

**Orange County Probate Division 01**  
**Judge Mark S. Blechman**  
**Judicial Assistant: Terry Marino**  
**Email: 1orange@ninthcircuit.org**  
**Address: 425 N. Orange Avenue, Orlando, Florida 32801**  
**Chambers: 2035, 20th floor**  
**Courtroom: 19-C (effective 1/2/24)**  
(Revised December 2023)  
<https://ninthcircuit.webex.com/meet/1orange>

**\*\*\* As guardianship/mental health cases are mixed on the docket and are confidential, you will not see an On-line Docket for this division. \*\*\***

In order to assist counsel, the litigants and the Court, the following guidelines<sup>1</sup>, procedures, practices and expectations are adopted for Probate Division 01 in Orange County, Florida when practicing before Judge Blechman.<sup>2</sup>

**ROUTINE PLEADINGS IN PROBATE CASES:** Routine petitions and proposed orders must be sent to the Court in writing for the Court to review and sign in chambers. These include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Petition to Appoint Personal Representative and issue Letters of Administration
- Order to Admit Will (original and ancillary) including the admission of authenticated copies of foreign wills
- Orders to Appoint Commissioners and Issue Commissions
- Preliminary Order to Inventory Safety Deposit Box
- Petition to Determine Homestead (uncontested)
- Petition to Determine Exempt Property (uncontested)
- Disposition of Personal Property without Administration
- Petitions to Sell Real Estate
- Petition for Opening Subsequent Administration
- Establishment and Probate of Lost or Destroyed Will (uncontested)
- Order of Summary Administration
- Order of Discharge

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<sup>1</sup>The above standards, procedures, practices and guidelines are minimum standards. All counsel are presumed to be familiar with and are expected to abide by the *Rules Regulating The Florida Bar*, and the *Guidelines for Professional Conduct* promulgated by the Trial Lawyers Section of The Florida Bar and adopted by the Conference of Circuit Judges. Copies of each of these documents may be obtained from The Florida Bar and/or are available on-line on its website <http://www.floridabar.org>. In addition, counsel must be aware of the *Ninth Judicial Circuit Courtroom Decorum Policy* promulgated on February 11, 2003 and Amended September 2014. (See <http://www.ninthcircuit.org> for Attorneys/Information/Rules & Policies/Courtroom Decorum Policy) as well as the local administrative rules.

<sup>2</sup>This Court is held to the additional standards set forth in *Code of Judicial Conduct* and the *Principles of Professionalism for Judges*.

- Any agreed or uncontested Petitions or Motions that are non-evidentiary and any other Petition or Motion that does not require giving notice to interested parties pursuant to the requirements of due process

Attorneys must submit the Petition or Motion, together with an appropriate cover letter (see below) and a proposed Order in Word format (see below) and any required checklist (see below), to [lorange@ninthcircuit.org](mailto:lorange@ninthcircuit.org).

**Please note that the Clerk of Court is charged with auditing Homestead, Summary Administration and Discharge orders before the Court reviews them. This may cause a delay and should be taken into account when submitting orders.** Once audited the Court will read and consider your matter and enter the proposed order or will issue further instructions on how to proceed if there is an issue. **Please allow 30 days before inquiring of the court of the status of submitted orders.**

**SUBMITTING ORDERS TO CHAMBERS:** Proposed agreed and unopposed orders should be emailed to [lorange@ninthcircuit.org](mailto:lorange@ninthcircuit.org). Orders must be in Word format only, (not rtf, pdf or any other version) as the Court can only upload a Word document for electronic signature.

- Please ensure the correct case number and decedent's name are on the order as well as in the subject line of the email.
- Along with the proposed order, an e-filed cover letter must be attached to the email. Please include any appropriate information in the cover letter that will assist the court in understanding why the order is ready for entry.
- Be sure that documents necessary to review the submission, including the motion, can be viewed on the Clerk's system before submitting. **The Court will not hold emails waiting for documents to be viewable and will be rejected.**
- A copy of the required efiled checklist, which includes the e-filing information across the top, must be attached to your email, along with your efiled cover letter and proposed orders in Word. Please be sure you are using the most current version of the checklist, which may be found on the Court's Probate page at <https://ninthcircuit.org/divisions/probate-court>.
- All parties must be copied on all email submissions. If there are parties not receiving service through the Florida Courts e-filing Portal, the proposed order must state that counsel will serve a copy of the order via U.S. mail to the non-efiling parties and file a certificate of service in the court file no later than three days from the date of entry the order.
- If the order is being submitted for consideration after being denied and corrected, please indicate such in the cover letter AND in the body of the email. This information will speed up the review of the order.

**EMERGENCY CONSIDERATION:** If you have a matter that you believe needs emergency consideration by the judge, please email the [lorange@ninthcircuit.org](mailto:lorange@ninthcircuit.org) to alert the Court that there is a Petition or Motion for emergency consideration. A telephone call may not be received if the judicial assistant is out.

**SHORT MATTERS HEARINGS:** During Short Matters time on **Tuesday's** and **Thursday's**, the Court will hear:

Please note that in December 2023, short matters will be held on Wednesday's (instead of Thursday) the week of December 4<sup>th</sup> and December 11<sup>th</sup>.

- Ex parte hearings defined as uncontested matters not listed as routine pleadings above
- Short matters defined as contested hearings requiring no evidence and that can be concluded in 10 minutes or less
- Matters set by the Court during short matters

**Important information about short matter hearings:**

Short matters hearings are not coordinated with the JA but are placed on the Court's docket by the Judicial Assistant once the courtesy copies are received. A courtesy copy of the motion, notice of hearing with the video link and reason for the necessity of the hearing, and proposed order must be provided to the judge via email at least three (3) business days before the hearing. Failure to do so will result in the hearing not being held. Courtesy copies in pdf or Word and the proposed order in Word format must be provided by email to [lorange@ninthcircuit.org](mailto:lorange@ninthcircuit.org). The subject line of the email must include the case number, style, and date/time of the hearing. Courtesy copies must not be sent any sooner than 7 days prior to the hearing.

The Judge does prepare for these hearings in advance. If a courtesy copy is not received, the Judge may not go forward with the hearing.

Orders that are to be submitted electronically for consideration may not be set at Short Matters without the Court's permission

A list of dates that the Court is unavailable for Short Matters is located in the instructions found at the top on JACS. (Select the calendar for Probate Division 01, select "Retrieve.") Any hearings scheduled on a posted unavailability date will not be heard and will need to be rescheduled by counsel. The attorney noticing the hearing must provide at least 5 days' notice of the hearing to all parties, including self-represented litigants.

The virtual link is: <https://ninthcircuit.webex.com/meet/lorange>

The following information must also be placed on the Notice of Hearing:

The hearing may be done by video conference using the below information. The hearing will not be cancelled or postponed due to a party's technical difficulties with the video link; accordingly, those wishing to be heard should consider coming to the hearing in person.

**SETTING OF CONTESTED HEARINGS OTHER THAN SHORT MATTERS:** All available hearing time is listed on the Judicial Automated Calendaring System ("JACS") in real-time. The Judicial Assistant does not have hearing time that is not listed on JACS.

- Click on Judicial Automated Calendaring System (ninthcircuit.org) or go to the court website at <http://www.ninthcircuit.org>. Select "Services" link or select the box that says JACS. Select Judicial Automated Calendaring System (JACS) link. Select the calendar for Probate Division 01 and hit "Retrieve." All instructions for scheduling in Division 01 and available hearing times will be displayed. For requests exceeding 15 minutes, please combine consecutive timeslots.
- Any hearing requests for longer than 1 hour must be approved by Judge Blechman either by appearing during short matters or by email to the lorange email detailing the reasons for the excessive time. After the Court reviews your request, you will receive a response.

Coordinate the date and time with opposing counsel/self-represented party as required by the Ninth Circuit's Administration Meet-and-Confer Order. Hearing times must be cleared with opposing counsel and/or self-represented parties. Be aware other attorneys are also coordinating hearing time, so you should coordinate up to 3 alternate times in case the time you request is booked.

Email [lorange@ninthcircuit.org](mailto:lorange@ninthcircuit.org) copying opposing counsel/self-represented litigants for the hearing to be added to the docket. The hearing request must include:

- 1-Date and time being requested for the hearing
- 2-Case number and style of the case
- 3-Names of the attorneys (or self-represented if applicable)
- 4-Title of the petition(s)/motion(s) to be heard
- 5-Amount of time requested for the hearing
- 6-Evidentiary or Non-Evidentiary
- 7-Parties appearance at hearing (in-person or virtually)

If any of the above information is not included in your email, the JA will email you back to inquire which may result in your hearing time being taken by another case, so please be sure to include all information in order to assist in getting your requested hearing time.

**Your hearing time is not confirmed until you receive a reply from the Judicial Assistant.** At the time of the emailed hearing confirmation, the JA will confirm your appearance type for the

hearing. If set in person, the courtroom or hearing room location **must** be included in the Notice of Hearing. If set virtually, the video hearing information **must** be included in the Notice of Hearing. Hearing time is assigned on a first come, first served basis. Please include the filing date of each motion to be heard on your Notice of Hearing. Your notice of hearing shall be filed within 3 business days of the JA confirming your hearing time.

**Cooperation of Counsel to Coordinate Hearings:** Good faith cooperation is expected both from counsel, their support staff and pro se litigants. If after 3 attempts on separate days to coordinate a hearing, counsel does not cooperate or respond, the requesting party may unilaterally set a hearing giving at least two weeks' notice to the opposing counsel who failed to cooperate or respond. Efforts to coordinate the hearing should be noted on the Notice of Hearing.

**Virtual Appearance Instructions:** Five minutes before the hearing, all participants should connect to the video conference. You will be entering a virtual waiting room before the hearing. The judge will admit you to the hearing when it begins. A party may appear virtually using the Webex link provided and must test the link prior to the hearing date. If a party is unable to connect to Webex, the party is required to appear in person.

**Judge Blechman's video link:** If the hearing is held in the hearing room, Judge Blechman uses a static Cisco Webex "click to join" link for all these virtual hearings. The link is:

<https://ninthcircuit.webex.com/meet/1orange>

This information must also be placed on the Notice of Hearing:

The hearing may be done by video conference using the below information. The hearing will not be cancelled or postponed due to a party's technical difficulties with the video link; accordingly, those wishing to be heard should consider coming to the hearing in person.

Counsel must be prepared at the time of the hearing to:

- Be fully familiar with the estate case.
- Assist the Court in a review of the matters necessary to determine that the requested order is legally ready for entry.
- Answer the Court's questions regarding the estate.

**Courtesy Copies Required:** Please only send electronically, do NOT send a hard copy unless directed otherwise by the Court. In addition to filing the Notice of Hearing with the Clerk of Court, a copy of the Notice of Hearing, Motion(s), supporting memoranda and/or case law to be heard **must be received**, by email at [1orange@ninthcircuit.org](mailto:1orange@ninthcircuit.org) at least five (5) but no more than ten (10) business days prior to the hearing to ensure an opportunity for the Court to review. Copies provided by email should be sent in pdf or Word, not in a zip folder or share folder as they are moved to a queue for the Judge to review and other formats cannot be moved properly. Counsel must ensure that the electronic copy is indexed and that the index contains a hyper-link to the document/exhibit/case indexed. The subject line of the email must include the

case number, style and date/time of the hearing. Failure to provide courtesy copies to all parties may result in the hearing being cancelled.

**Cross-noticing:** You may cross-notice a matter with the understanding that the Court will address what was originally noticed first and will address what has been cross-noticed, only if time permits. If there is not sufficient time for the cross-noticed matter to be heard, counsel must go through the normal scheduling procedure to schedule it with the JA.

**Cancellations:** Only the party setting the hearing may cancel the hearing. The party cancelling the hearing **must email [lorange@ninthcircuit.org](mailto:lorange@ninthcircuit.org)** to advise of the cancellation. The party cancelling the hearing must also file a Notice of Cancellation and email a copy of the notice of cancellation to [lorange@ninthcircuit.org](mailto:lorange@ninthcircuit.org) (filing the Notice of Cancellation with the Clerk is not sufficient as the Clerk does not notify the Court). If the hearing is cancelled less than 4 hours beforehand, and counsel cancelling the hearing has not been able to confirm the Judge has been informed, counsel must appear or have someone appear on counsel's behalf to so inform the Judge.

**CHECKLISTS:** A checklist must be filed with the following:

- Opening a Formal Administration
- Closing a Formal Administration
- Filing a Summary Administration
- Filing a Petition for Determining Homestead Status of Real Property in Formal and Summary Administration cases

The forms for the checklists are established in Administrative Order 2021-09-04, effective on August 1, 2021, and can be found here: <https://ninthcircuit.org/divisions/probate-court>. All checklists were revised on July 25, 2022. Please only use the most recent version. The applicable checklist must be fully completed or it will not be considered.

**ORDERS AND RULINGS:**

1. If counsel is asked to prepare an order without opposing counsel or parties, the order must be submitted to the Court within three (3) working days of the hearing. If counsel are asked to prepare an order where there are opposing counsel or other parties, the order should be drafted and circulated within three (3) working days and must be submitted to the court within seven (7) days of the hearing, with a copy to opposing counsel or to the other parties. Failure to object within 7 days is deemed approval of the order.

2. All Orders must describe, in the caption, the subject and ruling of the Court, (i.e. "Order Granting Motion to Strike Claim of Creditor Truist Bank.")

3. If there are any objections to the order, counsel may submit either competing orders or a redlined copy clearly noting the objection and basis.

4. All proposed orders must be accompanied by an e-filed cover letter that indicates that the order is being submitted subsequent to a hearing held (the cover letter must have the filing stamp across the top) and must indicate that opposing counsel, if applicable, has reviewed and approved the form of the order or that there is no opposing counsel when submitting to the court for review. The cover letter must be e-filed by the attorney with the Clerk and is required on all cases to document in the court file why the order was received by the Court.

5. The Court does not hold orders waiting for approval or objection. Please do not send proposed orders to the Court until you have approval as to the form by opposing counsel, if applicable.

**ORDERS ON MOTIONS TO WITHDRAW:** On motions to withdraw as counsel, please make sure that your order is in compliance with the Rules of General Practice and Judicial Administration and that the last known address, phone number and email address of the client are in the order. If formal administration, the PR shall be given 30 days to obtain new counsel or the case will be dismissed. If the client is a corporation or other legal entity, allow no more than thirty (30) days to obtain substitute counsel.

**REQUESTS FOR AMENDED ORDERS:** If an error is made on the order and an amended order is needed to correct a scrivener's error, please send a cover letter specifically indicating what needs to be corrected so there is documentation in the court file why the amended order is being signed. Please do not use the same cover letter as when the order was originally submitted.

**HEARINGS AND NON-JURY TRIALS:** All evidentiary hearings are in person hearings. Any request for a remote appearance at an evidentiary hearing must be approved by the Court *prior* to the hearing. Contested hearings involving only argument of counsel (no evidence being introduced) may be conducted either virtually or in person.

All non-jury trials are in person.

**EVIDENTIARY HEARING/NON-JURY TRIAL PROCEDURES:**

1. Preparing Evidence

a. **No later than 5 business days before the hearing**, counsel and/or self-represented parties must exchange any and all exhibits, which must be bates-stamped. The parties must have a substantive, good faith telephone conference to address stipulations and objections to the admissibility of any exhibits. If there are objections to the admissibility of any exhibits, the party raising the objection shall identify the exhibit by bates-stamped numbers and identify the ground(s) for any objection. The objections shall be filed with the Clerk and any objections not noted are waived.

b. After the substantive, good faith telephone conference and **no later than 5 business days before the hearing**, the parties are to pre-mark the bates-stamped exhibits that they intend to use during the hearing, provide a set of the exhibits to the other party and the witness(es). An electronic copy must also be sent to [lorange@ninthcircuit.org](mailto:lorange@ninthcircuit.org) with the case number, date and time of the hearing appearing in the subject line. The hard copy being introduced must be brought to the hearing itself.

**MOTIONS FOR REHEARING, RECONSIDERATION OR NEW TRIAL:** Upon filing the Motion, you must send a copy directly to chambers for review because the Clerk does not provide the motion to the Court. The Court will either (i) rule without a hearing, (ii) direct that a written response be filed by opposing counsel, or (iii) direct the JA to contact the moving counsel to schedule a hearing.

**FOR ANY INFORMATION NOT COVERED ABOVE:** If any matters concerning the conduct of the procedures of Orange Probate Division 01 are not covered herein, counsel is free to contact the Court by email at [lorange@ninthcircuit.org](mailto:lorange@ninthcircuit.org). In addition, a status hearing can be set during short matters at which time the Court will attempt to answer any questions.

December, 2023