



505TH DISTRICT COURT
HON. KALI MORGAN, PRESIDING JUDGE
HON. LATOSHA MCGILL CLAYTON, ASSOCIATE JUDGE

REVISED RULES OF PRACTICE (2025)

Effective **January 1, 2025**, the following rules of practice will apply to all legal proceedings in the 505th District Court. These policies and procedures do not supplant the Fort Bend County Local Rules.

The 505th District Court adheres to the Texas Rules of Professional Conduct, the Texas Lawyer's Creed, and the Texas Code of Judicial Conduct. Violations will result in appropriate sanctions.

**The following rules apply to attorneys and self-represented litigants.
Please read them carefully.**

1. GENERAL

- a. Each party shall consult the applicable state law(s) and the Fort Bend County Local Rules for additional specifics and time deadlines.
- b. The court's telephone number is **281-238-3244**. The court staff **will not** provide legal advice or participate in ex parte communications (except as allowed by law).
- c. **LEGAL AID**: Free legal information and court forms for many family law matters can be found online at <https://texaslawhelp.org>. There is also a *Self-Represented Litigant Packet* available on the court's website that contains helpful information for those representing themselves in Fort Bend County family courts. Please seek independent legal advice for additional specifics.
- d. General communication with the court is preferred by email to Angella Powers, Court Coordinator at: Angella.Powers@fortbendcountytexas.gov (**Do not use this**

email address to request a hearing date or to submit exhibits. Please follow the instructions below.)

- e. The 505th is a paperless court. **All pleadings and/or documents must be filed with the Fort Bend County District Clerk's Office.** Documents may be filed in person or online. Please visit the Fort Bend County District Clerk's website for more information on e-filing. Questions regarding documents, files, filings, service, etc. should be directed to the District Clerk's office at 281-341-4509. **Please do not include the Court or the Court Coordinator on any e-service requests.**
- f. **COURT CLOSURES:** The Court will have days throughout the year when court is not in session. Please consult our online calendar to determine those dates. In cases of Inclement Weather, please refer to the Court's **Inclement Weather Policy** on page 11.
- g. **CASE ASSIGNMENTS:** Per Standing Order of the Court, cases ending in **ODD** numbers will be heard by Presiding Judge Kali Morgan. Cases ending in **EVEN** numbers will be heard by Associate Judge LaTosha McGill Clayton. However, the court reserves the right to reassign cases as necessary.
 - i. Enforcements seeking contempt, protective orders, and motions to revoke community supervision will be heard by the Presiding Judge unless the parties agree on the record to waive their right to appeal the Associate Judge's Ruling.
- h. Appropriate attire is required for all appearances whether in person or on Zoom. No food or gum chewing is allowed in the courtroom or during Zoom proceedings. During in person hearings or trials, water is permitted at counsel table. **No photos or videos are allowed, except in adoption cases. Recording or screenshotting court proceedings is strictly prohibited by Standing Order of the Court.**
- i. **Trial Docket:** The trial docket will be called on Mondays at 9:30 AM **in person**. Cases set on the trial docket may be heard that day (depending on the time announcement) or continued and preferentially set for a future date.
- j. **UNCONTESTED DOCKET:** To request a hearing on an uncontested matter, please send an email to: 505Hearings@fortbendcountytexas.gov. The subject line of the email must include the cause number, the case name, and the type of hearing requested. For example, "24-DCV-00000, Smith, Final Divorce Hearing." The Court Coordinator will respond with available dates.

- i. The party requesting the hearing **must** complete and file the *Uncontested Matters Checklist* (located on the court's website) before the hearing date.
 - ii. If your case is contested (no agreement), you will have to follow the procedures in Sections 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 below.
- k. **AGREED ORDERS**: The court will sign agreed orders without a prove-up hearing when at least one party is represented by counsel. Agreed orders **must** contain signatures of all parties and attorneys. All signatures must be distinctive written signatures or electronic signatures generated by the signing party. **Agreed orders may NOT be signed by permission or by using “/s/ Typed Name.”** If electronic signatures are used, please include the confirmation/verification page. **Prove-up affidavits must be on file or attached to the proposed final order.**
 - i. Agreed Orders must indicate (1) that the parties did not appear in person but agreed to the terms of the order as evidenced by their signatures; and (2) that the making of a record was waived by the Court with consent of the parties.
 - ii. If both parties are pro se, a prove-up hearing is required. Please refer to the *Uncontested Matters Checklist*.
- l. **SUBMISSION DOCKET**: The following contested motions will be heard by submission; if the court believes that an oral hearing is needed, the court will contact the parties with further instructions:
(*Motions may be set concurrently with a hearing for temporary orders*)
 - Motion for Adoption Evaluation
 - Motion for Alternative or Substituted Service
 - Motion for Appointment of Attorney Ad Litem after Publication
 - Motion for Appointment of Amicus (Termination or Adoption suit)
 - Motion to Confer with a Child
 - Motion to Consolidate or Sever
 - Motion for Continuance (see Section 8 below)
 - Motion for Genetic Testing
 - Motion to Enter/Sign Orders
 - Motion for Judgment Nunc Pro Tunc
 - Motion for Mediation (compel/waive)
 - Motion to Reinstate/Retain
 - Motion for Summary Judgment
 - Motion for Withdrawal/Substitution of Counsel

NOTICE OF SUBMISSION HEARING: Notice of the submission hearing **must** be served at least **10** days before the date of the hearing, or more if required by statute or rule. **The notice must state** that (1) the motion will be heard by submission; (2) no party may appear for the hearing in person; and (3) any response to the motion must be on file at least 3 days before the submission date, or longer if required by statute or rule. **Proof of notice must be filed prior to the submission date.** **Responses must be filed at least 3 days before the submission date to be considered.**

- m. **ENTRY SETTINGS:** Entries are on Fridays by submission only. Failure to file a Proposed Order by the entry date may result in the case being dismissed. If more time is needed, please reset your entry setting. Contested entries may be set for hearing and are limited to 15 minutes. The party opposing entry of the Proposed Order **must** file a markup identifying all proposed edits.
- n. **CHILDREN IN COURT:** Children may not be brought into the courtroom without court approval. If the court approves a request for a child to be interviewed in chambers, the child should be brought to the courthouse at the scheduled interview time. Upon arrival, please check in with the Bailiff or Court Coordinator. Do not enter the courtroom.

2. PARENTING CLASSES

- a. Parents and/or conservators in all **contested** cases involving children are required to complete a 4-hour parenting class. The court may order an 8- or 12-hour parenting class if determined necessary. The certificates of completion must be filed with the District Clerk's office before the case is finalized.
- b. **Possession and access may be restricted for any party refusing to participate in the required parenting course.**
- c. The Court recognizes and approves the following **online** courses (in no particular order):

Online Co-Parenting/Divorce

<https://www.onlineparentingprograms.com>

Putting Kids First

<https://puttingkidsfirst.org>

Texas Cooperative Parenting

<https://txparent.com>

Parent Class Online

<https://www.parentclassonline.com>

Co-Parenting into the Future

<https://coparentingintothefuture.com>

Family Affairs

<http://familyaffairs.org>

Kids First

<https://kidsfirsttoday.com>

Parenting Choice

<https://www.parentingchoice.com>

3. MEDIATION

- a. Mediation is required prior to a hearing for temporary orders unless waived by the court. Impasse letters must be on file prior to your hearing.
- b. If a party is being denied possession of the party's child, the court may waive the mediation requirement.
- c. Mediation is required prior to final trial in all cases (except protective orders and contempt actions). Failure to mediate before trial may result in the case being dismissed. Mediation for Temporary Orders does not satisfy this requirement.
- d. Mediation may be waived only after filing a motion and upon a showing of good cause. The motion must be heard at least 10 days prior to the final trial date.
- e. Parties may agree to resolve a case without formal mediation. *Please see the rules governing Agreed Orders above.*
- f. Parties should make a good faith attempt to agree on a mediator. If no agreement can be reached, a motion should be filed with the court and the court will choose a mediator from the wheel.
- g. Income Based Mediation: The Fort Bend County Dispute Resolution Center "DRC" utilizes an income-based fee scale to determine the amount that each party pays for mediation. They may be reached at 281-342-5000.
- h. If parties reach an agreement at mediation and a hearing or trial setting is no longer necessary, please notify the court ASAP so that your setting can be removed from the docket.

4. CONTESTED HEARINGS

- a. Requests for contested hearing dates must be made by sending an email to: 505Hearings@fortbendcountytexas.gov. The subject line of the email must include the cause number, the case name, and the type of setting requested. For example, “22-DCV-00000, Smith, Temporary Orders Hearing”.
- b. In the interest of judicial economy, parties should make all efforts to have competing motions heard at the same time.
- c. **Motions to Modify Temporary Orders** – Absent a true emergency supported by affidavit, the parties will be ordered back to mediation.
- d. **SUPPORT CASES:** If child support or spousal support is an issue, the following documents **must** be exchanged before the hearing: (1) Financial Information Statements (FIS); (2) Income tax returns for the past two years; and (3) Three most recent payroll stubs. A blank FIS can be found on the court’s website. **Please refer to the exhibit rules below if you intend to use these documents as exhibits during your hearing/trial.**
- e. **PROPERTY CASES:** Proposed Property Divisions and Sworn Inventory & Appraisements (from both sides) are required in **all** cases in which property is an issue. For cases involving marital estates with numerous assets/debts, please provide (to the court) an Excel spreadsheet containing the party’s proposed property division. **Please refer to the exhibit rules below if you intend to use these documents as exhibits during your hearing/trial.**
- f. **ENFORCEMENTS:** The party requesting incarceration should bring a proposed Commitment Order to court on the day of the hearing. **Be prepared to edit the order based on the court’s ruling.** The Commitment Order must be signed before the parties leave the courtroom.
- g. **Temporary Restraining Orders:** There are *Standing Temporary Mutual Injunctions* that apply in divorces and suits affecting the parent-child relationship (SAPCR). Ex parte Temporary Restraining Orders should not be filed unless extraordinary relief is requested and is supported by an affidavit.
- h. Notice and proof of notice to the opposing attorney/party shall be pursuant to the Texas Rules of Civil Procedure. Please refer to the court’s **Zoom Hearing Procedures** for a sample Notice of Zoom Hearing. **The Zoom meeting ID and password must be included in the Notice of Hearing/Order to Appear if the matter**

is set for a Zoom hearing.

- i. **Please do not file blank Hearing Notices/Orders to Appear.** The court will not sign them. Please obtain your hearing date prior to filing the Notice/Order.

5. TRIALS

- a. Requests for trial dates must be made in accordance with paragraph 4(a) above.
- b. **Time Limits:** A “full-day” trial is approximately 3 hours per side (6 hours total). A “half-day” trial is approximately 1.5 hours per side (3 hours total).
- c. **Scheduling Orders and Pretrial Conferences** are required for all jury trials and for all bench trials **with a total time estimate that exceeds two days.** The *Scheduling Order* details the many tasks that must be completed at or before the pre-trial conference. The *Scheduling Order* can be found on the court’s website.

6. EXHIBITS - PLEASE READ CAREFULLY - FAILURE TO COMPLY WITH THESE PROCEDURES MAY RESULT IN EXHIBIT EXCLUSION.

- a. Exhibits and Exhibit Lists must be exchanged (submitted to the opposing party) by **12:00 PM THE BUSINESS DAY BEFORE THE HEARING.** The submission or exchange of exhibits after the deadline will not be permitted unless they are rebuttal exhibits and/or the parties have agreed. **This does not apply to cases under an approved Scheduling Order. In those cases, the Scheduling Order will control.* A sample Exhibit List can be found on the court’s website.
- b. Parties must attempt in good faith to confer and obtain agreements regarding exhibit admissibility before appearing in court. Time spent discussing the admissibility of exhibits will be deducted from the total time allotted for the hearing or trial.
- c. **Court Copies:**
 - i. Exhibits for all proceedings **must** be delivered to the court via email to: 505Exhibits@fortbendcountytexas.gov or on a USB Flash Drive as specified below. **Do not email exhibits to the Court Coordinator or to the Court Reporter. Do not file exhibits with the Clerk’s Office.** (Exhibit Lists may be filed).
 - ii. The Courtroom is equipped with technology that will allow exhibits to be

- published (broadcast on the courtroom monitors). You will need to bring a laptop to utilize this technology. Courtroom equipment may be tested prior to a hearing or trial. Please contact the Court Coordinator to make arrangements.
- iii. **File-Sharing Links:** The court does **not** accept exhibits via Dropbox, Google Drive, or any other file-sharing links. Please do not email links.
 - iv. **LESS THAN 50 TOTAL PAGES:** If a party's combined exhibits are **less than 50** total pages, submission by email only is sufficient. However, please be advised that the Court Reporter does not have access to a color printer. Admitted exhibits will be printed and delivered to the District Clerk's office in black and white. If color is important, exhibits must be delivered on a USB Flash Drive as indicated below.
 - v. **MORE THAN 50 TOTAL PAGES:** If a party's combined exhibits **exceed 50** total pages, the exhibits must be delivered to the court on a USB Flash Drive – no exceptions.
 - vi. **AUDIO/VIDEO:** Audio and video files **must** be on a USB Flash Drive – no exceptions.
 - vii. Flash Drives must be clearly labeled with the cause number, party name and hearing date.
 - viii. Flash Drives may be delivered in person or mailed to:

505th District Court
Attn: Melinda Bowers
301 Jackson Street (mailing address)
1422 Eugene Heimann Circle (physical address)
Richmond, TX 77469

Please be mindful of the deadline when delivering by mail.

Please note that delivery on Fridays is by appointment only.

- d. **The only formats accepted are PDF for documents, JPG and PNG for images, and MP4 for audio and videos.**
- e. **Each exhibit must be saved or attached as a separate file** and the file name must include the exhibit number and a brief description of the exhibit. For

example, “*P1 Bank Statements.*” **The actual document or image must also be marked for identification.** (This means you will need to mark it before you scan/save it.)

- f. The party tendering the exhibits is responsible for ensuring that files are saved correctly. Documents and photos should be as clear as possible and scanned upright (not sideways or upside down).
- g. The party tendering the exhibits is responsible for ensuring that witnesses have copies of the exhibits for use during hearings. The Court Reporter will NOT forward or otherwise circulate exhibits. The “share screen” feature may be used during Zoom hearings. The party tendering the exhibits is responsible for screen sharing. Please practice ahead of time if you are not familiar with this feature.

7. ADOPTIONS

- a. Adoptions may be heard in person or via Zoom. A pre-trial conference is required in all adoption cases. The proposed final order and all required documentation must be filed before the pre-trial conference. Failure to file the required documents prior to the pre-trial conference will result in the pretrial conference being reset.

8. CONTINUANCES

- a. For cases pending less than one year, the first continuance will be granted with or without cause by agreement of the parties. Parties must either file an Agreed Motion/Order or appear at the trial setting and announce the agreement.
- b. For cases pending more than one year, a request for continuance requires a written motion (even if it is unopposed or agreed). If the continuance is granted, a new trial date will be set at that time.
- c. The birth or adoption of a child by lead counsel or a party shall create a rebuttable presumption that a 90 day-continuance should be granted upon request.

9. DISMISSALS FOR WANT OF PROSECUTION (DWOP)

- a. Petitioner’s or Movant’s nonappearance at trial will result in DWOP if parties have been properly noticed for trial.

- b. Nonappearance by parties and their counsel at the scheduled pretrial conference will result in DWOP.
- c. A case may DWOP if, on the day of entry of a Final Order, no proposed Final Order has been filed and the entry setting was not reset.
- d. A case may DWOP if it is “Try or Dismiss” and parties are not ready to proceed with trial.

10. DISCOVERY DISPUTES

- a. **Failure to meaningfully confer prior to the hearing will result in your hearing being passed.**
- b. Motion to Quash Deposition: If the motion is based on the unavailability of the lawyer or witness, the party filing the motion to quash must provide at least **3** alternative dates within the body of the motion for the taking of the deposition.

11. COURT APPOINTMENTS

- a. To be eligible for Court Appointments in the 505th, please complete and submit the *Application for Court Appointments* (located on the court’s website). Attorneys seeking appointments **must** attach their State Bar of Texas MCLE Transcript. Mediators **must** attach a certificate of completion of the required mediation training course(s). **A new, updated Application must be received each year to remain on the wheel.**
- b. Parties may agree to an Amicus/Ad litem Attorney, but judicial approval is required. In the absence of agreement, the court will select an Amicus/Ad Litem from the wheel. **The court may deviate from the wheel for good cause.*
- c. The court will appoint an attorney for indigent parents who appear in opposition to **any** suit for termination of parental rights.
- d. **Fee Vouchers**: Vouchers for interim payments should be submitted monthly. Vouchers for final payments should be submitted within 30 days of the final hearing.

- 12. **DOCKET SHEET MONITORING**: Attorneys/Parties are responsible for monitoring the case docket entries for the court’s rulings and instructions. Case records and

docket entries may be viewed online through the Fort Bend County District Clerk's website. <http://tylerpaw.fortbendcountytexas.gov/PublicAccess/default.aspx>

13. INCLEMENT WEATHER POLICY

- a. The 505th District Court will follow the announcement of Fort Bend Independent School District (FBISD).
- b. *If FBISD closes due to inclement weather, the 505th District Court will also close (see "e" below).
- c. **Court Closure:** All cases set on a day that the court is closed due to inclement weather will automatically be reset. Please contact the Court Coordinator for a new date.
- d. **Delayed Start:** If FBISD is on a "delayed start," the 505th will delay start as well. Please contact the Court Coordinator to confirm the time of your hearing. Due to anticipated time constraints, the time allowed for each hearing may be limited. If an attorney or party is unable to appear at the updated start time, a reset may be requested.
- e. *If the school district closure extends over multiple days, the court may give parties the opportunity to have their cases heard via Zoom in lieu of being reset if **all** parties are available and agree. However, no defaults will be taken during inclement weather closures.

14. APPROACHES: The court will allow quick "approaches" via Zoom. Please contact the court to schedule. Opposing counsel/party must be present.

SIGNED ON: January 1, 2025



Kali Morgan, Presiding Judge