

United States Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit

ORDER

General Order Governing the Circuit Mediation Program
Effective September 24, 2024

Pursuant to Federal Rule of Appellate Procedure 33, it is hereby ORDERED that, in matters selected for participation in the court's circuit mediation program, or referred to the program by the court, proceedings shall be conducted in accordance with the provisions of this General Order.

1. The principal purpose of the program is to explore the possibility of settlement and to facilitate settlement discussions. Participation in the program may also entail consideration of simplification, clarification, and reduction of issues, and any other matters relating to the efficient management and disposition of the appeal.

2. Counsel will be notified by electronic mail of the date and time scheduled for the initial conference. Conferences may be conducted by telephone, video conference, or in person at the option of the circuit mediator, or upon request of all parties. Conferences will be scheduled and adjourned at the circuit mediator's discretion, with due regard for the availability and convenience of counsel.

3. Counsel's participation is required at any scheduled conference. The circuit mediator may also require attendance by the parties, appropriate corporate representatives of the parties, or representatives of insurers providing a defense. After a case has been assigned to the program, any party

may submit to the circuit mediator a request not to participate in or to terminate settlement discussions. In cases selected for the program by the circuit mediator, such a request will be honored, and any further proceedings will be restricted to the other purposes of the program. In cases referred to the program by the court, the request will be submitted to the court, and proceedings will be held in abeyance pending further directions from the court.

4. The circuit mediator may require counsel to provide pertinent written information or materials, including position statements, lists of issues, outlines of arguments or other documents that the circuit mediator believes may be helpful in accomplishing the purposes of conferences under Rule 33.

5. Counsel should not send the Clerk of Court copies of materials or documents requested by the circuit mediator or otherwise prepared specifically for the program. Documents created for the program and furnished to the circuit mediator will not be included in the court's file.

6. The time allowed for filing of briefs will not be tolled automatically by proceedings pursuant to this order. The circuit mediator may extend the briefing deadline if the extension is unopposed and such extension would aid in the settlement process.

7. All statements made by the parties or their counsel in the course of proceedings pursuant to this order, and all documents specifically prepared for use in such proceedings, shall be without prejudice, and, apart from any settlement agreement reached, shall not be binding on the parties. Such statements and documents shall not be quoted, cited, referred to or otherwise used by the parties or their counsel in the course of the appeal or in any other proceeding, except as they may be admissible in a proceeding to enforce a settlement agreement. Such statements and documents shall be privileged

from discovery by the parties except in such a proceeding. Disclosure of statements or documents in violation of this order may result in the release of the case from the program, and other appropriate action, including referral to the court for consideration of discipline, sanctions, or other remedial measures.

8. Confidentiality is required with respect to all settlement discussions conducted under program auspices. Information concerning such discussions shall neither be made known to the court nor voluntarily disclosed in any other proceeding or to anyone not involved in circuit mediation proceedings (or entitled to be kept informed of such proceedings) by the circuit mediator, the parties, or their counsel, except insofar as such information may be admissible in a proceeding to enforce a settlement agreement and except as provided below. Disclosure of confidential information in violation of this order may result in the release of the case from the program, and other appropriate action, including referral to the court for consideration of discipline, sanctions, or other remedial measures. To the extent that the matter is referred to the court as a result of a violation under either this or the preceding paragraph, this order authorizes disclosure by the circuit mediator to the court of the facts regarding the breach of confidentiality.

9. Information about the assignment of particular cases to the program shall not be made public either by the staff of the program or by the Clerk. For good cause (and in the absence of an explicit agreement to the contrary) the fact that a case has been assigned to the program may be disclosed by any party as long as substantive information about settlement discussions is not revealed, and the disclosure is not purposely used in an effort to gain an advantage over another party. Any such improper disclosure will result in the release of the case from the program. The identity of cases assigned to the program may in any event be provided to the court in

statistical reports, in response to inquiries, and in connection with recommendations about procedural orders.

10. Once all briefs have been filed, or when a motion is under submission to the court, the circuit mediator may report to the court whether active settlement discussions are under way in order to assist the court in scheduling. Such reports may include information about the likelihood and timing of settlement, but information about the parties' respective positions or other substantive aspects of settlement discussions will not be revealed to the court except upon the joint request of all parties.

11. The confidentiality provisions of this order shall extend to discussions occurring in the course of preliminary contacts between the circuit mediator and counsel about the possibility of settlement, whether or not the case is eventually assigned to the program. These provisions shall also be binding on non-parties (such as insurers or parties to related disputes) who accept invitations to participate in mediation program proceedings. For the purposes of this order, these participants shall be treated as parties, and participation in settlement discussions under the auspices of the program shall be deemed to constitute an agreement to be bound by the confidentiality provisions of this order.

12. Counsel for each party shall be responsible for providing a copy of this order to all persons participating in mediation program proceedings on behalf of that party. In addition, before disclosing any information about settlement discussions conducted under program auspices to any other person whose position or relationship with a party requires such disclosure, counsel shall provide such person with a copy of this order and obtain such person's agreement to be bound as a party would be bound by its provisions requiring confidentiality.

13. If a party is subject to obligations of disclosure to the public or to persons from whom such agreement cannot be obtained, counsel shall inform the circuit mediator and counsel for the other party or parties. Settlement discussions may then be conducted under program auspices only if all parties agree to proceed. This order is not intended of its own force to prevent disclosure required under applicable law, but parties subject to such requirements must make every effort to maintain, to the extent permitted by such provisions of law, the confidentiality of such settlement discussions.

16. The confidentiality of any settlement agreement will be governed by the terms of that agreement and the law otherwise applicable thereto.

17. This General Order supersedes the prior General Order issued July 6, 2023, which shall nevertheless continue to be effective for cases assigned to the program before the date hereof.

Dated this 24th day of September, 2024.



PRISCILLA RICHMAN
Chief United States Circuit Judge



A True Copy
Certified order issued Sep 24, 2024


Clerk, U.S. Court of Appeals, Fifth Circuit