

New Year, New Us

After a long month observing “Dry Newsletter January,” we are so back! And we’ve been busy planning for 2026. The Fourth Circuit Court has big goals for this year and we are excited to take what we learned in 2025 to better serve families and the Bar in Davidson County. The following is a list of the visions we are actualizing this year:

 **Triage of Cases:** We are working on a system to identify levels of conflict in cases so we may intervene, monitor, and involve additional resources in higher conflict cases early in the court process.

 **Virtual adoptions are on the table** (in accordance with TN Rule of Civil Procedure 43.01).

 **Surrenders by Zoom:** Surrenders may be conducted via Zoom in accordance with T.C.A. § 36-1-111(b)(1).

 **Domestic Bar Inn of Court:** We are laying the foundation to aid in the establishment of a Domestic Bar Inn of Court.

 **Podcast:** The legal and mental health collaboration continues. Look out for a podcast on navigating divorce from a legal, medical, psychological, and trauma-informed perspective.

 **Specialty Courts:** We will begin exploring the idea of a Specialty Court to provide support and resources to our families in transition.

 **Honoring Judge Kweller:** We are excited to honor and celebrate the legacy of the late Judge Stanley A. Kweller with his portrait unveiling later this year.

 **Back by popular demand – these events are returning:**

- Law Day for New Attorneys (May)
- Collaboration between Legal and Mental Health Providers (Fall)
- Adoption Week and Home for the Holidays (November)
- End of Year CLE (December)

Thank you for such incredible support—we are excited for a new year of expansion and improvement.

In This Issue:

Black History Month	2
Groundhog Day	3
JSC Video	3
ID Settings	3
Chamber Rules	4
Calendar	5
Motion Reminder	5

Black History Month: Did You Know?



February is Black History Month, a time to celebrate the historic accomplishments of African Americans and their contributions to our country and honor those who fought and continue to fight for equality. Black History Month was established in 1976, making 2026 the 50th anniversary of its observance! To celebrate this milestone, see how many black history related fun facts listed below you know:

- 1 Black History Month was adapted from “Negro History Week” which was launched in what year?
- 2 Who was the first African American woman to serve as a judge in the United States? *Hint: She is a distant relative of Judge Williams!*
- 3 What is the oldest institution of higher learning in Nashville?
- 4 What was the first southern city to desegregate public facilities?
- 5 Who was the first – and only – African American to serve as Chief Justice of the Tennessee Supreme Court?

Answers:

1. 1926. Not only is 2026 the 50th anniversary of Black History Month, it is the 100th anniversary of Negro History Week.
2. Judge Jane Bollin. And like Judge Williams, she served in domestic relations court! She was also the first African American woman to graduate from Yale Law School and to join the New York Bar Association.
3. Fisk University. The school, a historically Black College and University (HBCU), was established in 1866 to provide education to newly freed enslaved people. The school is known for many things now, including the Fisk Jubilee Singers who were the first collegiate music group to win a Grammy. Fun fact: Judge Williams attended Fisk University!
4. Nashville! Our city began desegregating public facilities starting on May 10, 1960.
5. Justice Adolfo A. Birch, Jr., the namesake of the Birch building across the street.



Groundhog Day

Punxsutawney Phil doesn't just predict winter; this year, his shadow controls the fate of our Friday Motion Docket. *That is, whether motions will be put on timers **this Friday only, February 6th**.*

Should the Groundhog see his shadow on Monday and subsequently predict six more weeks of winter, we will offer some solace: no timers for any motions on Friday's Motion Docket!

However, if the Groundhog stays out, pointing to an early spring, timers will be utilized in their typical fashion on the 6th. We will post on socials to let you know the verdict.

May the odds be ever in your favor!

JSCs with Special Master Menke

You may not have asked, but we know the true desires of your hearts: another video explaining the processes of the Fourth Circuit Court. Featuring our very own Special Master Kristen Menke, this volume explains what to expect from a Judicial Settlement Conference. Some of the questions the video addresses are:

- 1 Why do these take place?
- 2 Who needs to attend?
- 3 How do I prepare?
- 4 How long will this take?



View the video by clicking the following link: [JSC Video](#) or scanning the QR code above.

Getting ID Dates Just Got 11 Days Earlier

This time you've asked, and we're delivering. Previously, the Court's practice for scheduling Irreconcilable Differences (ID) divorces required the statutory 60- or 90-day period to have already elapsed before a date would be given and an Order to Set filed.

Now, however, dates may be approved and Orders to Set filed before the statutory period has elapsed, so long as the final hearing date falls after such time.

You may obtain final hearing dates by calling our office at (615) 862-5910 or by using our online calendar and request form which can be accessed through [this link](#) or by scanning the QR code:



Introducing the Case Dismissal Docket

Over the course of 2025, with the help of attorneys and litigants, and by conducting routine Status Conference Dockets, Fourth Circuit's pending case load was reduced from 2,776 cases at the beginning of the year to 1,156 cases at the end of year, a reduction of nearly 60% of our pending cases. Many of the cases had been dormant for some time, needed an extra nudge to get them closed out, or simply lacked the entry of a final order closing the case. Thank you to all attorneys and litigants who helped in this process and made it such a success.

We are committed to proactively managing our cases and assisting litigants and the bar in resolving their cases in a timely manner. Judge Philip E. Smith often said, "The only thing worse than a bad divorce is a prolonged divorce." We couldn't agree more.

As part of our ongoing case management efforts, the Status Conference Docket will continue in 2026 and will be held on the third Thursday of each month at 1:00 p.m. All cases pending nine (9) months or more will be set on a Status Conference Docket and will remain on a Status Conference Docket until the case is concluded. The Status Conference Dockets are designed to touch base with the attorneys and unrepresented litigants to ascertain the status of the case and to keep the case on track to a timely conclusion.

While the Status Conference Docket was successful, we found that many of the cases on that docket lacked movement or progress towards conclusion as they were reset from one Status Conference Docket to the next. ***Enter the creation of the Dismissal Docket!***



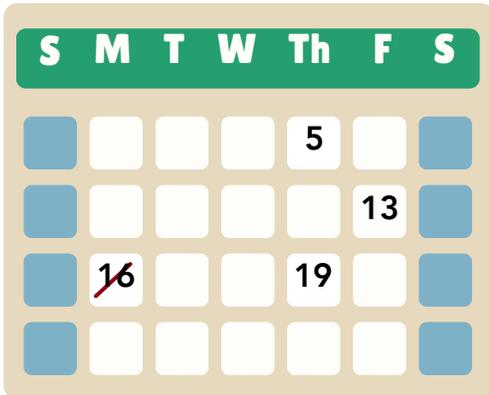
After ample time is given to reasonably conclude a case, usually after several Status Conference Docket appearances and/or after a case has been pending for 2 years, any such pending case may be placed on the Dismissal Docket. The Dismissal Docket is held on the third Thursday of each month, at 2:30 p.m., after the Status Conference Docket. Once a case is placed on the Dismissal Docket, the case will remain on the dismissal docket unless closed by final order or set for final hearing by signed order of the Court prior to the date it is set on the Dismissal Docket.

ALL OPEN CASES ON THE DISMISSAL DOCKET WILL BE DISMISSED ON THE DATE AND TIME THEY ARE SET ON THE DISMISSAL DOCKET. NO EXCEPTIONS. NO APPEARANCE. NO PENDING MOTION WILL PREVENT DISMISSAL.

Pending motions of any kind do not count. Further, appearances are **NOT** permitted. This is simply a docket to identify cases for dismissal and cases on this docket are automatically dismissed if still open and not set for a final hearing via an entered Order to Set.

As always, we welcome your feedback and appreciate your support as we implement this new docket into our system.

Calendar



February

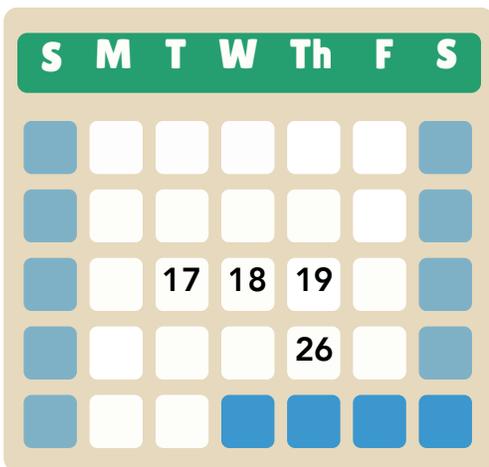
2/5: Special Master Menke's Case Management Docket at 9 a.m. via Zoom

2/13: No Friday Motion Docket, Office Open

2/16: Office Closed for Presidents' Day Holiday

2/19: Judge Williams' Status Conference Docket at 1 p.m. in Person or Via Zoom

Judge Williams' Dismissal Docket at 2:30 p.m.



March

3/17 – 3/19: Irreconcilable Differences Divorce Docket via Waiver Appearance ONLY

3/26: Judge Williams' Status Conference Docket at 1 p.m. in Person or Via Zoom

Judge Williams' Dismissal Docket at 2:30 p.m.

Reminder When Filing Motions

All motions filed this year **MUST** list the date as **2026**. If the date written accidentally states 2025, the Clerk's Office will *not* assume the correct year and *the motion will not be docketed*.

Share



@JudgeStephanieJWilliams



Judge Stephanie J. Williams

Feel free to share this newsletter with anyone who may be interested. To be added to the mailing list, please email RebekahLHaralson@jnsnashville.gov.

Additionally, you may view this and all previous newsletters on our website by clicking this link: [Updates and Announcements](#) or by scanning the QR code:

