to the Judge.

### **2.4.1 Submitting Materials**

All correspondence, e-filed motions, proposed orders, and notices of hearings should be emailed to the JA in word format, without copying the judge (motions may be sent as a PDF). The documents referenced in 2.4, exceeding 40 pages in toto, should be submitted directly to the Judge's office. Documents should be placed in the Judge's box located on the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor, west of the north rotunda. Materials exceeding 80 pages must be submitted in a three-ring binder. Binded submissions should also contain a table of contents and section dividers for ease of reference. **Please do not staple any pages in three-ring binders.**

### **2.4.2 Time to Provide Materials**

While no bright line exists, the more voluminous the materials, the further in advance of the hearing they should be submitted. Submission of any materials should be at least 72-hours in advance or you will run the risk of having the hearing reschedule. Likewise, as the Judge prefers to read all legal authority in advance of hearings, handing the Judge case law during a motion hearing is highly *disfavored*.

## **2.5 Motions Decided on Papers and Memoranda**

Only rarely will the Court decide motions without a hearing. However, routine, unopposed motions may be decided without a hearing, provided the opposing party's position in agreement is noted.

## **2.6 Submitting Proposed Orders**

All proposed orders must be submitted to the JA via email at [RandolphR@leoncountyfl.gov](mailto:RandolphR@leoncountyfl.gov) in Word Arial, 14 point font size, and accompanied by the efiled motion that includes opposing counsel's agreement or objection.

Orders submitted after a hearing - Normally the prevailing party will be asked to submit a proposed order after the Court rules at a hearing. In some instances, the Court may request proposed orders from both sides, after review of which the Court will efile the signed order of the prevailing party.

## **2.7 Cancellation of Hearings**

If your hearing is cancelled or rescheduled, all attorneys are tasked with notifying the JA as soon as possible so that the Judge may turn her attention to other matters. A notice of cancellation efiled by the attorney cancelling a scheduled hearing will alert the clerk to remove it from the docket.

## **2.8 48-Hour Rule**

If you email the JA or submit correspondence but do not receive a response within 48-hours, please forward original correspondence to the judge and copy opposing counsel.

## **SECTION 3 - EMERGENCY MATTERS**

### **3.1 Emergencies Defined**

Emergencies are defined as “non-routine matters which, by their nature, require immediate action by the Court to prevent or stop physical harm to a person, irreparable property damage, or a hardship of such a critical nature that the immediate intervention of the Court is absolutely necessary.”

### **3.2 Prohibited Practice**

The practice of labeling a routine matter as an “emergency” to gain priority on the Court’s docket, calendar, or otherwise is prohibited. Please be aware that the designation of a matter as an “emergency” will normally cause the Judge to abandon other pending matters in order to immediately address the emergency. Often the JA, clerk, bailiff’s unit, court reporter, attorneys, as well other litigants, are also affected by alleged emergencies. In the case of a bona fide emergency this is necessary and proper.

However, non-emergencies which are improperly labeled as emergencies create hardships and unfairly prejudice court personnel and other litigants. Therefore, such a motion must state with particularity the reason the matter meets the definition of an emergency as set forth above. **Please Note:** Lack of due diligence by a party or counsel does not create an emergency.

### **3.3 Emergency Hearings and Orders**

Please include the Judge in the initial email requesting an emergency order or hearing. If the matter is a bona fide emergency, the movant shall file the motion for an emergency hearing with the Clerk of Court. The Clerk will e-mail the motion to the JA and the Judge will then review the motion to determine if it is an actual emergency and if a hearing is warranted. Opposing counsel must be given a copy of the motion with all attachments.

## **SECTION 4 - PRESENCE OF DEFENDANTS**

### **4.1 In General**

A defendant’s presence is required at **ALL HEARINGS** unless previously waived by the Court or by Court order. However, counsel are authorized to waive the appearance of their clients for routine case management conferences, provided the requirements of Section 4.3 are satisfied. No Court order or approval is required.

### **4.2 Defendants in Custody (in Leon County Jail)**

Defendants are not automatically transported for every hearing. If counsel wants a defendant transported, a request must be made to the Division A felony clerk no later than 2:00 p.m. the day before the proceeding.

Defendants are automatically transported to the courthouse for violation of probation hearings, plea hearings, final pretrial case management conferences, docket soundings, and trials; no request of the clerk is required for these proceedings.

#### **4.2 Defendants in Custody (in other than Leon County Jail)**

Defendants who are not being held in the Leon County Jail will require a transport order to secure their appearance in court. The bailiff's unit requires a minimum of ten (10) business days' notice in order to ensure the transport of out-of-county defendants. If the plea is agreed-upon, the procedure in Section 4.3 will govern.

It is the responsibility of counsel to make certain the bailiff's unit receives two certified copies of transport orders no fewer than ten (10) business days prior to the defendant's scheduled court appearance. Counsel should make every endeavor not to cause the unnecessary transport of out-of-county defendants as this is not an efficient use of county resources.

#### **4.3 Defendants Not in Custody**

As noted in Section 4.1, counsel are authorized to excuse clients from appearance at routine case management conferences; however, counsel are expected and required to alert the Court if any client is not keeping appropriate contact with counsel.

#### **4.4 Plea Hearings**

The practice of having inmates transported from the jail for a plea hearing when there is not an agreed-upon disposition (unless the inmate will be entering and "open" or "straight up" plea) is **prohibited**. Often plea hearings are set while plea negotiations are still ongoing. This is expected and proper, however, counsel are required to cancel the transport of inmates if a plea agreement has not been reached (unless the inmate will be entering an "open" or "straight up" plea). Inmates are **not** to be transported so counsel can "talk to them" about a plea. While the Court understands that plea agreements can disintegrate unexpectedly, this should be a rare occurrence. The unnecessary transport of inmates will be very closely monitored.

### **SECTION 5 – CONTINUANCES**

#### **5.1 Motions to Continue Trials, VOP Hearings, Sentencing, Etc.**

Motions to continue a trial, violation of probation (VOP) hearing, sentencing, and specially set hearings must be in writing and if necessary scheduled for hearing

before the date of the matter sought to be continued, if at all possible. The Court may rule on the motion without a hearing if the position of opposing counsel is noted in the motion. Motions to continue a trial after the final Pre-Trial Case Management conference or Docket Sounding (see Section 6.4), or to continue a VOP hearing on the date of the hearing, are **strongly discouraged** and will be carefully reviewed.

## **5.2 Motions to Continue Other Hearings**

Motions to continue other hearings must be in writing, must identify the reason(s) for continuance and the position of opposing counsel, must state the status of speedy trial, and must be scheduled for hearing before the date of the matter sought to be continued. An agreed-upon order along with the motion may be presented, which the Court may enter without a hearing. Additionally, the Court, in its discretion, may rule on opposed motions to continue without a hearing.

## **SECTION 6 - TRIALS**

### **6.1 In General**

Jury selection and trials start at 8:30 a.m. All counsel and their clients are expected to be present in the courtroom at this time. Jurors are sacrificing their time to perform an important civic duty. Again, the Court intends to make every effort to ensure that jurors' time is not wasted. See Section 2.3.2. Counsel should be personally aware of, and impress upon their clients, witnesses, etc., the importance of timeliness. This applies equally to breaks and recesses.

### **6.2 Witnesses**

All witnesses that are present should be in the courtroom at 8:30 a.m. to receive any instructions from the Court. Counsel are permitted, in their discretion, to have reliable witnesses arrive at a later time. While the Court recognizes that the pace of trial is impossible to predict with surgical precision, counsel are cautioned to be judicious in the exercise of this discretion. Furthermore, during the trial, it is counsel's obligation to have the next witness immediately available when court resumes from a break or recess. The Court considers it a waste of jurors' time to be waiting on witnesses to appear and/or for counsel to be searching for witnesses throughout the courthouse when court reconvenes.

#### **6.2.1 Witness List**

Counsel shall provide the Court with a list of probable witnesses prior to the beginning of the trial. The list may be legibly handwritten, and the witnesses need not be listed in the order they will be called to testify.

### **6.3 Evidence**

Counsel must provide the Court and opposing counsel with a list of probable evidence prior to the start of the trial. All exhibits should be marked and numbered as listed. All evidence will be shown to opposing counsel after it is marked. It is opposing counsel's obligation to carefully examine the evidence before the trial begins.

During trial, the party offering the evidence is obligated to make opposing counsel aware of any changes in the numbering of the exhibits or the intent to offer of any evidence not previously numbered or displayed. Opposing counsel may rely on this numbering; therefore, it is unnecessary to further present exhibits to opposing counsel before offering the item in evidence.

Counsel are responsible for arranging to have evidence in the courtroom in time for inspection and marking prior to the start of the trial.

### **6.4 Pre-Trial Case Management and Docket Sounding**

Beginning May 1, 2020, the terms "Pre-Trial Case Management" and "Docket Sounding" are added to the Court's standard lexicon. Cases set for trial will be set for both a "Pre-Trial Case Management" and a "Docket Sounding." The presence of all counsel and defendants is required.

"Pre-Trial Case Management" refers to the last proceeding at which the Court will normally accept a *negotiated* plea. A tentative trial calendar is set at this proceeding. "Pre-Trial Case Management" will normally occur two weeks prior to the "Docket Sounding" date.

"Docket Sounding" refers to the proceeding at which the "final" trial calendar is set. However, counsel should be prepared for changes to be made in the "final" calendar, as pleas and necessary continuances occur. Docket Sounding will normally occur during the week immediately preceding Monday jury selection (most often on Thursday).



## **6.5 Plea Acceptance**

“Straight up” or “open” pleas (no agreement) will be accepted after Pre-Trial Case Management. The Court, in its discretion, may accept a negotiated plea after the Pre-Trial Case Management. However, this is highly disfavored, and counsel should be prepared to justify why there should be a deviation from normal practice.

**Please note:** Despite all expectations that a case may be resolved with a plea, counsel are strongly cautioned not to cancel witnesses or cease trial preparation in expectation that a defendant will enter a plea, as the failure of an expected plea to occur will not be grounds for a continuance.

## **SECTION 7 - PETITIONS TO SEAL/EXPUNGE**

**7.1** A courtesy copy of the Petition, Affidavit, FDLE Certification, Position of the State Attorney, and a blank order **MUST** be provided to the JA upon filing a Petition to Expunge/Seal.

## **SECTION 8 – REMOTE APPEARANCES**

### **8.1 Remote Appearance by Counsel**

Counsel may request to appear by remote means (e.g., telephonically, Zoom, etc.) by filing a motion and proposed order no fewer than 48 hours prior to the proceeding. The motion shall set forth the reason(s) remote appearance is necessary and shall include the most recent date counsel has had *personal contact* with opposing counsel (not email or legal staff contact, etc.). Remote appearance at Pre-Trial Case Management or Docket Sounding is not favored.