

RULE 2.215. TRIAL COURT ADMINISTRATION

(a) Purpose. The purpose of this rule is to fix administrative responsibility in the chief judges of the circuit courts and the other judges that the chief judges may designate. When these rules refer to the court, they shall be construed to apply to a judge of the court when the context requires or permits.

(b) Chief Judge.

(1) The chief judge shall be a circuit judge who possesses managerial, administrative, and leadership abilities, and shall be selected without regard to seniority only.

(2) The chief judge shall be the administrative officer of the courts within the circuit and shall, consistent with branch-wide policies, direct the formation and implementation of policies, and priorities for the operation of all courts and officers within the circuit. The chief judge shall exercise administrative supervision over all judges and court personnel within the judicial circuit. The chief judge shall be responsible to the chief justice of the supreme court. The chief judge may enter and sign administrative orders, except as otherwise provided by this rule. The chief judge shall have the authority to require that all judges of the court, other court officers, and court personnel comply with all court and judicial branch policies, administrative orders, procedures and administrative plans.

(3) The chief judge shall maintain liaison in all judicial administrative matters with the chief justice of the supreme court, and shall, considering available resources, ensure the efficient and proper administration of all courts within that circuit. The chief judge shall develop an administrative plan that shall be filed with the supreme court and shall include an administrative organization capable of effecting the prompt disposition of cases; assignment of judges, other court officers, and all other court personnel; control of dockets; regulation and use of courtrooms; and mandatory periodic review of the status of the inmates of the county jail. The plan shall be compatible with the development of the capabilities of the judges in such a manner that each judge will be qualified to serve in any division, thereby creating a judicial pool from which judges may be assigned to various courts throughout the state. The administrative plan



shall include a consideration of the statistical data developed by the case reporting system. Questions concerning the administration or management of the courts of the circuit shall be directed to the chief justice of the supreme court through the state courts administrator.

(4) The chief judge shall assign judges to the courts and divisions, and shall determine the length of each assignment. The chief judge is authorized to order consolidation of cases, and to assign cases to a judge or judges for the preparation of opinions, orders, or judgments. All judges shall inform the chief judge of any contemplated absences that will affect the progress of the court's business. If a judge is temporarily absent, is disqualified in an action, or is unable to perform the duties of the office, the chief judge or the chief judge's designee may assign a proceeding pending before the judge to any other judge or any additional assigned judge of the same court. The chief judge may assign any judge to temporary service for which the judge is qualified in any court in the same circuit. If it appears to the chief judge that the speedy, efficient, and proper administration of justice so requires, the chief judge shall request the chief justice of the supreme court to assign temporarily an additional judge or judges from outside the circuit to duty in the court requiring assistance, and shall advise the chief justice whether or not the approval of the chief judge of the circuit from which the assignment is to be made has been obtained. The assigned judges shall be subject to administrative supervision of the chief judge for all purposes of this rule. When assigning a judge to hear any type of postconviction or collateral relief proceeding brought by a defendant who has been sentenced to death, the chief judge shall assign to such cases a judge qualified to conduct such proceedings under subdivision (b)(10) of this rule. Nothing in this rule shall restrict the constitutional powers of the chief justice of the supreme court to make such assignments as the chief justice shall deem appropriate.

(5) The chief judge may designate a judge in any court or court division of circuit or county courts as "administrative judge" of any court or division to assist with the administrative supervision of the court or division. To the extent practical, the chief judge shall assign only one administrative judge to supervise the family court. The designee shall be responsible to the chief judge, shall have



the power and duty to carry out the responsibilities assigned by the chief judge, and shall serve at the pleasure of the chief judge.

(6) The chief judge may require the attendance of prosecutors, public defenders, clerks, bailiffs, and other officers of the courts, and may require from the clerks of the courts, sheriffs, or other officers of the courts periodic reports that the chief judge deems necessary.

(7) The chief judge shall regulate the use of all court facilities, regularly examine the dockets of the courts under the chief judge's administrative supervision, and require a report on the status of the matters on the dockets. The chief judge may take such action as may be necessary to cause the dockets to be made current. The chief judge shall monitor the status of all postconviction or collateral relief proceedings for defendants who have been sentenced to death from the time that the mandate affirming the death sentence has been issued by the supreme court and shall take the necessary actions to assure that such cases proceed without undue delay. On the first day of every January, April, July, and October, the chief judge shall inform the chief justice of the supreme court of the status of all such cases.

(8) The chief judge or the chief judge's designee shall regularly examine the status of every inmate of the county jail.

(9) The chief judge may authorize the clerks of courts to maintain branch county court facilities. When so authorized, clerks of court shall be permitted to retain in such branch court facilities all county court permanent records of pending cases, and may retain and destroy these records in the manner provided by law.

(10)

(A) The chief judge shall not assign a judge to preside over a capital case in which the state is seeking the death penalty, or collateral proceedings brought by a death row inmate, until that judge has become qualified to do so by:

(i) presiding a minimum of 6 months in a felony criminal division or in a division that includes felony criminal cases, and



(ii) successfully attending the "Handling Capital Cases" course offered through the Florida Court Education Council. A judge whose caseload includes felony criminal cases must attend the "Handling Capital Cases" course as soon as practicable, or upon the direction of the chief judge.

(B) The chief justice may waive these requirements in exceptional circumstances at the request of the chief judge.

(C) Following attendance at the "Handling Capital Cases" course, a judge shall remain qualified to preside over a capital case by attending a "Capital Case Refresher" course once during each of the subsequent continuing judicial education (CJE) reporting periods. A judge who has attended the "Handling Capital Cases" course and who has not taken the "Capital Case Refresher" course within any subsequent continuing judicial education reporting period must requalify to preside over a capital case by attending the refresher course.

(D) The refresher course shall be at least a 6-hour course and must be approved by the Florida Court Education Council. The course must contain instruction on the following topics: penalty phase, jury selection, and proceedings brought pursuant to Florida Rule of Criminal Procedure 3.851.

(11) The failure of any judge to comply with an order or directive of the chief judge shall be considered neglect of duty and may be reported by the chief judge to the chief justice of the supreme court who shall have the authority to take any corrective action as may be appropriate. The chief judge may report the neglect of duty by a judge to the Judicial Qualifications Commission or other appropriate person or body, or take such other corrective action as may be appropriate.

(12) At the call of the chief justice, the chief judges of the circuit court and district courts of appeal shall meet on a regular basis and with each other and with the chief justice to discuss and provide feedback for implementation of policies and practices that have statewide impact including,



but not limited to, the judicial branch's management, operation, strategic plan, legislative agenda and budget priorities. Such meetings shall, if practicable, occur at least quarterly and be conducted in person. At the discretion of the chief justice, any of these meetings may be combined with other judicial branch and leadership meetings.

(13) The chief judge shall have the responsibility to exercise reasonable efforts to promote and encourage diversity in the administration of justice.

(c) Selection. The chief judge shall be chosen by a majority of the active circuit and county court judges within the circuit for a term of 2 years commencing on July 1 of each odd-numbered year, or if there is no majority, by the chief justice, for a term of 2 years. The election for chief judge shall be held no sooner than February 1 of the year during which the chief judge's term commences beginning July 1. All elections for chief judge shall be conducted as follows:

(1) All ballots shall be secret.

(2) Any circuit or county judge may nominate a candidate for chief judge.

(3) Proxy voting shall not be permitted.

(4) Any judge who will be absent from the election may vote by secret absentee ballot obtained from and returned to the Trial Court Administrator. A chief judge may be removed as chief judge by the supreme court, acting as the administrative supervisory body of all courts, or may be removed by a two-thirds vote of the active judges. The purpose of this rule is to fix a 2-year cycle for the selection of the chief judge in each circuit. A chief judge may serve for successive terms but in no event shall the total term as chief judge exceed 8 years. A chief judge who is to be temporarily absent shall select an acting chief judge from among the circuit judges. If a chief judge dies, retires, fails to appoint an acting chief judge during an absence, or is unable to perform the duties of the office, the chief justice of the supreme court shall appoint a circuit judge to act as chief judge during the absence or disability, or until a successor chief judge is elected to serve the unexpired term. When the office of chief judge is temporarily vacant pending action within the scope of this paragraph, the duties of court



administration shall be performed by the circuit judge having the longest continuous service as a judge or by another circuit judge designated by that judge.

(d) Circuit Court Administrator. Each circuit court administrator shall be selected or terminated by the chief judge subject to concurrence by a majority vote of the circuit and county judges of the respective circuits.

(e) Local Rules and Administrative Orders.

(1) Local court rules as defined in rule 2.120 may be proposed by a majority of the circuit and county judges in the circuit. The judges shall notify the local bar within the circuit of the proposal, after which they shall permit a representative of the local bar, and may permit any other interested person, to be heard orally or in writing on the proposal before submitting it to the supreme court for approval. When a proposed local rule is submitted to the supreme court for approval, the following procedure shall apply:

(A) Local court rule proposals shall be submitted to the supreme court in January of each year. The supreme court may accept emergency proposals submitted at other times.

(B) Not later than February 15 of each year, the clerk of the supreme court shall submit all local court rule proposals to the Supreme Court Local Rules Advisory Committee created by rule 2.140. At the same time, the clerk of the supreme court shall send copies of the proposed rules to the appropriate committees of The Florida Bar. The Florida Bar committees, any interested local bar associations, and any other interested person shall submit any comments or responses that they wish to make to the Supreme Court Local Rules Advisory Committee on or before March 15 of the year.

(C) The Supreme Court Local Rules Advisory Committee shall meet on or before April 15 to consider the proposals and any comments submitted by interested parties. The committee shall transmit its recommendations to the supreme court concerning each proposal, with the reasons for its recommendations, within 15 days after its meeting.



(D) The supreme court shall consider the recommendations of the committee and may resubmit the proposals with modifications to the committee for editorial comment only. The supreme court may set a hearing on any proposals, or consider them on the recommendations and comments as submitted. If a hearing is set, notice shall be given to the chief judge of the circuit from which the proposals originated, the executive director of The Florida Bar, the chair of the Rules of Judicial Administration Committee of The Florida Bar, any local bar associations, and any interested persons who made comments on the specific proposals to be considered. The supreme court shall act on the proposals promptly after the recommendations are received or heard.

(E) If a local court rule is approved by the supreme court, it shall become effective on the date set by that court.

(F) A copy of all local court rules approved by the supreme court shall be indexed and recorded by the clerk of the circuit court in each county of the circuit where the rules are effective. A set of the recorded copies shall be readily available for inspection as a public record, and copies shall be provided to any requesting party for the cost of duplication. The chief judge of the circuit may provide for the publication of the rules. The clerk of the supreme court shall furnish copies of each approved local court rule to the executive director of The Florida Bar.

(2) Any judge or member of The Florida Bar who believes that an administrative order promulgated under subdivision (b)(2) of this rule is a court rule or a local rule as defined in rule 2.120, rather than an administrative order, may apply to the Supreme Court Local Rules Advisory Committee for a decision on the question. The decisions of the committee concerning the determination of the question shall be reported to the supreme court, and the court shall follow the procedure set forth in subdivision (D) above in considering the recommendation of the committee.

(3) All administrative orders of a general and continuing nature, and all others designated by the chief judge, shall be indexed and recorded by the clerk of the circuit court in each county where the orders are effective.



A set of the recorded copies shall be readily available for inspection as a public record, and copies shall be provided to any requesting party for the cost of duplication. The chief judge shall, on an annual basis, direct a review of all local administrative orders to ensure that the set of copies maintained by the clerk remains current and does not conflict with supreme court or local rules.

(4) All local court rules entered pursuant to this section shall be numbered sequentially for each respective judicial circuit.

(f) Duty to Rule within a Reasonable Time. Every judge has a duty to rule upon and announce an order or judgment on every matter submitted to that judge within a reasonable time. Each judge shall maintain a log of cases under advisement and inform the chief judge of the circuit at the end of each calendar month of each case that has been held under advisement for more than 60 days.

(g) Duty to Expedite Priority Cases. Every judge has a duty to expedite priority cases to the extent reasonably possible. Priority cases are those cases that have been assigned a priority status or assigned an expedited disposition schedule by statute, rule of procedure, case law, or otherwise. Particular attention shall be given to all juvenile dependency and termination of parental rights cases, cases involving families and children in need of services, challenges involving elections and proposed constitutional amendments, and capital postconviction cases. As part of an effort to make capital postconviction cases a priority, the chief judge shall have the discretion to create a postconviction division to handle capital postconviction, as well as non-capital postconviction cases, and may assign one or more judges to that division.

(h) Neglect of Duty. The failure of any judge, clerk, prosecutor, public defender, attorney, court reporter, or other officer of the court to comply with an order or directive of the chief judge shall be considered neglect of duty and shall be reported by the chief judge to the chief justice of the supreme court. The chief justice may report the neglect of duty by a judge to the Judicial Qualifications Commission, and neglect of duty by other officials to the governor of Florida or other appropriate person or body.



(i) Status Conference after Compilation of Record in Death Case. In any proceeding in which a defendant has been sentenced to death, the circuit judge assigned to the case shall take such action as may be necessary to ensure that a complete record on appeal has been properly prepared. To that end, the judge shall convene a status conference with all counsel of record as soon as possible after the record has been prepared pursuant to rule of appellate procedure 9.200(d) but before the record has been transmitted. The purpose of the status conference shall be to ensure that the record is complete.

Committee Notes

2008 Amendment. The provisions in subdivision (g) of this rule should be read in conjunction with the provisions of rule 2.545(c) governing priority cases.

Court Commentary

1996 Court Commentary. Rule 2.050(h) [renumbered as 2.215(h) in 2006] should be read in conjunction with Florida Rule of Appellate Procedure 9.140(b)(4)(A).

1997 Court Commentary. [Rule 2.050(b)(10), renumbered as 2.215(b)(10) in 2006]. The refresher course may be a six-hour block during any Florida Court Education Council approved course offering sponsored by any approved Florida judicial education provider, including the Florida College of Advanced Judicial Studies or the Florida Conference of Circuit Judges. The block must contain instruction on the following topics: penalty phase, jury selection, and rule 3.850 proceedings.

Failure to complete the refresher course during the three-year judicial education reporting period will necessitate completion of the original “Handling Capital Cases” course.

2002 Court Commentary. Recognizing the inherent differences in trial and appellate court dockets, the last sentence of subdivision (g) is intended to conform to the extent practicable with appellate rule 9.146(g), which requires appellate courts to give priority to appeals in juvenile dependency and termination of parental rights cases, and in cases involving families and children in need of services.

Criminal Court Steering Committee Note

2014 Amendment. Capital postconviction cases were added to the list of priority cases.

