

IN THE 16th JUDICIAL CIRCUIT OF MISSOURI

IN RE:           EQUALIZATION OF DOMESTIC RELATIONS DOCKETS AMONG THE  
                  DIVISIONS ASSIGNED CONTESTED DOMESTIC MATTERS

ADMINISTRATIVE ORDER NO. 2026-004

ORDER

WHEREAS Missouri Revised Statute Section 478.461.2(4) provides that the presiding judge of the sixteenth judicial circuit may order the transfer of cases from a division at Independence to a division at Kansas City or vice versa when the presiding judge determines that such transfer is necessary because one or more divisions in either portion of Jackson County have a disproportionate number of cases pending; and

WHEREAS Missouri Supreme Court Operating Rule 14.01 gives the presiding circuit judge authority to assign any case or any class of cases to any judge or division within the circuit with limited exceptions not applicable to this Order; and

WHEREAS the presiding judge has determined that the judicial officers in Independence are assigned a disproportionate number of contested domestic cases,

Pursuant to Section 478.461.2(4), RSMo and Missouri Supreme Court Operating Rule 14.01, the Court enters this Order to promote judicial efficiency and economy and to equalize distribution of newly filed cases on the domestic relations docket among the divisions assigned to hear contested domestic cases within the circuit.

Effective beginning February 2, 2026, the Court Administrator shall assign the first 40 new contested domestic cases filed in Independence to divisions in Independence handling contested domestic cases. The next 10 new contested domestic cases filed in Independence shall be randomly assigned to judicial officers in Kansas City who are assigned a contested domestic docket. This process will repeat itself as contested domestic cases are filed in Independence.

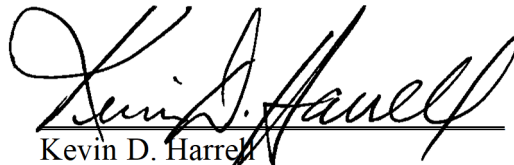
Upon transfer, the Court Administrator is further directed to notify the attorneys of record and/or litigants, in those cases impacted, of the transfer and of the division to which the matter is assigned. The Department of Civil Records shall create a docket entry that clearly designates that the case is being transferred “pursuant to AO-2026-004.” Any motion for change of venue on any case transferred under this Order shall not be granted, consistent with the authority provided by Section 478.461.2(4), RSMo and Missouri Supreme Court Operating Rule 14.01. If a timely motion for change of judge is granted pursuant to Supreme Court Rule 51.05, a case which has been transferred to Kansas City will be reassigned to another Kansas City division.

Uncontested domestic relations cases filed in Independence, which later become contested, shall be assigned a new judicial officer through this same process.

Further, this order will also impact all domestic relations cases for which the parties fail to designate whether the case is contested or uncontested at the time the case is filed. Such cases will initially be placed by the Court Administrator on the uncontested docket regardless of where filed. If it later becomes apparent that the case is contested, such case will be reassigned to a new judicial officer. If such case was filed in Kansas City, the case will be reassigned to another judicial officer in Kansas City who is assigned a contested domestic docket. If such case was filed in Independence, it shall be reassigned a new judicial officer who is assigned a contested domestic docket through the same allocation process described above.

Additionally, the Department of Civil Records' office located in Independence will henceforth assign cases involving family access motions (§452.400, RSMo) as contested domestic cases to the judge who entered the most recent judgment, resulting in the elimination of the family access motion docket currently assigned to Division 40 in Independence.

Dated: January 8, 2026

  
Kevin D. Harrell  
Presiding Judge

cc: All Judges and Commissioners  
Beverly Newman, Court Administrator  
Theresa Byrd, Deputy Court Administrator - Family Court  
Tracy Smedley, Deputy Court Administrator – Circuit Court/Jury Supervisor  
Antonia Craig, Director, Civil Records  
Zach Smith, Legal Counsel