IN THE SUPERIOR COURT OF THE STATE OF ARIZONA
IN AND FOR THE COUNTY OF MARICOPA

IN THE MATTER OF THE ASSIGNMENT OF CIVIL CASES	ADMINISTRATIVE ORDER NO. 2026-163 (Replaces A.O. 2026-114)

In Administrative Order No. 2024-022, the Court originally adopted the "Judicial Assignment Procedure for the Civil Department in the Superior Court" (the Procedure) in accordance with A.R.S. §12-137. The Court has now determined that the Procedure needs to be amended to account for an additional civil commissioner calendar that has been created for the Civil Department. This revision only affects the final paragraph of Part I of the Procedure to equalize caseloads for civil commissioners and account for the addition of calendar CVC01.

IT IS THEREFORE ORDERED that Civil cases in Maricopa County will be assigned in accordance with the revised "Judicial Assignment Procedure for the Civil Department in the Superior Court in Maricopa County," attached as Attachment "A".

IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that this Administrative Order replaces Administrative Order No. 2026-114.

Dated this 19 day of November, 2026.

Hon. Pamela Sue Gates
Presiding Judge

Original: Clerk of the Superior Court

Copies: Hon. Danielle Viola, Associate Presiding Judge
Hon. John Blanchard, Civil Department Presiding Judge
Hon. Jay Polk, Tax Department Presiding Judge
Hon. Jillian Francis, Lower Court of Appeals Presiding Judge
All Civil Judges and Commissioners
Raymond Billotte, Judicial Branch Administrator
Bryan Farrell, Deputy Court Administrator
Luke Emerson, Civil Department Administrator

Attachment "A"

Judicial Assignment Procedure for the Civil Department in the Superior Court in Maricopa County

I. Automated Assignments at Case Initiation – Supreme Court Approval Not Required by A.R.S. § 12-137

Judges are assigned to civil cases at case-initiation with each case receiving a unique case number beginning with CV. After litigant files case-initiating documents (e.g., a complaint or a petition), an automated system assigns the case a unique case-identifying number.

The case-management system of the Superior Court in Maricopa County, called iCIS, is programmed to assign new cases to a judge's calendar. This is a random assignment process that occurs based on the last three digits of the case number. The case-management system is pre-programmed to assign case numbers to judicial calendars before any cases are ever docketed for that year. Once a case number is entered into the case-management system, cases are then assigned to calendars on a rotating basis between the different judicial calendars. The case-initiation assignments are automated in a random manner that is unpredictable and provides for an equal distribution of cases among trial divisions. See Maricopa County Local Rule 3.1(b).

The case-management system is programmed to assign cases to judicial divisions equally with two exceptions: 1) the programming assigns non-commercial civil cases to the four judges assigned to commercial court at a reduced rate to account for the complexity of the judges' commercial calendars; and 2) the Civil Presiding Judge and Associate Civil Presiding Judge have reduced caseloads due to the administrative responsibilities of the assignments.[1] Additionally, upon assignment to the Civil Department, each judge provides a recusal list with those lawyers, law firms, or parties with whom the judge has a conflict. The list is used by our Court Technology Services department to automatically override the original case-initiation assignment based on the algorithm to avoid assigning cases based on existing conflicts. The case is reassigned by an automated, blind, and random process to another civil judge. This process eliminates the need to re-assign cases manually.

If a party at case-initiation identifies a case as an excess proceeds matter ("an EP case" or "EP cases") or a transcript of judgment case ("a TJ case" or "TJ cases"), the automated system assigns the case unique case-identifying number. EP and TJ cases are handled by high-volume civil commissioners. Additionally, eviction cases, name changes, amended marriage licenses, amended birth certificates and foreign judgments

[1] The reduced caseloads may vary depending on the type of calendar assigned (i.e., commercial, complex, or non-commercial civil).

are also handled by high-volume civil commissioners. To equalize caseloads for civil commissioners, the automated system uses the last digits of the unique case identifier to assign cases ending in the digits 00-17 to CVC01, digits 18-35 to PCC07, digits 36-45 to PCC08, digits 46-63 to PCC05, digits 64-81 to NEC02, and digits 82-99 to SEC02.

II. Blind Assignments Using a Formula Approved by the Arizona Supreme Court Pursuant A.R.S. § 12-137

After the initial automated assignment through the process described in Section II, some civil cases are reassigned when:

1) The assigned judicial officer self-disqualifies as the assigned judge following case initiation due to a conflict, potential for appearance of impropriety, etc., referred to as "recusal."
2) A party files a Notice as a Matter of Right under Arizona Rules of Civil Procedure 42.1.
3) A party files and the court grants a Motion for Change of Judge for Cause under Arizona Rules of Civil Procedure 42.2.
4) A party files a lower court appeal or special action.

If reassignment is appropriate following one of the events identified above, a blind reassignment process is followed as described below and referred to as "the Reassignment Process." The Reassignment Process and reassignment formula require approval by the Arizona Supreme Court pursuant A.R.S. § 12-137.

a. The Reassignment Process

All available civil trial divisions are listed on an electronically stored excel spreadsheet that identifies the division number, judicial officer assigned to the division, and the last date the judicial division received a case through the Reassignment Process. The excel spreadsheet also contains a separate list of available commercial judges and a list of judges assigned to complex calendars. The judicial divisions are sequenced with a judicial division most recently having received a reassignment through the Reassignment Process at the bottom of the list and the judicial division last receiving a reassignment through the Reassignment Process at the top of the list. No discretion is used in selecting the judicial division to receive the next reassignment after taking into account recusals; the blind list and date determine the next available judge for reassignment.

b. Lower Court Appeals and Special Action Assignments

Lower Court Appeals matters and special actions are assigned at case initiation to the Lower Court and Administrative Appeals Judge (LCA Judge). As needed, the LCA Judge reassigns cases via minute entry to the commissioner assigned to Lower Court Appeals based on workload considerations. If the LCA Judge or LCA commissioner recuses from a matter, the matter is reassigned to the other LCA judicial officer. Special Actions are automatically assigned to the LCA Judge who determines if the case should be assigned to a Civil or Criminal Judge. If the Special Action should be assigned to a Civil Judge, the LCA Judge contacts Civil Court Administration to obtain a judicial assignment consistent with Section II(a) above. The LCA Judge issues a minute entry documenting the re-assignment and the new CV case number. If a judge recuses from a Civil Special Action, the recusal is handled as described above in Section II(a). If the Special Action should be assigned to a Criminal Judge, the LCA Judge issues a minute entry assigning the matter using the LCA Special Action Assignment for Criminal spreadsheet consistent with the Reassignment Process described above in Section II(a).

III. Emergency Matters or Judge Unavailability – Must be Blind and May Account for Availability—Approved by the Supreme Court Pursuant A.R.S. § 12-137

Time Sensitive Matters

From time to time, the Civil Presiding Judge must assign cases for time sensitive matters. Examples include eviction jury trials, short trials for which a judge is not available, or cases transferred from one judge to another due to trial conflicts.

Case Transfer

The Civil Department uses the case transfer process when a judge has two trials scheduled to begin on the same date or the trial date otherwise conflicts with another trial date. Judges often double book trials given that a large percentage of cases settle in advance of trial. Case Transfer allows trials to proceed even when a judge has two conflicting trials. The process for case transfer is as follows: 1) the judge with the trial conflict contacts the Civil Presiding Judge to advise of the conflict; 2) the judicial assistant for the Civil Presiding Judge notifies the Civil judicial officers of the conflict and the case information with a request that a judge with calendar availability accept and complete the trial; 3) an available judge contacts the Civil Presiding Judge to advise of trial availability; 4) the judicial assistant for the Civil Presiding Judge notifies the parties of the potential reassignment and confirms that the parties involved are not exercising a notice of change

of judge; 5) if a notice is exercised, the judicial assistant begins the process again; 6) if a notice is not exercised, the case is reassigned by the judicial assistant for the Civil Presiding Judge to the accepting judge for all further purposes.

Eviction Cases

In most cases, commissioners are assigned eviction matters that conclude through bench trials. However, some eviction cases involve disputed issues of fact, requiring a jury trial. High-volume civil court commissioners do not have the available time to preside over jury trials given the demands of their civil calendars. Therefore, if an eviction case proceeds to a jury trial, the Civil Presiding Judge sends an email to all Civil Judges notifying the judges of the eviction case and the need for a judge to preside over a jury trial. The assignment process is consistent with Case Transfer as described above.

On occasion, the Justice Courts request assistance with facilitating a jury trial for an eviction case. In most cases, the Superior Court facilitates jurors needed for the eviction trials. In some cases, the Superior Court facilitates jurors and a courtroom for the eviction trials. In rare cases, the Justice Court requests the Superior Court to provide a judicial officer and jurors to complete a jury trial. In those cases, the Civil Presiding Judge identifies an available judicial officer to preside over the trial. The process is consistent with Case Transfer as described above.

Short Trials

By stipulation, parties can agree to a binding, one-day jury trial. Each party has two hours to present its case before a group of four jurors. Three of the four jurors must agree to the verdict. A judge *pro tempore* presides over the short trial. Jury fees are assessed against the appropriate parties.

At times, a judge *pro tempore* may not be available to complete a short trial. In these rare situations, the Civil Presiding Judge follows a process consistent with Case Transfer described above to identify an available judicial officer.

Election Challenges

Election Challenges under A.R.S. § 16-351 have statutory deadlines and must be resolved on an expedited basis (e.g., the court is required to hear and render a decision on the matter within ten days after filing). To ensure compliance with the statutory timeframes, before the filing deadline, the Court pre-populates a master calendar of available judicial officers to hear the accelerated petition hearings filed under A.R.S. § 16-351. When filed on identified predetermined dates, the cases are assigned a hearing time and date. The predetermined dates are identified with each election cycle. The Associate Civil Presiding Judge assigns the case to a judge identified as available on the master calendar. This system is designed to ensure that judges are available to handle each of these highly accelerated cases within the statutory periods.

Election Day Emergency Coverage

The Presiding Judge of the Maricopa County Superior Court selects an Election Day Emergency Coverage Judge for the Primary and General Election Day. To select the Election Day Emergency Coverage Judge, the Presiding Judge selects the Election Day Coverage Judge by lot in a drawing from the names of available civil trial judges.

Injunctions Against Harassment and Injunctions Against Workplace Harassment

Injunctions against harassment cases and injunctions against workplace harassment cases, are assigned based on a Duty Calendar that is prepopulated with high-volume civil commissioners who cover the calendar on a rotating basis. For example, a new injunction matter will be assigned by Civil Court Administration to the civil commissioner handling the Duty Calendar on the day the injunction is filed.

Judge Unavailability[2]

From time to time, judicial officers assigned to matters are unavailable. In the normal course, judicial officers arrange for other judicial officers to handle emergencies ("emergency coverage") in their absence due to vacation, illness, etc. Cases are not reassigned when they are handled via emergency coverage. For example, these situations may involve a judicial officer who is ill or on vacation when a party files a request for relief that needs immediate attention. In these cases, the emergency coverage judicial officer acts on behalf of the assigned judicial officer because the matter needs immediate attention. Once available, the assigned judicial officer handles the case moving forward.

This same process applies to critical/emergency coverage during the annual Judicial Conference and certain holiday periods.

IV. Specialty Assignments – Deviations from Blind Assignment under § 12-137 – Supreme Court Approval Not Required

Tax

Assignments to the Arizona Tax Court are made based on the Judicial Officer assigned to the calendar. The Presiding Judge of the Maricopa County Superior Court appoints a judicial officer to serve as the Tax Judge. In the case of a recusal by the Tax Court Judge, the case is reassigned to a Commercial Court judge identified by the

[2] Judge Unavailability does not typically result in reassignment. Accordingly, this process is included for information purposes only but does not need approval from the Supreme Court.

Maricopa County Superior Court Presiding Judge

All post-judgment tax cases are assigned to the Arizona Tax Court Judge upon filing; however, post-judgment cases are managed by high-volume civil commissioners. Tax Court judicial staff forwards post-judgment tax filings to the high-volume civil commissioners to handle based on the last two digits of the case number.

Small Claims Tax (ST) cases are assigned at case initiation to one of the high-volume civil commissioners based on the last two digits of the case number. The assignments will be adjusted proportionately if the number of commissioners assigned to the Civil Department is modified in the future.

Complex

Cases designated as complex are assigned to a subset of judicial officers overseeing "complex" calendars. The cases are assigned by the Civil Presiding Judge on motion at case initiation to a judge handling a complex calendar after taking into account the last complex assignment and standing recusals consistent with the Reassignment Process described above in Section II(a).

Maricopa County Local Rule 3.12 identifies complex civil actions as those that require continuous judicial management to avoid placing unnecessary burdens on the court or the litigants and to expedite the case, keep costs reasonable, and promote an effective decision- making process by the court, the parties, and counsel. Following case initiation, cases may be deemed complex in two ways: 1) the parties request a complex assignment, and the judge grants the request; or 2) the judge determines sua sponte that the case is complex. In such cases, the assigned judge forwards the ruling to the Civil Presiding Judge for reassignment to a Complex Case Judge.

Commercial

Pursuant to Arizona Rules of Civil Procedure 8.1, cases designated as commercial are assigned to a subset of judicial officers overseeing a "commercial court" calendar.

1) Plaintiffs can request assignment to commercial court at case initiation by marking the civil coversheet and the complaint with "commercial court assignment requested." Cases assigned to the commercial court under Rule 8.1 of the Arizona Rules of Civil Procedure are identified by Deputy Clerks of Court. Commercial court cases are assigned at case initiation consistent with Section I above with each calendar receiving random assignments based on the last two digits of the case number.

2) The parties can request assignment to commercial court after case initiation by filing a separate notice requesting commercial court assignment. The assigned judge rules on the request and forwards the request to the Civil Presiding Judge for reassignment to a commercial court judge using the Reassignment Process described above in Section II(a). The assigned judge may also conclude the case is commercial and transfer the case to the Civil Presiding Judge for reassignment. These cases are assigned using the Reassignment Process described above in Section II(a).

Water Rights

The Supreme Court assigns the general adjudication to a superior court judge. A.R.S § 45-252(C). The superior court judge assigned to the adjudication may appoint a master or masters under Rule 53 of the Arizona Rules of Civil Procedure. A.R.S. § 45-255. The Supreme Court further assigns a superior court judge to handle groundwater appeals.