



Judge Pacheco's Guide for Self-Represented Parties

(Last modified 11/7/2025)

Hon. Javier A. Pacheco, County Court Judge
Lee County Court, Civil Division
Twentieth Judicial Circuit of Florida
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Contact Information

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A. Communications with the Judicial Office

- **E-Filing and Email are the Required Method of Communication in Most Instances**
 - E-filing is the fastest, most convenient and most reliable method for ensuring that your documents make it into the Court file.
 - You do NOT have to be an attorney to use e-filing, and there is no charge to set up an account or file documents (though the

standard filing fees apply for filing new lawsuits, just as they do when you file in-person at the Clerk's Office).

- This video will show you how to set up your own account as a self-represented litigant:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I6gB9xGQL-0>
- An added benefit of e-filing is that you will receive instantaneous copies of everyone else's filings via email, keeping you informed on your case at all times, even if you change your physical address.
- All self-represented parties should include a valid email address on all court filings, and should further check to ensure that court documents are not ending up in spam or junk folders. Many rights in County Court are highly time-sensitive, and if you do not promptly receive our communications, you may lose your opportunity to protect those rights.
- All motions and correspondence should make clear that copies of same have been sent to all other parties. Insufficient specifics as to the delivery of your document to all parties may result in your motion being delayed while you re-send it with proper notations as to service.

- **Method of Communication with Judicial Office.**

- **Judicial Email:** All communications to the judicial office must be submitted by email to msouza@ca.cjis20.org. The subject line of any email to the judicial office must contain the case number, case name, and relevant matter (e.g., 2024 CC 001234 – Doe v. Doe – 2-Hour Hearing Requested).
All parties must be copied on any email directed to the judicial office.
- Any email sent to or from the judicial office may be a public record subject to disclosure.
- **Telephone:** Self-represented litigants may communicate with the judicial office by telephone: (239) 533-9157. The judicial office does not accept text messages. Calls to the judicial office must be limited to notifying the Court of a filing, a hearing cancellation, settlement, or other time-sensitive matters. For questions about how to file documents, please contact the Clerk of Courts.

NEITHER THE JUDGE NOR THE JUDICIAL ASSISTANT IS PERMITTED TO PROVIDE LEGAL ADVICE OR DISCUSS SPECIFIC CASE INFORMATION.

- **Unilateral Communications:**

- To ensure fairness, all communications must be open and in the presence of all parties, with few exceptions. Judges are prohibited

from initiating, permitting, or considering unilateral communications and from considering other communications outside the presence of the parties concerning a pending or impending proceeding, unless authorized by law. *Again, all parties must be copied on any email directed to the judicial office, unless a unilateral communication is authorized by law.*

- **When will you hear back?**

- We try to respond to all questions within one business day. If we are unable to respond within one business day, we will let you know when to expect a response and alternate contact for immediate assistance.

B. Scheduling Procedures

- **Hearings Scheduled by Court**

- The Court will unilaterally select the date and schedule for hearings in landlord-tenant cases, unlawful detainer cases, small claims cases, actions to determine title to vehicles, and actions advanced on the Court's calendar or governed by summary procedure under Section 51.011, Florida Statutes.
- The Court will unilaterally select the date and schedule for hearing any motions that are pending for over 30 days.
- Hearings scheduled by the Court may be rescheduled or continued *only* upon the filing of a "Joint Request to Reschedule Hearing" executed by all parties selecting a new hearing date agreed upon by all parties. Immediately upon filing a "Joint Request to Reschedule Hearing," please email the judicial assistant at msouza@ca.cjis20.org so that the Court can consider the request.

C. Remote Appearance / Zoom Hearings

- **Remote Appearance / Zoom Hearings, Generally:**

- This Court is generally willing to permit persons to appear for Court virtually, by videoconference. The Court uses a Zoom platform to conduct virtual hearings. There is no charge to use Zoom for a court appearance, nor do you need to set up an account.
- Hearings to be scheduled via Zoom: All non-evidentiary hearings scheduled for 30 minutes or less shall be via Zoom unless there is good cause to require such a hearing to be in person.
- Hearings that **must** be in person: unless the Court permits otherwise, the following categories of hearings shall be in person:

- Jury Trials
 - Non-jury trials scheduled for longer than 1 hour.
 - Evidentiary hearings scheduled for longer than 1 hour.
 - Small claims trials and evidentiary hearings involving self-represented individuals scheduled for longer than 15 minutes.
- Hearings not identified above may be scheduled in person or via Zoom as agreed by the parties.
- Objecting to Zoom or In-Person proceedings: You may file an objection in writing to the form of the hearing within 10 days of receiving the notice of hearing. The objection must state whether the other parties agree with the objection. When filing the objection, you must deliver a courtesy copy to the judicial assistant by email at msouza@ca.cjis20.org. The decision to authorize the use of Zoom over objection is ultimately at the discretion of the Court. Failing to timely object waives the objections.
- No hybrid hearings: The Court prefers not to hold hearings in which some parties appear remotely and some appear in person. Hybrid hearings will only be allowed with prior Court approval.
- **Requirements for Attendance via Zoom:**
 - **The Court may continue any hearing at which a party does not comply with these procedures. If parties have continued difficulty complying with these procedures, the Court may require that all hearings in that action be in person.**
 - Proper Location of Participants: Please be in an area with either good cell reception or strong Wi-Fi. Any person appearing remotely must be in a private location that is quiet and free from distractions. Under no circumstances will a participant be permitted to appear remotely from a moving vehicle.
 - Proper Dress and Appearance: Any person appearing remotely must dress and behave professionally in the same manner as if physically present in the courtroom.
 - Camera must be on: Any person appearing remotely must enable the person's camera when joining the proceeding and keep the camera turned on until instructed otherwise by the court. If you only appear by phone, you may not be able to testify, because you must be seen in order to be sworn in.
 - Mute yourselves / no outside noise: Any person appearing remotely must mute the person's microphone when joining the proceeding and keep the microphone turned off until instructed otherwise by the court.

- Please test equipment: If a witness appears remotely, the party calling the witness must ensure the witness has a functioning camera and microphone and has tested the internet connection before the hearing. The oath will be administered in accordance with Rule 2.530.
- Name display: If possible, participants should display their full name (and not just a first name, nickname, or phone number) and any party they represent, if applicable. Self-represented parties should add “pro se” after their name.
- Identify persons present: At the commencement of a remote proceeding, the Court will request that each participant identify themselves. All persons physically in the room or viewing or hearing the proceedings must be identified, even if that person is off-camera. If another person enters the room with a participant during the proceeding, that participant should notify the other participants and identify the person at that time.
- Break out room: Upon request, the Court may place the parties in a break out room to discuss settlement or the resolution of the issues before the Court.
- Screen sharing: Upon request, the Court may allow participants to share case law, documents, photos, or other materials via the screen-sharing mechanism, provided that the materials have been previously disclosed or filed in accordance with the Court’s procedures.
- Recording is not permitted except by a certified court reporter.
- Interpreters: The Court does not provide interpreters for civil matters. Parties are required to provide their own interpreter if needed. If a party attends a hearing and does not understand English or cannot communicate, the hearing will be continued until the party obtains an interpreter.

D. Emergency and Other Urgent Matters

- **Requirements:**

- If a party believes there is a factual basis for setting an emergency hearing, a detailed motion setting forth the following must be filed: (1) the issues to be resolved, (2) reasons why an emergency hearing is necessary, and (3) the amount of time needed for each party’s presentation.

- **Scheduling:**

- If the court determines that an emergency exists, a hearing will be scheduled unilaterally by the court. All parties shall make themselves available for the emergency hearing, barring exigent circumstances.

E. Evidence and Exhibits

- **Evidence Notes for Self-represented Parties**

- Just because you have filed something in the Court File does NOT mean it is in evidence, OR that it is even admissible (meaning, able to be considered by the Judge for your case).
- Evidence in Florida is governed by the Florida Evidence Code, which can be found at Chapter 90, Florida Statutes. The Florida Evidence Code applies in all court proceedings, including Small Claims.
- Hearsay: Hearsay is generally defined as: any out-of-court statement, made by a person, that is offered in court for the purpose of proving the truth of the matter asserted. A common example would be: the car mechanic estimated that it would cost \$700.00 to fix the damaged car. When offered for the purposes of getting \$700.00 awarded in a lawsuit against the other party in the car accident, this would NOT be admissible. Instead, the mechanic would have to appear at the hearing, and offer live testimony and be subject to questioning (called cross-examination) by the other party. There are several exceptions to this rule, and they are all set forth in the Evidence Code. Again, this applies equally in Small Claims Court.
- Evidence in Zoom Hearings:
 - If you or your witness plan to testify, you will need to appear by video and not just call in by phone via Zoom. The Judge has to be able to see you in order to swear you in so that you can testify. IF YOU APPEAR MERELY BY PHONE, YOU MAY NOT BE ABLE TO TESTIFY.
 - If your hearing is being conducted via Zoom, and you wish to present evidence, you will need to file the evidence (generally photographs, documents and the like) with the Court at least five business days before your hearing, OR deliver an identical copy to each other party in the case and to the Court at least five business days before the hearing.

- **Submission Method:**

- Exhibits should be submitted electronically via the Florida Courts E-Filing Portal <https://www.myflcourtaccess.com/>

- **Document Procedures:**

- If hard copy documents are brought to the Court, bring sufficient copies of each exhibit for the clerk, the court, and each party to review during the hearing or trial.

F. Forms and Links

- **General Forms:**

- County Court, Civil Division forms (including all Eviction forms, Small Claims forms, and Civil Traffic forms) are available for download at: <https://www.leeclerk.org/services/forms-library>
- Lee County Civil Pre Trial Conference / Trial Order: https://www.ca.cjis20.org/pdf/LeeCountyUniformPT_New1.doc

- **Resources for Self-represented Litigants:**

- [You must click "Enable Editing" in the yellow banner when opening a document. Not doing so will lock the document.]
- Instructions for Party not Represented by an Attorney: <https://www.ca.cjis20.org/pdf/Lee/Instructionsforpartynotrepbyatty.docx>
- Designation of Email Address: <https://www.ca.cjis20.org/pdf/Lee/DesignationofEmailAddre.pdf>
- Notice of Change of Mailing Address or Designated Email Address: <https://www.ca.cjis20.org/pdf/Lee/NoticeofChangeofAddres.pdf>
- Request to be Excused from Email Service: <https://www.ca.cjis20.org/pdf/Lee/RequesttobeExcused.pdf>

- **Links:**

- **Rules of Professionalism.** The Twentieth Judicial Circuit has adopted Administrative Order 2.20, which sets forth standards of professional courtesy and conduct for all counsel practicing within the Circuit and self-represented litigants. The Court requires that all parties familiarize themselves and comply with Administrative Order 2.20. Administrative Order 2.20 may be viewed on the Court's website at: http://www.ca.cjis20.org/web/main/ao_admin.asp.
- **Administrative Order No. 1.13** (filed 2/17/2025), Twentieth Judicial Circuit, Implementing Civil Case Management Plan and Requirements: https://www.ca.cjis20.org/pdf/ao/ao_1_13.pdf
- Florida E-Filing Portal: <https://www.myflcourtaccess.com/authority/>
- JACS: <https://www.ca.cjis20.org/Services/jacs.aspx>
- Law Library: <https://www.ca.cjis20.org/Services/Law-Library/>

- Pro Bono Legal Services:
<https://www.ca.cjis20.org/Services/probono.aspx>
- Lee County Legal Aid: <https://www.leecountylegalaid.org/>
- Florida Rural Legal Services: <https://www.frls.org/>
- Requests for use of Audio/Visual Equipment for hearings and trials: <https://www.ca.cjis20.org/Forms/avrequest.aspx>
- Mediation/Arbitration/ADR:
<https://www.ca.cjis20.org/Programs/Alternative-Dispute-Resolution/>
- Residential Landlord Tenant Statute (Ch. 83.40, et seq.):
https://www.leg.state.fl.us/statutes/index.cfm?App_mode=Display_Statute&Search_String=&URL=0000-0099/0083/0083PARTIIContentsIndex.html
- Unlawful Detainer Statute (Ch. 82):
https://www.leg.state.fl.us/statutes/index.cfm?App_mode=Display_Statute&URL=0000-0099/0082/0082ContentsIndex.html&StatuteYear=2025&Title=%2D%3E2025%2D%3EChapter%2082
- Mobile Home Park Statute (Ch. 723):
https://www.leg.state.fl.us/statutes/index.cfm?App_mode=Display_Statute&URL=0700-0799/0723/0723ContentsIndex.html&StatuteYear=2025&Title=%2D%3E2025%2D%3EChapter%20723
- Transient Public Lodging Statute (Ch. 509):
https://www.leg.state.fl.us/statutes/index.cfm?App_mode=Display_Statute&Search_String=&URL=0500-0599/0509/0509PARTIContentsIndex.html
- Florida Small Claim Rules: https://www-media.floridabar.org/uploads/2025/09/2024_07-JAN-Small-Claims-Rules-1-24-2025.pdf
- Florida Traffic Rules: https://www-media.floridabar.org/uploads/2025/09/2026_03-SEPT-Traffic-Court-Rules-9-11-2025.pdf
- Florida Rules of Procedure:
<https://www.floridabar.org/rules/ctproc/>
- Florida Bar, Regulation of Lawyer Conduct Information:
<https://www.floridabar.org/rules/conduct/>
- Florida Bar, Legal and Judicial Volunteer Opportunities:
<https://www.floridabar.org/public/consumer/nonlawyer-service/>

G. Procedures / Language / ADA

- These procedures are intended to help with the timely, fair, and effective resolution of civil cases while ensuring the efficient use of court resources. These procedures do not replace or overrule any existing rule, statute, or law. Neither these procedures nor any Administrative or Case Management Order of this Court shall be construed as granting any rights not already provided for by rule, statute, or law. To the extent that any provision of these procedures may be construed as being in conflict with any rule, statute, or law, the rule, statute, or law shall prevail.
- **Language:**
 - Court proceedings are in English. If an interpreter is needed the person needing an interpreter will be responsible for securing an interpreter and all costs associated with hiring an interpreter. More information can be found at: Interpreter Services.
<https://www.ca.cjis20.org/Services/interpreters.aspx>
 - En Español: Si una persona requiere un intérprete, la persona que necesita un intérprete será responsable de obtener un intérprete, y será responsable por todos los costos asociados con contratar a un intérprete.
https://www.ca.cjis20.org/Services/interpreters_esp.aspx
 - En Français: Si un interprète est nécessaire, la personne ayant besoin d'un interprète sera responsable de la sécurisation d'un interprète et tous les coûts associés à l'embauche d'un interprète.
https://www.ca.cjis20.org/Services/interpreters_krl.aspx
- **ADA Accommodations:**
 - If you are a person with a disability who needs any accommodation in order to participate in a court proceeding, you are entitled, at no cost to you, to the provision of certain assistance. Please contact Brooke Dean, Operations Division Manager for the 20th Judicial Circuit whose office is located at the Lee County Justice Center, 1700 Monroe St., Fort Myers, FL 33901, and whose telephone number is (239) 533-1771, at least 7 days before your scheduled court appearance, or immediately upon receiving this notification if the time before the scheduled appearance is less than 7 days; if you are hearing or voice impaired, call 711.
 - For complete ADA information, please visit:
<https://www.ca.cjis20.org/Services/ADA/>.