

RULE 16. SETTLEMENT CONFERENCES IN CIVIL APPEALS

(a) Assignment of Case to Settlement Conference Program. Any civil appeal in which all parties are represented by counsel and that does not involve termination of parental rights may be assigned to the settlement conference program. The settlement conference program administrator shall determine whether to assign an appeal to the settlement conference program. The settlement conference shall be presided over by a qualified mediator who has been appointed as a settlement judge by the Supreme Court.

(1) Settlement Notice; Suspension of Rules. The clerk shall issue a settlement notice informing the parties that the appeal will be assigned to the settlement conference program. The settlement notice automatically stays the time for filing a request for transcripts under Rule 9 and for filing briefs under Rule 31. The notice also stays the preparation and filing of any transcripts requested under Rule 9.

(2) Assignment Notice. The clerk of the Supreme Court shall issue an assignment notice informing the parties that a case has been assigned to the settlement conference program and of the name of the settlement judge.

(3) Service. Papers or documents filed with the Supreme Court while a case is in the settlement program shall be served on all parties and the settlement judge.

(b) Early Case Assessment. The settlement judge shall conduct a pre-mediation telephone conference with counsel and file an Early Case Assessment Report within 30 days of assignment. In that report, the settlement judge shall inform the court whether the case is appropriate for the program or should be removed from the program. If the settlement judge reports that the case is not appropriate for the settlement conference program, the court may remove the case from the program and reinstate the timelines for requesting transcripts under Rule 9 and briefing under Rule 31.

(c) Scheduling of Settlement Conference. Unless the Supreme Court removes the case from the settlement conference program under Rule 16(b), the settlement judge shall schedule a settlement conference within 90 days of assignment. If the case involves child custody, visitation, relocation or guardianship issues, the conference shall be scheduled within 60 days of assignment.

(d) Settlement Statement. Each party to the appeal shall submit a settlement statement directly to the settlement judge within 15 days from the date of the clerk's assignment notice. A settlement statement shall not be filed with the Supreme Court and shall not be served on opposing counsel.

A settlement statement is limited to 10 pages, and shall concisely state: (1) the relevant facts; (2) the issues on appeal; (3) the argument supporting the party's position on appeal; (4) the weakest points of the party's position on appeal; (5) a settlement proposal that the party believes would be fair or would be willing to make in order to conclude the matter; and (6) all matters which, in counsel's professional opinion, may assist the settlement judge in conducting the settlement conference. Form 10 in the Appendix of Forms is a suggested form of a settlement statement.

(e) Settlement Conference. The settlement conference shall be held at a time and place designated by the settlement judge.

(1) Attendance. Counsel for all parties and their clients must attend the conference. The settlement judge may, for good cause shown, excuse a client's attendance at the conference, provided that counsel has written authorization to resolve the case fully or has immediate telephone access to the client.

(2) Agenda. The agenda for the settlement conference and the sequence of presentation shall be at the discretion of the settlement judge. A subsequent settlement conference may be conducted by agreement of the parties or at the direction of the settlement judge.

(3) Settlement Conference Status Reports. Within 10 days from the date of any settlement conference, the settlement judge shall file a settlement conference status report. The report must state the result of the settlement conference, but shall not disclose any matters discussed at the conference.

(4) Settlement Documents. If a settlement is reached, the parties shall immediately execute a settlement agreement and a stipulation to dismiss the appeal, and shall file the stipulation to dismiss with the clerk of the Supreme Court. The settlement agreement does not need to be filed with the Supreme Court.

(f) Length of Time in Settlement Conference Program.

(1) Time Limits. Within 180 days of assignment, the settlement judge must file a final settlement conference status report indicating whether the parties were able to agree to a settlement. For cases involving child custody, visitation, relocation or guardianship issues, a final settlement conference status report must be filed within 120 days of assignment.

(2) Extensions. Upon stipulation of all parties or upon the settlement judge's recommendation, the settlement program administrator may extend the time for filing a final settlement conference status report. In cases not involving child custody, visitation, relocation or guardianship issues, the time may be extended for an additional 90 days. In cases involving child custody, visitation, relocation or guardianship issues, the time may be extended for an additional 60 days.

(3) Reinstatement of Rules. At the discretion of the settlement program administrator, the timelines for requesting transcripts under Rule 9 and filing briefs under Rule 31 may be reinstated during any extension period granted under Rule 16(f)(2).

(g) Sanctions. The failure of a party, or the party's counsel, to participate in good faith in the settlement conference process by not attending a scheduled conference or not complying with the procedural requirements of the program may be grounds for sanctions against the party, the party's counsel, or both. If a settlement judge believes sanctions are appropriate, the settlement judge may file a settlement conference status report recommending the sanction to be imposed and describing the conduct warranting that sanction. Sanctions include, but are not limited to, payment of attorney's fees and costs of the opposing party, dismissal of the appeal, or reversal of the judgment below.

(h) Confidentiality. Papers or documents prepared by counsel or a settlement judge in furtherance of a settlement conference, excluding the settlement conference status report, shall not be available for public inspection or submitted to or considered by the Supreme Court. Matters discussed at the settlement conference and papers or documents prepared under this rule shall not be admissible in evidence in any judicial proceeding and shall not be subject to discovery.

[Added; effective February 26, 1997; as amended, effective April 18, 2006.]