

THE SKETCHLEY LAW FIRM, P. A.

Providing Compassionate Support & Guidance Through Elder Law & Guardianship

BASIC COURT CONDUCT

March 2008

When dealing with the Court and its complex rules and procedures, individuals unfamiliar with basic court conduct and decorum may inadvertently be guilty of committing gaffes.

Contact the Clerk of Courts First

Most people think contacting the Court will result in speaking directly to a Judge. Judges can only be spoken to in a hearing.

The first point of contact in most cases is the Clerk of Courts. The Clerk is responsible for the court file, its storage and the filing of all pleadings and papers. The clerk can assist with questions regarding what has been filed, who filed something, how and where to file things and how to get copies of documents.

When speaking with the Clerk, be sure to have the case information available. The Clerk must have case numbers and party names to access information. Due to privacy laws, the Clerk may be unable to provide some information over the phone and may require you to visit the Clerk's office to obtain what is requested.

The Clerk can provide filing requirements, fees, general Court schedules and deadlines, and information regarding special accommodations for disabled individuals. However, the Clerk is absolutely prohibited from giving legal advice. Only an attorney can give you legal advice in Florida.

Judicial Assistants

A Judge's assistant is known as a Judicial Assistant or "JA". A Judicial Assistant works directly for Judge and

manages the Judge's calendar and docket, assists in preparing for hearings and trial, and performs other essential tasks in administration of the Judge's caseload.

If you have a question about a Judge's schedule, a hearing date or time, or an issue requiring the Judge's direct attention, contact the Judicial Assistant.

Conduct at Hearings and Trials

When appearing in Court, professional and respectful behavior is required. Disparaging remarks or gestures and bad attitudes are inappropriate and may hurt the case.

Most Court's have dress codes requiring participants to dress appropriately. While attorneys generally wear suits, other participants are not required to do so. Men should wear khaki or dress pants, with a button-up shirt, dress shoes and a belt. Women should wear a skirt (of knee-length or longer) or dress pants with a nice sweater or dress shirt and dress shoes. Never wear anything oversized or t-shirts, mini-skirts flip-flops, shorts, tank-tops, jeans or athletic-wear.

When addressing a Judge, refer to him or her as "Your Honor." When referring to other parties in the matter, use proper prefixes such as Mr., Mrs. and Ms., followed by their last name. Refrain from addressing or referring to anyone by their first name, even if they may be personal friends outside the courtroom.

If you would like to arrange for one of our attorneys to speak to your group or organization about this topic, please contact Tracy Rouse at (850) 894-0152. Past newsletters can be found at www.sketchleylaw.com.



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