



DAVIDSON COUNTY PROBATE COURT: ***WHO WE ARE, WHAT WE DO, AND WHY IT MATTERS***

League of Women Voters

SEPTEMBER 1, 2023

What We Are

Pursuant to Tennessee Code Annotated Section 16-2-506(20)(A)(i), the Seventh Circuit Court of the Twentieth Judicial District (which is just Davidson County) has exclusive jurisdiction for probate, conservatorship, and guardianship matters and is commonly referred to as the probate court. The probate court is one of eight civil circuit courts in Nashville and has circuit and chancery powers. This is different from most counties in which the initial probate proceedings go before a Clerk and Master and any appeals or will contests are certified to the circuit court.

In Davidson County, probate proceedings are first heard in probate court. Certain matters, such as cases involving trusts and legal name changes, may be filed either in probate court or in one of the chancery courts. The judge of the probate court also rotates with the other civil trial judges in presiding over involuntary civil commitment hearings for those persons who are hospitalized and receiving treatment at Middle Tennessee Mental Health Institute.

Who We Are



L-R: Andra Hedrick, Deäanna Alexander, Kitty Lammers, Pat Salthill, Judy Lojek and Elizabeth Johnson

The Judge (*Andra Hedrick*)

ANDRA HEDRICK is a lawyer and the judge of the probate court. Judge Hedrick was elected by the voters of Davidson County in 2022 to succeed Judge Randy Kennedy upon his retirement. She practiced law with the Nashville law firm Gullett, Sanford, Robinson & Martin, PLLC for twenty-two years working exclusively on probate and estate matters. Before entering private practice, she was a law clerk first to Judge Donn Southern of the Shelby County, Tennessee Probate Court and later to Judge David Farmer of the Tennessee Court of Appeals. Judge Hedrick presides over a wide range of contested and uncontested matters in probate court.

The Probate Master (*Elizabeth Johnson*)

ELIZABETH JOHNSON is a lawyer and a master for the probate court. Probate Master Johnson presides over show cause and review hearings, fee disputes and other contested matters as may be referred to her by Judge Hedrick. She sets and adjusts fiduciary bonds and reviews accountings, property management plans, inventories, and estate closing documents before they are sent to Judge Hedrick for final review and approval.

The Special Master (*Judy Lojek*)

JUDY LOJEK is a lawyer and a master for the probate court. Special Master Lojek presides over hearings to admit wills to probate, appoint executors and administrators, to approve the administration of small estates and proceedings for name changes. She also conducts the first setting for exceptions to claims to determine whether the claims need to be specially set for trial. Special Master Lojek presides over the “Rocket Docket,” which is available for the hearing of unopposed petitions to open estates when there are no special complications. She also prepares notes for Judge Hedrick’s reoccurring dockets.

Judicial Assistant (*Kitty Lammers*)

KITTY LAMMERS is a judicial assistant for the probate court. She is the primary contact person for the probate court and can be reached by phone at 615-862-5990 or by e-mail at kittylammers@jnsnashville.gov. She schedules and prepares notes for Judge Hedrick’s specially set hearings, hosts our ZOOM, prepares orders, sets show cause hearings, makes referrals to the Office of Conservatorship Management, and so much more.

Probate Paralegal (*Deänna Alexander*)

DEÄNNA ALEXANDER (a/k/a “Dr. D”, as she holds a doctorate in education) is a paralegal for the probate court. She attends hearings, hosts our ZOOM, keeps notes of the rulings, manages orders, prepares notes for the small estate, claim/exception and fee dockets, and so much more. Although Ms. Lammers is the primary contact for the probate court, many attorneys communicate with Dr. Alexander when procedural assistance is needed. Dr. Alexander can be reached by phone at 615-862-5990 or by e-mail at deannaaalexander@jnsnashville.gov.

Court Security Officer (*Pat Saltkill*)

PAT SALT KILL is a security officer for the probate court. He attends hearings and monitors conduct in the courtroom. He opens and closes court, swears in witnesses before they testify, and assists in the passing of documents among persons in the courtroom. He also directs jurors during jury trials. Mr. Saltkill’s instructions are to be followed to ensure the safety of those in the courtroom.

Our Cases

The probate court is an **incredibly busy court**. In a typical month, anywhere from 150-200 new cases are filed in the probate court. Each of those new cases requires at least one hearing to be conducted by Judge Hedrick or Special Master Lojek. Some cases are uncontested and involve only one hearing. Other cases are complex and/or contested and require multiple (sometimes lengthy) hearings and trials. The administration of an estate, conservatorship or guardianship is an ongoing process that can last many years. The process can involve a fiduciary bond and filing of an inventory, property management plan, periodic accountings and status reports. Probate Master Johnson sets the fiduciary bonds and reviews all inventories, property management plans and accountings. She is authorized to require such additional information and supporting documentation as may be needed in overseeing the financial reporting and bonding for estates, guardianships and conservatorships.

As of August 1, 2023, there were **5268 cases pending** in the probate court, as follows:

Non-Emergency Conservatorship	1687
Emergency Conservatorship / ELHF	118
Guardianship (for minor)	290
Estate Administration (with will)	1890
Estate Administration (without will)	987
Small Estate Administration	102
Muniment of Title Probate	29
Administrator Ad Litem	13
Trust	88
Name Change	19
Birth Certificate Correction	0
Miscellaneous	45

Because of the probate court's extraordinary caseload, other courts do assist in taking some cases which otherwise would be handled in the probate court. Prior to Judge Hedrick taking the bench, a policy was established which allows new emergency conservatorships and emergency limited healthcare fiduciary (ELHF) cases to be filed directly with the Second Circuit Court (Judge Amanda McClendon). In 2023, a case management strategy was put in place under which a portion of the probate court's conservatorships would be transferred to First Circuit Court (Judge David Briley) or Eighth Circuit Court (Judge Lynne Ingram).

Communicating With Us

Physical Location

The Seventh Circuit Court is located in Courtroom 608 on the sixth floor of the Historic Metro Courthouse in downtown Nashville. Courtroom 608 is on the northwest corner of the floor

(exit elevators, turn right, last courtroom on the right). Chambers are located through the double-leather covered doors next to the courtroom. There is a parking garage located under the courthouse, with an entrance on the James Robertson Parkway side of the building. The parking garage is not free, even if you have a hearing or other business in the courthouse.

Mailing Address

Seventh Circuit Court
Historic Courthouse
1 Public Square, Suite 608
Nashville, TN 37201

Ex Parte Communication

Judge Hedrick does not engage in or consider ex parte communications. Letters addressed to Judge Hedrick or her staff will be file-stamped and placed in the case record with a copy sent to all parties if required. Procedural and scheduling questions should be addressed to Ms. Lammers or Dr. Alexander. The probate court staff may not provide legal advice, so do not ask them for legal advice.

Our Schedule

The schedule of the Seventh Circuit Court generally is the following every week, but jury trials, judicial conferences, vacations, and holidays may alter this schedule:

MONDAY

10:00 a.m.	Specially set hearings Room 608 (set by the court)
1:30 p.m.	Specially set hearings Room 608 (set by the court)

TUESDAY

9:00 a.m.	Small Estate Docket Room 608 (set by Circuit Court Clerk)
10:00 a.m.	Specially set hearings Room 608 (set by the court)
1:30 p.m.	Specially set hearings Room 608 (set by the court)

WEDNESDAY

9:00 a.m.	Claim/Exception Docket Room 608 (set by Circuit Court Clerk)
9:00 a.m.	Probate Master Docket Room 510 (set by Probate Master)
10:00 a.m.	Probate Court Docket Room 608 (set by Circuit Court Clerk)
1:30 p.m.	Specially set hearings Room 608 (set by court)

THURSDAY

9:00 a.m.	Probate Rocket Docket Room 608 (set by Probate Court Clerk)
10:00 a.m.	Probate Court Docket Room 608 (set by Circuit Court Clerk)
1:30 p.m.	Specially set hearings Room 608 (set by court)

FRIDAY

10:00 a.m.	Motion Docket Room 608 (set by Circuit Court Clerk)
1:30 p.m.	Specially set hearings Room 608 (set by court)

We start hearings on time.

ZOOM

We have ZOOM available, which attorneys and non-attorneys are welcomed to use unless specifically ordered to appear in person. Use common sense and good judgment with respect to appearances by ZOOM, making sure you are in a quiet place with a strong audio/video connection. Err on the side of appearing in person for contested matters. When appearing by ZOOM, it helps to use headphones or earbuds. If you do not use these items, then sit close to your audio input source and stay very still (moving your head back and forth makes the audio cut out). Our ZOOM codes, for Room 510 and Room 608, are located on the Circuit Court Clerk's website: <https://circuitclerk.nashville.gov/probate-dockets/>.

Interpreter Services

If you have an upcoming hearing and there is a need for foreign language or sign language interpretation, please complete an online request for an interpreter; <https://trialcourts.nashville.gov/interpreter/>. Noemi Camejo is the Trial Court Interpreter Coordinator, and can be contacted by phone at 615-852-5939 or by e-mail at NoemiCamejo@jnsnashville.gov.

Lactation Room

There is a lactation room located in the Historic Metro Courthouse. If you have a need to use this room, please contact Trial Court Administrator Bart Pickett (615-880-2558 or bartpickett@jnsnashville.gov) or Deputy Administrator Tammy Hawkins (615-880-3595 or TammyHawkins@jis.nashville.org).

ADA Requests

If you have an ADA request, contact Trey Collier (615-880-3309 or treycollier@jnsnashville.gov), who serves as the ADA Coordinator for the Circuit Court Clerk's Office.