

LOCAL RULES OF PROCEDURE
AND
RULES OF DECORUM
FOR
THE JUSTICE OF THE PEACE COURTS

LEON COUNTY, TEXAS

EFFECTIVE 1/01/2012

Chapter 1

GENERAL

1.1 Objective.

These rules are promulgated to provide a uniform system for the fair, impartial, and prompt disposition of matters properly before the Justice Courts of Leon County. They are to be interpreted consistent with this objective.

1.2 Scope.

These rules govern cases filed in the Justice Courts of Leon County, Texas. They are promulgated pursuant to Section 27.061 of the Texas Government Code.

1.3 Jurisdiction.

The Justice Courts of Leon County hear:

(a) Debt Claims, Repair and Remedy and Small Claims cases in which the amount in controversy is \$20,000.00 or less.

(b) Eviction cases, both residential and commercial, including writs of re-entry.

(c) Administrative hearings involving revocation of drivers licenses, concealed handgun permits, etc.

(d) Criminal offenses which are fine only, both traffic and Class C

(e) Cases involving animal cruelty and neglect.

(f) Peace Bonds

(g) Issue warrants for search and arrest

(h) Perform functions as a magistrate and conduct inquests

1.4 Organization.

Each Justice Court in Leon County has a specific geographical area of jurisdiction. Generally Precinct One serves the northeastern and western portion of Leon County; Precinct Two serves the southeastern part; Precinct Four serves the southwestern part of the county. Precinct One and Two has its own court clerk(s) responsible for setting cases on the individual docket of the court.

1.5 Calendar.

Each Justice Court will keep a docket of scheduled hearings and trials. A trial docket shall be available to the public for these proceedings.

The elected judges will generally be available as indicated by these rules and the calendar. However, when a judge is on vacation, at a judicial or educational conference, or has medical or dental needs, it is the policy of the Justice Courts to obtain an on call judge from another Leon County precinct, whenever possible, so that there will be no interruption in the work of each court.

1.6 Jury Selection.

The Justice Courts utilize the electronic method of selecting names of persons assigned for jury service. Jury impaneling is conducted in cooperation with the District Court, County Court, and the Leon County Sheriff's Office. Questions about the jury impaneling process and jury service may be addressed to the jury office at the office of the District Clerk at 903-536-2227.

Chapter 2

CIVIL CASES

2.1 Filing Cases.

All civil cases shall be filed in the Justice Court where one or more defendants may reside, except as otherwise provided by law. Eviction cases shall be filed in the Justice Court where the leased premises are located.

2.2 Mediation.

It is the policy of the Leon County Justice Courts to encourage the peaceful resolution of disputes and the early settlement of pending litigation. Each court shall determine which of its cases to refer to mediation and shall determine to which mediation service to refer a case.

Any party receiving notice of a referral to mediation has 10 days from date of notice to file a motion objecting to the referral. If any party to a case files a motion objecting to the referral to mediation, and the Court finds that there is a reasonable basis for the objection, the case may be excused from the referral. If either party fails to attend mediation or if no resolution is reached, the case is to be promptly set for trial.

2.3 Setting Cases.

All civil cases are to be brought to trial or final disposition as promptly as practicable.

At any time the Court may order a pre-trial conference. The Court may enter an order or orders following each pre-trial conference, which would address any applicable matters.

Each Justice Court shall be responsible for the setting of hearings and trials in each court and for the notices thereof.

2.4 Demand for Jury.

A party requesting a civil jury trial shall file a written request with the court in which the case is filed not later than the 10th day before trial. The jury fee shall be paid upon filing the request.

2.5 Preferential Settings.

Preferential settings may be obtained at the discretion of the judge.

2.6 Continuances.

Continuances will be heard at such time as scheduled by the court. The notice and pleading requirements of law must be followed. Continuances may not be heard thereafter unless they allege grounds which arose only after that time.

2.7 Uncontested Docket.

Uncontested matters and routine matters of very short duration may be heard at the uncontested docket as scheduled by each court.

The parties are responsible for arranging in advance with the court's clerk to have the files pulled and available for the court. If more than two cases will be presented at the uncontested docket, please inform the clerk of the cause number and style of each case at least 24 hours in advance.

2.8 Matters Preliminary to Trial on the Merits.

Except for motions for continuance based on new circumstances, all motions in limine, exceptions and all pre-trial motions and pleas in each jury case shall be presented and heard at pre-trial hearing. All such exceptions, motions, and pleas not presented and heard at scheduled pre-trial hearings will be deemed waived, except upon a showing of good cause.

For non-jury cases all exceptions, motions and pleas must be filed three days before the scheduled trial before the court.

A movant shall deliver a copy of each pleading to any opposing party and to the court in the manner and within the time provided by the Texas Rules of Civil Procedure.

2.9 Hearings Conducted by Telephone.

At the discretion of the judge, a party or attorney may appear by telephone conference call. A request by a party for such an arrangement must be made in advance. In rare cases in the interest of justice, the court may permit a witness to appear by telephone conference call.

A judge will not initiate a conference call. All arrangements with telephone operators must be made by the requesting party.

At any time, even after the completion of a conference call, a judge may determine that a hearing by telephone will not be sufficient and may require a hearing in court upon notice to all parties.

2.10 Dismissal for Want of Prosecution by the Court

2.10.1 Case Selection.

The following cases are eligible for dismissal for want of prosecution *sua sponte* by the Court:

- (a) Cases that have been set for trial and the Plaintiff fails to appear to prosecute as noticed in the trial setting.
- (b) Cases that have been on file for more than 12 months that are not set for trial and have had no filings or settings within 180 days;
- (c) Any other case designated by the Court.

2.10.2 Notice.

The court clerk shall give notice that certain cases will be dismissed for want of prosecution. Such matters will be dismissed on the date indicated in the notice of dismissal unless the Court orders it retained.

2.10.3 Docket Settings.

Only the Court may make a setting in cases.

2.10.4 Procedures for Retaining Cases and Objecting to Motions to Retain.

- (a) Motions to retain shall be filed with the Court at least 10 working days prior to the date specified in the notice of dismissal for want of prosecution.
- (b) Any party who files a motion to retain shall state in writing the factual and legal bases why the case should not be dismissed for want of prosecution.
- (c) Parties objecting to a motion to retain shall state in writing the basis for any objection to the motion to retain within 3 days of service of a motion to retain.
- (d) The Court shall notify all parties of the Court's ruling on a motion to retain.

2.10.5 Cases Not Requiring Oral Argument.

Oral arguments on motions to retain or objections to motions to retain, may be permitted by the Court.

2.10.6 Cases Requiring Oral Argument

The Court shall notify the parties of the Court's decision to permit oral argument, and shall notify the parties of any hearing on motion to retain.

A party wanting to argue a motion to retain or an objection to retention may appear on the date and time set for dismissal of the case.

2.10.7 Retained Cases.

If the Court decides to retain the case, the Court will set the case for trial at the convenience of the Court. The Court will notify the parties of the setting. At the setting, the case will be tried or dismissed.

2.10.8 Includes all Pending Claims.

References in this chapter to a "case" include all pending claims in the case.

2.11 Drafts of Judgments and Orders.

So far as practicable, every draft of a judgment or order to be signed by a judge should be approved as to form by attorneys for all parties before it is presented to the judge.

A draft of an order shall not be typed on the same page with a pleading, motion, certificate of service, or any part thereof, and each such draft shall have a heading showing the cause number, the style of the case, and the court in which it is pending.

The word "entered" should not be used in the line provided immediately above the judge's signature to show the date on which a judgment or order is signed.

2.12 Motions to Withdraw as Attorney.

Except as provided in Rules 8 and 10, Texas Rules of Civil Procedure, a motion to withdraw will be granted without a hearing only if the moving attorney:

(a) Files written consents to the withdrawal signed by attorneys for all parties; and

(b) Files a written consent to the withdrawal signed by the client, or includes in the motion a specific statement of the circumstances that justify the withdrawal and the circumstances that prevent the moving attorney from obtaining the client's written consent; and

(c) Files a certificate stating the last known mailing address of the client.

If all requirements above are not satisfied, a motion to withdraw or to substitute another attorney must be presented at a hearing after notice to the client and to all other parties.

2.13 Holidays.

When any date mentioned in these rules falls on a court holiday then the applicable date shall be the first date following the holiday.

The court holidays shall be published.

2.14 Authorization to Serve Citation (Rule 103).

A person wishing to be authorized by written order of the court to serve citations and other notices may file a written affidavit in application for authorization. The Court may, upon approval of the application, authorize service by the applicant in all appropriate suits pending in that Justice Court. Prior to, or in conjunction with the filing of return of service in any suit, the person verifying the return shall also file an affidavit that he or she is not a party to and has no interest in said suit. The affidavit may be part of the verified return required by Rule 107, Texas Rules of Civil Procedure.

Chapter 3

Criminal Cases

3.1 Filing Cases.

Justice Court cases shall be tried in the precinct where the offense is alleged to have occurred, except for cases involving school attendance, which may be filed and tried in any precinct in the county.

3.2 First Appearance.

Unless otherwise directed, defendants will appear at the Justice Court in which the case is filed, according to the date and location written on their citation or summons.

Subsequent appearances will be as scheduled by the Court.

3.3 Setting Cases.

Cases are set by the Court Clerk at the request of defense attorneys or defendants in the Justice Court in which the case is docketed.

Attorneys or defendants may request one reset no later than the day before the current setting in accordance with court rules.

Court clerks are authorized to give settings as approved by the Judge.

Defendants may discuss their cases with a prosecutor, plead guilty or no contest to resolve the case, or reset the case for trial

(a) Pretrial

Pretrials are normally conducted in Class C cases prior to a jury trial. Special pretrial settings must be requested and approved by the Court. All pretrial hearings will be held on the day set unless a written State or Defense motion for continuance is granted.

(b) Trial before the Court (TBC)

All cases shall be tried when set unless a written State or Defense motion for continuance is granted.

(c) Jury Trial

Defense attorney and/or defendant shall appear at the scheduled jury setting. State and Defense must either announce ready, or file a written motion for continuance not less than 24 hours before trial by jury. If the defendant waives jury at the docket call, a written waiver, signed by counsel and/or defendant must be presented.

3.4 Plea of Guilty or Nolo Contendere.

Defendants may enter a plea of guilty or no contest at any time, with or without a plea agreement. Each Justice Court shall maintain a list of "standard" fines for various offenses. Defendants may also elect to enter a plea of guilty or no contest and address the Judge regarding punishment.

3.5 Appointment of Counsel.

Indigent defendants are not entitled to a court appointed attorney, as a matter of law, when charged with a fine-only offense.

3.6 **Motions to Withdraw or Substitute.**

An attorney becomes attorney of record in a misdemeanor case by listing his or her name on pleadings or by setting or resetting the case. He or she remains attorney of record until relieved by written order of the Court.

An attorney's motion to withdraw will be heard at any time when the defendant has had notice to appear or whenever the defendant agrees in writing. Adequate notice is by certified mail, return receipt requested.

Motions to substitute counsel will be granted without hearing so long as the scheduling of trial will not be delayed by the change in counsel.

Chapter4

Rules of Decorum

4.1 Opening Procedure.

Immediately before the scheduled time for the first court session on each day the bailiff shall direct all persons present to their seats and shall cause the courtroom to come to order. As the Judge enters the courtroom the bailiff or the court clerk shall state:

"All rise."

And while everyone is still standing, the bailiff shall announce: "Justice of the Peace Court, Precinct ____ of Leon County, Texas is now in session, Judge_ presiding. Please be seated. "

4.2 Recess

When the Judge announces a recess, the bailiff shall state: "All rise."

And all shall remain standing until the Judge leaves the courtroom, whereupon the bailiff shall announce: "The Court is now in recess".

In reconvening after a recess, the bailiff shall call the courtroom to order and request everyone to rise as the Judge enters and shall state:

"Please be seated."

Before a recess of a jury trial, the jury will be excused, and all other persons present shall remain seated while the bailiff conducts the jury from the courtroom into the jury room.

After a recess, the bailiff shall direct all jurors to the jury room and shall call the courtroom to order and request everyone to rise as the Judge enters, as in non-jury trials. The jury shall be returned to the jury box from the jury room, upon the instruction of the Judge.

4.3 General Rules of Courtroom Conduct.

All officers of the court, except the Judge and jurors, and all other participants, except witnesses who have been placed under the rule, shall promptly enter the courtroom before the scheduled time for each court session. When the bailiff calls the Court to order, complete order should be observed.

In the courtrooms there shall be:

- (a) no tobacco used;
- (b) no chewing gum;
- (c) no excessively short pants or bare midriffs;
- (d) no reading of newspapers;
- (e) no audible cell phones or pagers;
- (f) no bottles, cups or beverage containers except court water, pitchers and cups or as otherwise permitted by the Judge;
- (g) no edibles;
- (h) no propping of feet on tables or chairs;
- (i) no noise or talking that interferes with court proceedings.

The Judge, the attorneys, and other officers of the court will refer to and address other court officers and other participants in the proceedings respectfully and impersonally, as by using appropriate titles and surnames rather than first names.

All officers of the court should dress appropriately for court sessions.

4.4 Attorneys

(a) Attorneys should observe the letter and spirit of all canons of ethics, including those dealing with discussion of cases with representatives of the media and those concerning improper ex parte communications with the Judge.

(b) Attorneys should advise their clients and witnesses of Local Rules of Decorum that may be applicable.

(c) All objections, arguments, and other comments by counsel shall be directed to the Judge or jury and not to opposing counsel.

(d) While another attorney is addressing the Judge or jury, an attorney should not stand for any purpose except to make an appropriate motion, request or objection to the Court.

(e) Attorneys should not approach the bench without leave of court and must never lean on the bench.

(f) Attorneys shall remain seated at the counsel tables at all times except:

(1) when the Judge enters and leaves;

(2) when addressing the Judge or jury; and

(3) whenever it may be proper to handle documents, exhibits, or other evidence (leave of court is not required.)

(g) Attorneys should anticipate any need to move furniture, appliances, or easels, and should make advance arrangements with the Court. Tables should not be moved during court sessions, unless approved the Court.

4.5 Broadcast Media

Requests to broadcast court proceedings shall be determined by each Judge on a case by case assessment after consultation with all the parties to a case.

Chapter 5

Transfer of Cases

5.1. Civil Cases.

- (a) At the Judge's discretion, a Justice of the Peace court in one precinct may transfer a pending civil case to another Justice of the Peace court in Leon County, provided that the receiving Judge has no objection to the transfer.
- (b) The parties lack standing to contest or request the transfer.
- (c) Once transferred, the case proceeds as if it arose originally in the court to which it was transferred.

5.2. Criminal Cases.

- (a) A judge may transfer a pending misdemeanor case to another Justice of the Peace court in Leon County, provided that the receiving Judge has no objection to the transfer.
- (b) The Court of transfer must notify the Defendant of the precinct and mailing information of the new venue in writing if the Defendant is not in the court in person to obtain this information.
- (c) The defendant has 10 days to object in writing to the transfer.
- (c) Once transferred, the case proceeds as if it arose originally in the court to which it was transferred.