

IN THE EIGHTH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT OF FLORIDA
LOCAL RULE NO. 3.200

UNIFIED FAMILY COURT

Whereas, the Florida Supreme Court endorsed the implementation of a unified family division consistent with the "Coordinated Management" Model in the circuit courts of Florida in the *In re: Report of the Family Court Steering Committee*, 794 So. 2d 518 (Fla. 2001); and

Whereas, the Florida Supreme Court has directed each circuit to submit a new local rule or administrative order by January 1, 2002, which is consistent with the recommendations for a unified family court system; and

Whereas, the implementation of the "Coordinated Management" Model and the concept of "one family, one judge" to coordinate multiple cases involving one family will improve the resolution of disputes within the judicial system for children and families; and

Whereas, it is necessary to resolve disputes involving children and families in a fair, timely, and efficient manner; and

Whereas, it is necessary for the prompt and efficient administration of justice in this circuit to establish procedures which will effectively resolve disputes involving children and families; it is therefore

ORDERED as follows:

1. *General Provisions*. There shall be a circuit wide Unified Family Court ("Family Court") in the Eighth Judicial Circuit based on the "Coordinated Management" model as approved by the Supreme Court of Florida. In a "Coordinated Management" system, all pending family cases are coordinated and managed by a staff member or team of staff members to facilitate the delivery of appropriate social services, maximize judicial resources, avoid conflicting court orders, and prevent multiple court appearances by the parties on the same

issues.

2. *Scope of Cases.* Family Court will preside over cases involving a single family, to include but not limited to: dissolution of marriage, division and distribution of property arising out of a dissolution of marriage, annulment, support unconnected with dissolution of marriage, paternity, child support, URESA/UIFSA, custodial care of and access to children, adoption, name change, declaratory judgment actions related to premarital, marital, or post marital agreements, civil domestic and repeat violence injunctions, juvenile dependency, termination of parental rights, juvenile delinquency, emancipation of a minor, CINS/FINS, truancy, and modification and enforcement of orders entered in these cases.

3. *Judicial Assignment.* The assignment of the cases and counties for the judges of the Family Court shall be determined by the General Assignment of Judges Order. A separate administrative order will establish the procedures to assign all current family law matters that affect one family to one judge.

4. *General Master and Hearing Officers.* A Dependency General Master will be used to perform all duties as directed by the circuit bench for Alachua, Gilchrist, and Levy counties. The Dependency General Master will help facilitate the resolution of dependency cases in those counties as outlined in Administrative Order No. 5.130. A full time judicial hearing officer will conduct public assistance (Title IV-D) and non-assistance (non-Title IV-D) child support hearings for the Department of Revenue in Alachua County. Two part time hearing officers will perform the same duties for Baker, Bradford, Gilchrist, Levy, and Union counties. These resources will continue to be made available as long as sufficient funding is provided.

5. *Case Management.* The Family Law case managers will conduct research into any action filed which might be related to or have a bearing on another new case and will alert the

judge assigned to a particular case about any additional case related to the new case. The case manager will track all active cases, follow up on the scheduled hearing dates and the results of the hearings, and update each case's status as necessary. The Clerk's of Court of each county in the circuit will provide the case manager access to all information regarding the cases using the existing technology available.

6. *Self-Help Program.* The circuit has a Self-Help program established under Administrative Order No. 5.0100. The Self-Help program provides services for self-represented litigants for all six counties within the circuit. Information and services in Alachua County will be provided in a classroom format. In the regional counties the coordinator will meet with litigants on an appointment basis to review their paper work. Other services available to self-represented litigants are through the University of Florida College of Law. Family Court will refer those litigants who are eligible and have the desire to make use of the law school's services.

7. *Alternative Dispute Resolution.* An alternative dispute resolution program has been established under Administrative Order No. 3.1241(A). The program will be administered by the Administrative Offices of the Court's Alternate Dispute Resolution Department.

8. *Guardian ad Litem.* The circuit will maintain a Guardian ad Litem program to represent the best interest of children involved in dependency cases and dissolution or custody matters. This program will be made available throughout the circuit with staff members located in each county.

9. *Supervised Visitation.* Supervised visitation services are available through the Family Visitation Center of Alachua County. The supervised visitation services are available to anyone in the circuit at the facility in Gainesville.

10. *Parenting Classes.* The requirement of parent education and family stabilization

course for divorcing parents or those involved in custody or dependency actions was established under Administrative Order No. 5.1120. There are currently two programs which provide services for Alachua County with one extending services to all the counties.

11. *Dependency and Juvenile Drug Courts.* The Dependency Drug Court program was established under Administrative Order No. 5.555. The Dependency Drug Court Program services are available to any parent in the circuit through the treatment facility in Gainesville. The Juvenile Drug Court program was established under Administrative Order No. 5a.550.

12. *Disposition.* All cases in Family Court shall have a final hearing date established at the earliest time possible, and all cases, including Department of Revenue cases, shall have a future case management hearing date set at all times.

13. *Security.* Security for each courthouse is provided for by the Sheriff's Department for that respective county.

14. *Technology.* The Court Technology Officer for the Eighth Circuit shall continue to develop and improve the existing automated systems used for case management.

ORDERED on January 4, 2002.


STAN R. MORRIS, CHIEF JUDGE