

IN THE CIRCUIT COURT OF JACKSON COUNTY, MISSOURI

IN RE: GUARDIAN AD LITEM FEES FROM PUBLIC FUNDS

ADMINISTRATIVE ORDER 2025-130

ADMINISTRATIVE ORDER
GUARDIAN AD LITEM FEES FROM PUBLIC FUNDS

WHEREAS, Section 452.423 RSMo governs appointment of guardians ad litem in Missouri, and the award of fees to the guardians ad litem for services rendered in performing the obligations of the guardian ad litem; and

WHEREAS; Section 452.423 RSMO grants discretion to the Court to order guardian ad litem fees to be paid out of public funds in appropriate cases, to wit:

Guardian ad litem appointed, when, duties—disqualification, when—fees

1. In all proceedings for child custody or for dissolution of marriage or legal separation where custody, visitation, or support of a child is a contested issue, the court may appoint a guardian ad litem. Disqualification of a guardian ad litem shall be ordered in any legal proceeding only pursuant to this chapter, upon the filing of a written application by any party within ten days of appointment, or within ten days of August 28, 1998, if the appointment occurs prior to August 28, 1998. Each party shall be entitled to one disqualification of a guardian ad litem appointed under this subsection in each proceeding, except a party may be entitled to additional disqualifications of a guardian ad litem for good cause shown.

2. The court shall appoint a guardian ad litem in any proceeding in which child abuse or neglect is alleged.

3. The guardian ad litem shall be awarded a reasonable fee for such services to be set by the court. The court, in its discretion, may:

(1) Issue a direct payment order to the parties. If a party fails to comply with the court's direct payment order, the court may find such party to be in contempt of court; or

(2) Award such fees as a judgment to be paid by any party to the proceedings or from public funds. Such an award of guardian fees shall constitute a final judgment in favor of the guardian ad litem. Such final judgment shall be enforceable against the parties in accordance with chapter 513.

WHEREAS, Missouri Case Law defines "public funds" to mean County funds. *Meyer v Meyer*, 842 S.W.2d 841 (Mo. App. E.D.).

WHEREAS, there are cases in which a guardian ad litem is required to be appointed where one or more of the parties are indigent.

WHEREAS, Jackson County has limited public funds from which to pay guardian ad litem fee awards.

WHEREAS, it is appropriate to establish a process for determining when public funds should be used to pay guardian ad litem fees.

WHEREAS, the court may order guardian ad litem fees be paid from public funds only after affording the County an opportunity to intervene. *Sweeten v Watie*, 842 S.W.2d 190 (Mo. App. E.D.).

THEREFORE, IT IS ORDERED that in a case where one or more of the parties seek to obtain an order requiring payment of guardian ad litem from public funds, Jackson County shall be joined as a party to the action as a Third-Party Intervenor by order of the Court. Jackson County need not file a motion seeking intervention.

IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that the order adding Jackson County as a party shall be served via electronic mail at: GALrequests@jacksongov.org and by First Class Mail at:

Office of the Jackson County Counselor
Attn: GAL Determination
415 E 12th Street
2nd Floor
Kansas City, MO 64106

IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that the Court shall set a hearing, with notice to all parties, including notice to the Jackson County Counselor, to determine whether or not public funds should be used to pay part or all of the guardian ad litem's fees. Alternatively, and at the Court's discretion, the issue may be taken up with the trial of the case. The Court's determination of indigency, under the terms of this order, shall be made at the time of the hearing or trial.

IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that the Court shall hear evidence regarding the financial status of the parties, including, but not limited to, Income and Expense Statements, Statements of Assets, income from other persons living in the party's household, and other relevant evidence, and shall determine whether or not any or all of

the parties are indigent based on the evidence presented and whether the total household income¹ exceeds 125% of the then current Federal Poverty Guideline Level.

IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that the Court in its discretion may declare a party indigent based on the available evidence and the circumstances, even if the party fails to provide financial documentation or declines to participate in the case.

IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that Jackson County shall not have the burden of proving that a party is indigent under the terms of this Administrative Order.

IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that in cases in which, after consideration of all the income and assets of the party, including income from other persons living in the party's household, any or all of the parties are indigent based on 125% of the Federal Poverty Guideline Level, the Court may order payment of guardian ad litem fees from public funds as follows:

WHERE MORE THAN ONE PARTY IS INDIGENT

1. The hourly rate to be used for calculation of guardian ad litem fees shall not exceed TWO HUNDRED FIFTYAND NO/100s DOLLARS (\$250.00); and
2. The total amount ordered to be paid out of public funds shall not exceed SEVEN THOUSAND FIVE-HUNDRED AND NO/100s DOLLARS (\$7,500.00) per case.

WHERE ONE PARTY IS INDIGENT

1. The hourly rate to be used for calculation of guardian ad litem fees shall not exceed TWO HUNDRED FIFTYAND NO/100s DOLLARS (\$250.00) per hour; and
2. The total amount ordered to be paid out of public funds shall not exceed THREE-THOUSAND SEVEN-HUNDRED FIFTY AND NO/100s DOLLARS (\$3,750.00) per case.

IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that if multiple guardians ad litem are appointed to a single case, the caps above may be increased by an amount not to exceed ONE THOUSAND FIVE HUNDRED AND NO/100s DOLLARS (\$1,500.00) and the resulting total amount to be paid out of public funds is to be distributed between the guardians ad litem as the Court deems appropriate.

IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that if a guardian ad litem's hourly rate and/or total fees (as determined reasonable and appropriate by the Court) are reduced as a result of the application of this Administrative Order, the Court may issue judgment against any non-indigent party for some or all of the remaining balance.

¹ In the event that a party is incarcerated, that party's household size shall be deemed to be one (1) for the purposes of such calculation.

IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that this Administrative Order shall not be interpreted to limit the Court's authority to apportion guardian ad litem fees between the parties, as the Court deems appropriate.

IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that, when a guardian ad litem files an appeal and any or all of the parties are indigent, as defined in this Administrative Order, the Court, after notice to all parties, including the Jackson County Counselor, and after hearing, upon a finding of good cause, may order payment of guardian ad litem fees related to the appeal in an amount not to exceed ONE THOUSAND FIVE HUNDRED AND NO/100s DOLLARS (\$1,500.00).

IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that, when an appeal is filed by an indigent party as defined in this Administrative Order, on an issue of custody, terms of a Parenting Plan, visitation, parenting time or child support, and the Guardian Ad Litem remains on the case, the Court, after hearing, upon a finding of good cause, may order payment of guardian ad litem fees related to the appeal based upon an hourly rate not to exceed TWO HUNDRED FIFTY AND NO/100s DOLLARS (\$250.00) per hour, in an amount not to exceed FIVE THOUSAND AND NO/100s DOLLARS (\$5,000.00).

IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that, in exceptional circumstances, the court, after notice to all parties, including the Jackson County Counselor, after hearing evidence and upon entering an order containing written findings demonstrating the Court's reasoning for ordering additional fees to be paid out of public funds, may order additional fees to be paid out of public funds.

IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that the Court may not order fees be paid from public funds for an adult guardian ad litem, appointed pursuant to Mo. S. Ct. R. 52.02(k). *Gross v. Jackson County*, 537 S.W.3d. 393 (Mo. App. W.D. 2018).

IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that copies of all orders shall be sent by the Court's Judicial Administrative Assistant to all parties and to the County Counselor of Jackson County, Missouri.

IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that the foregoing shall be the policy, procedure, and practice regarding payment of guardian ad litem fees from public funds.

IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that the Director of Family Court Services shall from time to time update and distribute the Federal Poverty Guidelines to be used herein for the determination of indigency.

IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that the Director of Family Court Services shall forward a copy of this Administrative Order to the Office of the County Counselor, the Jackson County Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA), the Chair of the Family Law Committee of the KCMBA, and the Presidents of the Eastern Jackson County Bar Association and the Jackson County Bar Association.

IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that a copy of this Administrative Order shall be published on the Jackson County Family Court website and shall also be published on the Jackson County Circuit Court website.

IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that Administrative Order 2014-041 is hereby superseded.

IT IS SO ORDERED.

04-Dec-2025

Date


Kevin D. Harren, Presiding Judge

Certificate of Service

This is to certify that a copy of the foregoing was hand delivered/e-mailed/mailed and/or sent through the eFiling system to the following on: December 04, 2025



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