



FAMILY MATTERS

IN THE FOURTH CIRCUIT COURT

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HAPPY MOTHER'S DAY

Mother's Day is just around the corner! As a family court, we know the importance of mothers and the importance of supporting them in the hard but necessary work they do every single day. Thank you to the mothers and mother figures out there, your families are better because of you.



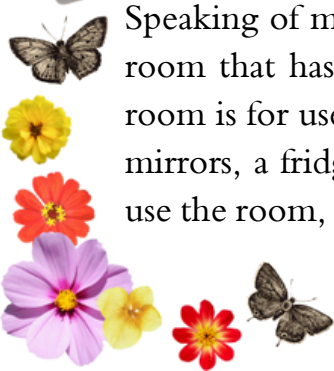
Families come in all different shapes and sizes, which means no mother looks the same. Recently, Judge Williams was interviewed by Grammy Award-winning gospel singer CeCe Winans and her daughter, Ashley Phillips, where she shared her experience raising two kids as a single mother. Judge Williams knows firsthand how challenging being a single mother can be. However, she wants all the single mothers out there to know that they are capable of so much more than they even realize. Lean on the people around you, and never be too scared to ask for help. **You can watch the video on CeCe Winans' YouTube channel at this link: [Single Motherhood with Judge Stephanie Williams](#).**

Additionally, we recognize that although this day is meant to honor all that mothers do for their families, for many, it is also a day of remembering the mothers who have passed on. As such, Mother's Day is also a time to gather with loved ones for the reflection, remembrance and celebration of their lives. We hope you have a meaningful Mother's Day full of joy, gratitude, and irreplaceable memories. Happy Mother's Day!



COURTHOUSE LACTATION ROOM

Speaking of mothers, located on the 7th floor of the Historic Metro Courthouse is a lactation room that has recently been updated by the State Trial Courts Administrator's Office. This room is for use of nursing mothers—attorneys, employees, and litigants alike. There are chairs, mirrors, a fridge, tables, and cleaning supplies, all in suite 702. If you or your clients need to use the room, please feel free to do so.



LAW DAY REVIEW



On May 1st, we had the pleasure of hosting 16 new and emerging attorneys to the Historic Metro Courthouse for our inaugural Law Day with the Fourth Circuit Court. Attendees included current law school students, recent law school graduates, recent Bar passers, and attorneys new to the domestic bar. Their day consisted of the following:

- A Tour of the Courthouse
- Meet and Greet with Chancellors and Judges in the Courthouse
- An Introduction to the Fourth Circuit Court Staff, Processes, and Procedures
- An Introduction to Appointment Opportunities in the Fourth Circuit Court
- A Meet and Greet with Circuit Court Clerk Joseph P. Day
- E-filing and CaseLink Presentation from the Circuit Court Clerk's Office
- Panel Discussions from Family Law Practitioners with Tips and Tricks about Building a Successful Family Law Practice

We are grateful for all the judges, chancellors, attorneys, and Clerk's office staff who participated to make this a meaningful experience for all those who attended. The feedback and reception we received from the day solidified our commitment to make this an annual event in our court!



CASE LAW SPOTLIGHT

The Late Judge Philip E. Smith is Affirmed by the Tennessee Supreme Court

Colley v. Colley, No. M2021-00731-SC-R11-CV, 2025 WL 1232008 (Tenn. Apr. 29, 2025).



In this case, the Tennessee Supreme Court construed the parties' marital dissolution agreement, as well as Tennessee Code Annotated section 36-5-103(c), which permits attorney fee awards in certain original and post-award proceedings in family law cases involving alimony, child support, child custody, and permanent parenting plans. Here, the former husband filed a post-divorce petition to alter the award of transitional alimony, and after considerable litigation, he nonsuited it.

The question on appeal, under both the marital dissolution agreement and the statute, is whether a trial court may award attorney fees to a former spouse for fees incurred in defending the original award of alimony in post-divorce proceedings, where the petition to modify the award was nonsuited before adjudication on the merits.

As it relates to the marital dissolution agreement, the holding is based on the language of the parties' agreement. As to the statute, Tennessee Code Annotated section 36-5-103(c) explicitly applies in post-award proceedings to "enforce, alter, change, or modify" an existing decree of alimony, child support, custody, or a permanent parenting plan. Tenn. Code Ann. § 36-5-103(c). The Court opined that for an obligee spouse defending against an obligor spouse's effort to reduce or end alimony or child support, or modify a permanent parenting plan, the objective may be to maintain the status quo. This objective is achieved upon voluntary dismissal by the obligor spouse. Under these circumstances, the obligee spouse is a "prevailing party" under section 36-5-103(c). For this reason, the Tennessee Supreme Court held that trial courts may award attorney fees to an obligee spouse under the statute after the obligor spouse nonsuits a post-divorce petition.



Accordingly, the Court of Appeals decision was reversed, and the decision of Judge Smith was affirmed!

To read the case, click on the following link: *Colley v. Colley*



CHAMBER RULE SPOTLIGHT: COURTROOM DECORUM

Rule V, Page 5: Courtroom Decorum

It is important for attorneys to dress appropriately and professionally when in court as they are representing and advocating for their clients. Whether intentional or not, attire sends a message. For attorneys, it is important that this message is “clear, professional, and prepared.”

Please find below an excerpt from the Chamber Rules on courtroom attire:

Courtroom Attire

“Attire for attorneys, parties, witnesses, and spectators should be restrained and appropriate to the dignity of a courtroom. Attorneys and court reporters shall be professionally dressed, whether appearing in person or by visually remote means.

Litigants, witnesses, and spectators should avoid wearing shorts, tank tops, mini-skirts and dresses, low cut apparel, sleeveless apparel, flip flops, shirts that depict pictures or words (unless the words are the brand of the apparel), clothes that reveal midriff areas, denim pants, and any other attire that is inappropriate for a formal business setting. Further, unless worn for religious custom and practice, hats and sunglasses shall not be worn in the courtroom. This is applicable to litigants and witnesses whether appearing in person or by visually virtual means.

The Court recognizes that people come to court from all walks of life and may come directly from work or may face challenges that cause them to appear in clothing other than that described above. No one will be prohibited from entering the courtroom or removed from the courtroom based on such attire unless such attire is blatantly offensive.”

To read the rest of our Courtroom Decorum and Chamber Rules, click this link to our website’s resources page: [Resource Page](#) or scan the QR code:



THANK YOU, TAYLOR!



We were honored to have Taylor Jordan, a 3L at Nashville School of Law, join our office this semester as an intern. His last day with us was April 24th and he is now preparing for finals and to go into his last year of law school. Thank you for serving our families, Taylor!

CALENDAR

Check out the list below for changes to our regularly scheduled dockets and Court closures:

MAY

S	M	T	W	Th	F	S
				1		
				15		
					23	
	26					

5/1: Law Day with the Fourth Circuit Court

5/15: Status Conference Docket at 1 p.m.

5/23: No Motion Docket, Office Open

5/26: Office Closed for Memorial Day Holiday

JUNE

S	M	T	W	Th	F	S
				5		
			11	12		
				19		
				26		
	30					

6/5: Status Conference Docket

Judicial Conference is June 10th--June 12th. The Court will limit hearings on those dates as follows:

6/11: ID Divorce w/ Appearance Waiver ONLY

6/12: ID Divorce w/ Appearance Waiver ONLY

6/19: Office Closed for Juneteenth Holiday

6/26: Status Conference Docket at 1 p.m.

6/30: No Hearings, Office Open

JULY

S	M	T	W	Th	F	S
		1	2	3	4	
	7					
				17		

7/1--7/3: No Hearings, Office Open

7/4: Office Closed for July 4th Holiday

7/7: No Hearings, Office Open

7/17: Status Conference Docket at 1 p.m.

For a complete view of our regularly scheduled dockets and available Court dates, please see the calendar page on our website by clicking here: [Website Calendar](#) or by scanning the QR code:

