



STATE OF FLORIDA
NINTH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT OF FLORIDA

CELIA THACKER DORN
County Judge

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JUDGE CELIA THACKER DORN
Courtroom Guidelines, Procedures and Expectations
For Osceola County Criminal Division 80-H, Courtroom 4E

IN ORDER TO ASSIST COUNSEL, THE LITIGANTS AND THE COURT, THE FOLLOWING GUIDELINES¹, PROCEDURES, PRACTICES AND EXPECTATIONS ARE HEREBY ADOPTED FOR THE COUNTY CRIMINAL DIVISION NUMBER 80-H, IN OSCEOLA COUNTY, FLORIDA WHEN PRACTICING BEFORE JUDGE CELIA THACKER DORN.²

- I.** **Court Division/Assignments:** This division covers half of the Osceola County Criminal docket (including Misdemeanor Domestic Violence). Starting April 1, 2024, cases are assigned by last name with this division handling last names beginning with “N” – “Z”. Prior to April 1, 2024, cases with even numbers were assigned to this division, regardless of last name. The only exceptions to the number assignments would be for “consolidation” orders entered or for cases where another judge has been “conflicted” or recused. Please always check with the Clerk of Court to ensure you are filing in the correct division, you are aware of the correct court dates, and you are contacting the correct office and email address for all correspondences.
- II.** **Contact Information:** The Judicial Assistant’s name is Jennifer Nobles. The Division e-mail address is: 80Osceola@ninthcircuit.org.

¹The 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. (See <http://www.ninthcircuit.org> [For Attorneys/Information/Rules & Policies/Courtroom Decorum Policy.](#))

²All appearing before this Court are held to the additional standards set forth in *Code of Judicial Conduct* and the *Principles of Professionalism for Judges*.

Please use this e-mail when requesting hearing time (motion must already be e-filed), cancelling a hearing, to obtain general information, and to forward a copy of motion and/or proposed order. If you email the Judicial Assistant directly to any other email about the specifics of a case, the email will be rejected.

III. **Arraignments:** Arraignments are scheduled Monday through Friday weekly. You must **E-FILE** your Notice of Appearance with the Clerk's Office. A courtesy copy may be provided to the Judicial Assistant through the division email, but the courtesy copy will be disregarded if the Notice of Appearance is not e-filed.

*NOTE: If the Public Defender is already appointed, counsel may file a Notice of Appearance. The Court will consider the Public Defender's Office as Defendant's Counsel until the Public Defender's Office files a Motion to Withdraw.

IV. **Discovery Matters:** All parties are directed to Florida Rule of Criminal Procedure 3.220 and are ordered to comply with the deadlines and terms set forth in the rule. If a discovery dispute arises, the parties should first attempt to resolve the matter between themselves. If a resolution is not possible, please e-file a Motion to Compel (or other appropriate motion) with the Clerk and send a copy of same to the Division 80-H email. After review by Judge Dorn, the Judicial Assistant will advise if a hearing will be scheduled.

V. **Motion Hearings:**

All Motions must be e-filed and visible on Benchmark prior to requesting hearing time. When emailing the Division 80-H to schedule a hearing, please have the following information clearly notated on the email:

Case Number, Defendant's name, type of motion, amount of time needed and the date the case is set for pre-trial conference date and/or Trial.

Hearings are secured on a first come/first served basis and are not secured until the JA has confirmation from the moving party that all interested parties are available AND the moving party has received confirmation from the JA that the hearing time has been secured. *Notice of Hearing should NOT be filed with the Clerk's Office until the moving party has received written confirmation from the JA that the date and time requested has been secured.*

Once hearing time has been obtained from the JA, please forward a copy of your Notice of Hearing to opposing Counsel/opposing Party as soon as possible so subpoenas may be issued timely, if necessary. There should be a minimum of ten (10) days' notice prior to a hearing in order to have subpoenas issued and served in a timely manner.

CASE LAW: If Counsel intends to provide any additional case law to what is cited in the Motion, that Case law MUST be provided to the JA no later than 48 hours prior to the set hearing. If Opposing Counsel plans to provide any additional case law, that MUST also be provided no later than 24 hours prior to the set hearing.

- a. **Motions to Quash Capias:** A response from the State Attorney’s Office is required. If motion is scheduled for a hearing, the defendant **MUST** be present.
- b. **Motions to Continue (other than MTC pre-trial conference—see below for PTC):** A response from the Opposing Attorney’s Office is required. If you have contacted the opposing counsel and he/she has no objection to your motion, please state this in your Motion and e-mail a copy of the Motion to the Division 80-H email address for the Judge’s review only once it has been filed, along with the Opposing Counsel’s Position in writing and with a proposed Order (in Word format).

The Parties are advised that all Motions to Continue must clearly state the reason why the continuance is needed. Each party will generally be “allowed” one continuance, but additional continuances are unlikely absent valid and/or urgently extenuating circumstances, regardless if the other Party is in agreement or has “no objection.”

- c. **Bond Estreature Motions:** When filing this type of Motion, you must send a copy to the State Attorney’s Office and The Clerk of Court Attorney. A response from their offices is required for all motions concerning bond estreatures. Hearing time is NOT required unless there is an objection from the State Attorney’s Office and/or the Clerk of Court.
- d. **Requests to set or reduce Bond Hearings for “new” charges:** Bond hearing requests will be handled in accordance with the timeframes set by law. Please email the Division 80-H email address to schedule. The motion must be e-filed and visible on Benchmark before attempting to schedule. The Judge will review the motion in chambers. The Judicial Assistant will contact the Attorney if the motion will be scheduled for a hearing.
- e. **Requests to set Bond Hearing in a Violation of Probation Case -** The motion must be e-filed and visible on Benchmark before submitting a request to the Division 80-H email address to schedule. The Judge will review the motion in chambers. The Judicial Assistant will contact the Attorney if the motion will be scheduled for a hearing.
- f. **Early Termination of Probation:** Motions for “early” termination **MUST** contain the positions of the State Attorney and the Probation Officer (P.O.), who will inform the Court of what conditions, if any, are outstanding. Generally, the Court will not consider early termination if there are any outstanding obligations.

Note: The Probation department is not a Party to the case and the Probation officer should not be filing Motions in the case. If Probation is recommending termination, revocation, withdrawal of a filed violation affidavit, etc., then the Probation officer should submit an affidavit/sworn statement to the State Attorney and the State Attorney should file the appropriate motion seeking relief, attaching the Probation officer’s affidavit/statement.

**NOTE: All motions which have no response from the opposing party will be rejected as incomplete.

ALL MOTIONS MUST BE FILED, HEARD AND DISPOSED OF PRIOR TO PRE-TRIAL OR DEEMED WAIVED.

VI. Pre-Trial Conference:

- a. **Private Attorney cases:** Defendants represented by private counsel will be scheduled for “Paper PTC.” If Defense Counsel completes the Pretrial Conference Form, then counsel and their clients are not required to attend Pretrial Conference. All private counsel (non-court appointed counsel) are **REQUIRED to e-file a completed and updated Paper PTC form prior to EACH PTC**, no later than Friday prior to the scheduled PTC date.
- b. **Pro Se (self-represented) Defendants:** all Defendants choosing to proceed unrepresented must file with the Clerk the Paper PTC form in accordance with the procedures detailed herein to the best of the Defendant’s ability (no later than Friday prior to the scheduled PTC date). An email address and phone number for the Defendant must be clearly printed on the form and the form must be signed.
- c. **Public Defender cases:** Defendants represented by the Office of the Public Defender will be set for a specific Pre-Trial date but will have the option of “waiving” attendance upon the proper submission of a completed Paper PTC form, **e-filed by the Assistant Public Defender no later than the Friday prior to the scheduled PTC date**. The option of waiving is at the discretion of the attorney, not the Defendant, and is conditioned upon the attorney certifying to the Court that he/she has been in regular contact with the Defendant, has had meaningful conversation with the Defendant about the case and the purpose of PTC, and has a reliable method of reaching the Defendant (email, phone number, etc.). The Assistant Public Defenders assigned to Division 80-H will be present for the scheduled PTC, regardless of any waivers filed, to “check-in” with the Judge about the status of each case. Defendants who are not waived must also appear at the set date/time. If Defendants plan to enter a plea during PTC, and that is known prior to PTC, those pleas will be address at 1:30 at PTC and those Defendants are not required to appear in the morning.

***NOTE: The Paper PTC form MUST be e-filed no later than the Friday prior to the scheduled PTC date and a copy emailed to the Division 80-H email address.

The Paper PTC form can be obtained from going to <https://ninthcircuit.org/judges/osceola-county/celia-thacker-dorn> under “Other Information.”

Do not create your own form and do not change the form to add or delete any required information. Doing so may result in your form being stricken and the Court finding you out of compliance with these procedures.

- VII. Trials:** Every effort will be made to set Trials for a date and time certain, typically during a 3 (three) week trial period and the Court will consider your noted and filed conflicts, if any. If you would like to move your case to a different trial day (during the same trial period), you must contact the opposing party to get their position prior to contacting the Judicial Assistant. The Court will consider all timely requests and will try to accommodate the dates and times sought however, moving the Trial date is not guaranteed and the

attorneys are reminded that TRIAL takes priority over all other court “conflicts” other than time-certain Circuit Court trials.

Trial Procedures:

- a. **Voir Dire:** The Court will conduct a preliminary voir dire of the jury. Counsel are welcome to request that the Court explore certain areas of inquiry that may be important to the trial but sensitive in nature. Counsel are reminded to be considerate of the jurors’ personal lives during their inquiries as well as the jurors’ time constraints. While the Court will afford counsel significant latitude in questioning, the Court will limit repetitive questions. Counsel shall not attempt to either explore the facts of their case nor explain the law that may apply in the case, nor attempt to curry favor with the venire.
- b. **Jury Selection Process:** After voir dire, the Court will first inquire as to “Cause” strikes. Counsel will be prepared to succinctly state a valid “strike for cause” basis. Next, the Court will move to pre-emptory challenges, starting with the first juror on the seating chart and moving sequentially through the list, alternating between counsel, until a panel is chosen. Back-striking during jury selection is always permitted. The number of alternates will be determined by the type and length of the trial. Each party will have one additional strike as to each alternate.
- c. **Opening and Closing:** Only demonstrative aids or exhibits marked by the clerk, agreed to by all counsel or approved by the Court may be used in either opening or closing. Counsel should avoid moving away from the podium (where the microphones are located) but may be permitted to move within a short distance of same, remaining mindful of the jury’s space. Counsel should stay at least three feet back from the jury rail at all times. The Court will discuss with counsel the time requirements for both opening and closing after the panel has been sworn and will expect that a reasonable estimate be provided by counsel. Counsel are expected to adhere to these time constraints.
- d. **Exhibits:** All exhibits are to be marked for identification by the clerk the day prior to trial and shall make arrangements with the Clerk’s office for this purpose. Exhibits which will be stipulated into evidence may be marked into evidence. Once exhibits are marked in evidence or are offered but not admitted, they become the property of the Clerk of Court and may not be altered or removed from the courtroom without order of the Court. No exhibits are to be published or exhibited to the jury until admitted into evidence and/or authorized by the Court. **Audiovisual and/or equipment questions should be addressed with Court Administration:**

<http://www.ninthcircuit.org/programs-services/audio-visual>.

- e. **Demonstrative Aids:** Any demonstrative aid that is to be used at trial must be marked by the clerk and disclosed to opposing counsel to the start of trial (preferably at least a week or more prior or at a hearing set prior to trial if there are any objections). No aids are to be shown to the jury without prior approval of the Court.
- f. **Experts:** The Court will not accept or qualify a witness as an expert in front of the jury. Challenges to an expert’s qualifications and his or her ability to testify must be addressed prior to the start of the trial period and therefore outside the presence of the jury. Experts are to be cautioned by the attorney who calls the expert of “in limine” rulings, and the effect of the invocation of the Rule of Sequestration.
- g. **Use of Depositions:** If depositions are to be used at trial in any manner (impeachment, as video testimony, etc.) the questioning/moving Attorney shall make a hard copy available both for the Court and for the witness being questioned.³
- h. **Objections:** The Court will not allow speaking objections in front of the jury. When counsel rises to object, the legal basis for the objection only should be stated. If elaboration is necessary, the Court will call counsel to the bench for a Bench Conference or out of the presence of the jury. Counsel shall not interrupt opposing counsel or witness’s questions or answers with an objection unless the answer or question is patently objectionable. Once the Court has ruled, no further argument shall be permitted. The Attorneys shall not “object” and then ask to approach without having first stated the legal basis for the objection.
- i. **Jurors:** The Court generally will allow jurors to take notes and to ask questions where necessary (see Section 40.50, Florida Statutes). If any counsel objects to these procedures, such objection should be addressed to the Court prior to the day of trial.
- j. **Jury Instructions:** Jury instructions are to be prepared by both sides and exchanged at the beginning of the trial. An emailed copy must be provided to the Court through the Division 80-H email address prior to the start of Trial. The instructions should not contain any citations, jury instruction titles or information as to who requested the instruction. The Court intends to provide the jury with a written copy of all jury instructions when the jury retires to deliberate. In certain cases, the Court may provide some substantive law instructions to the jury during preliminary instructions and/or before closing arguments. Should any counsel wish to consider this option, this matter should be addressed with the Court prior to the day of the start of trial.

³In Osceola County some documents electronically filed with the Court are imaged and may not be readily available in hard copy to the Court. Additionally, when documents are filed “recently” in time to the court event, they may not be imaged yet in Benchmark, which means the Judge cannot view the filing. Counsel should bring copies with him/her to the Court event

VIII. Cancellation Policy: Please immediately notify the Division 80-H e-mail of all hearing cancellations or settlements so that the calendar may be opened up for other matters. You must attach to the e-mail a copy of the Notice of Cancellation. It is the responsibility of the moving party to file a Notice of Cancellation in the court file and to contact the opposing party to notify them of the cancellation.

IX. Requests for Court Interpreter: If a Defendant or Witness will require an interpreter to speak/testify or to understand what is said during a Court proceeding, please email the Judicial Assistant through the Division 80-H email address with an “Interpreter Request” at the very least two (2) business days prior to the scheduled hearing for *Spanish* and at least ten (10) business days for any language *other than Spanish*.

X. Courtroom Etiquette and Decorum: Counsel shall stand when addressing the Court or the jury. Counsel will be dressed appropriately for Court and be respectful to all present. Counsel will seek permission of the Court to approach the bench, the clerk, the witness or the jury. All parties and attorneys shall avoid contact with the venire and jury and counsel shall so instruct their clients and witnesses. Counsel shall address all arguments to the Court and not opposing counsel. Counsel shall advise their clients and witnesses that gestures, facial expressions or any manifestations of approval or disapproval of anything occurring in the courtroom is absolutely prohibited.

Please see the *Ninth Judicial Circuit Courtroom Decorum Policy* available at <http://www.ninthcircuit.org>.

XI. All Electronic Devices (other than hearing aids or visual aids): Cell phones, tablets, laptops, “blue-tooth” devices and all other types of electronics **MUST** be turned off when in the courtroom. If necessary to make or take phone calls, please step out of the Courtroom. Witnesses will not be permitted to possess any type of communication device while on the witness stand and should have nothing in their hands when taking the witness stand.

XII. INFORMATION NOT COVERED IN THIS DOCUMENT

If any matters concerning the conduct of the pre-trial or trial procedures of Osceola County Criminal Division 80-H are not covered herein, counsel is free to contact the Court for clarification or instruction via the Division 80-H email address. A status hearing can be set at which time the Court will attempt to answer any inquiries. The Court appreciates counsels’ efforts to understand and comply with this Court’s procedures.