

CHAPTER 7

PROBATE COURT

SUBCHAPTER 1

GENERAL PROVISIONS

§201. Courts of record; seal; punishment for contempt

Courts of probate are courts of record. Each shall have an official seal, of which the register shall have the custody. They may issue any process necessary for the discharge of their official duties and punish for contempt of their authority.

§202. Oaths and acknowledgments

All oaths required to be taken by personal representatives, trustees, guardians, conservators, or of any other persons in relation to any proceeding in the probate court, or to perpetuate the evidence of the publication of any order of notice, may be administered by the judge or register of probate or any notary public. A certificate thereof, when taken out of court, shall be returned into the registry of probate and there filed. When any person of whom such oath is required, including any parent acknowledging consent to an adoption, resides temporarily or permanently without the State, the oath or acknowledgment may be taken before and be certified by a notary public without the State, a commissioner for the State of Maine or a United States Consul. [PL 1981, c. 456, Pt. A, §5 (AMD).]

SECTION HISTORY

PL 1979, c. 540, §6 (AMD). PL 1981, c. 456, §A5 (AMD).

§203. Rights of claimants under heir

Any person claiming under an heir at law has the same rights as the heir in all proceedings in probate courts, including rights of appeal.

SUBCHAPTER 2

JURISDICTION

§251. General jurisdiction

Each judge may take the probate of wills and grant letters testamentary or of administration on the estates of all deceased persons who, at the time of their death, were inhabitants or residents of the judge's county or who, not being residents of the State, died leaving estate to be administered in the judge's county, or whose estate is afterwards found therein; and has jurisdiction of all matters relating to the settlement of such estates. A judge may grant leave to adopt children, change the names of persons, appoint guardians for minors and others according to law and has jurisdiction as to persons under guardianship, and as to whatever else is conferred by law, except in cases in which the District Court has jurisdiction over a child pursuant to section 152, subsection 5-A. [RR 2015, c. 2, §1 (COR).]

SECTION HISTORY

RR 2015, c. 2, §1 (COR). PL 2015, c. 460, §3 (AMD).

§251-A. Other proceedings involving parental rights; transfer to District Court

1. Disclosure of orders and proceedings. The judge of probate presiding over any matter involving guardianship, adoption or change of name or another matter involving custody or other parental rights with respect to a minor child shall require all parties to disclose whether they have knowledge of:

A. Any interim or final order then in effect concerning custody or other parental rights with respect to the minor child, including any order of the District Court terminating parental rights; appointing a guardian, including a permanency, emergency or interim guardian; awarding parental rights to a 3rd party; or granting an adoption; [PL 2023, c. 63, §2 (AMD).]

B. Any proceeding under the Maine Juvenile Code brought against the minor child pending in District Court or any proceeding involving custody or other parental rights with respect to the minor child pending before any court of this State or another state, including the District Court; or [PL 2023, c. 63, §2 (AMD).]

C. Any other related action pending before any court of this State or another state, including the District Court. [PL 2023, c. 63, §2 (AMD).]
[PL 2023, c. 63, §2 (AMD).]

2. Transfer to District Court. Except as provided in subsection 3, if in a matter before the Probate Court concerning a minor child a judge of probate becomes aware that a proceeding under the Maine Juvenile Code brought against the minor child or a proceeding involving custody or other parental rights with respect to the minor child is pending in the District Court or that the minor child is or was the subject of a District Court order terminating parental rights, appointing a guardian, including a permanency, emergency or interim guardian, awarding parental rights to a 3rd party or granting an adoption, the judge shall notify the District Court and take appropriate action to facilitate a transfer of the matter to the District Court. If a matter is transferred to the District Court under this subsection, the District Court has continuing, exclusive jurisdiction over the matter and over any future proceedings for guardianship, adoption or change of name or other matter involving custody or other parental rights with respect to the minor child brought under Title 18-C, except to the extent that the District Court's jurisdiction is precluded by the Uniform Child Custody Jurisdiction and Enforcement Act.
[PL 2023, c. 63, §2 (AMD).]

3. Exception to transfer. Notwithstanding any provision of law to the contrary, a probate court shall retain jurisdiction over an action for guardianship, adoption, change of name or other matter involving custody or other parental rights with respect to a minor child brought under Title 18-C that would otherwise be within the exclusive, continuing jurisdiction of the District Court under section 152, subsection 5-A and may not transfer that matter to the District Court under subsection 2 if:

A. At the time the proceeding under the Maine Juvenile Code or the proceeding involving custody or other parental rights with respect to the minor child that would otherwise trigger the District Court's continuing, exclusive jurisdiction is initiated, the testimonial hearing on the Title 18-C matter has concluded and the Probate Court has that matter under advisement; and [PL 2023, c. 63, §2 (NEW).]

B. The Probate Court has not determined that the District Court is the more appropriate forum for the Title 18-C proceeding. [PL 2023, c. 63, §2 (NEW).]
[PL 2023, c. 63, §2 (NEW).]

For purposes of this section, a proceeding is pending if a complaint, petition or post-judgment motion has been filed and the final judgment or final order on that complaint, petition or post-judgment motion has not yet been issued. [PL 2023, c. 63, §2 (NEW).]

SECTION HISTORY

PL 2015, c. 460, §4 (NEW). PL 2023, c. 63, §2 (AMD).

§252. Equity jurisdiction

The courts of probate shall have jurisdiction in equity, concurrent with the Superior Court, of all cases and matters relating to the administration of the estates of deceased persons, to wills and to trusts which are created by will or other written instrument. Such jurisdiction may be exercised upon complaint according to the usual course of proceedings in civil actions in which equitable relief is sought.

§253. Jurisdiction in court where proceedings originate

Subject to Title 18-C, sections 1-303 and 3-201, and except as otherwise provided in Title 18-C, section 5-105, when a case is originally within the jurisdiction of the probate court in 2 or more counties, the one that first commences proceedings therein retains the same exclusively throughout. The jurisdiction assumed in any case, except in cases of fraud, so far as it depends on the residence of any person or the locality or amount of property, may not be contested in any proceeding whatever, except on an appeal or removal from the probate court in the original case or when the want of jurisdiction appears on the same record. [PL 2017, c. 402, Pt. C, §4 (AMD); PL 2019, c. 417, Pt. B, §14 (AFF).]

SECTION HISTORY

PL 1979, c. 540, §7 (AMD). PL 2017, c. 402, Pt. C, §4 (AMD). PL 2017, c. 402, Pt. F, §1 (AFF). PL 2019, c. 417, Pt. B, §14 (AFF).

SUBCHAPTER 3**JUDGES****§301. Terms; vacancies; salary**

Judges of probate are elected or appointed as provided in the Constitution of Maine. Only attorneys at law admitted to the general practice of law in this State and resident in this State may be elected or appointed as judges of probate. Their election is effected and determined as is provided respecting county commissioners; and they enter upon the discharge of their duties on the first day of January following their election; but, when appointed to fill vacancies, their terms commence on their appointment. Vacancies caused by death, resignation, removal from the county, permanent incapacity as defined in Title 30-A, section 1, subsection 2-A or any other reason must be filled as provided in the Constitution of Maine. In the case of a vacancy in the term of a judge of probate who was nominated by primary election before the general election, the judge of probate appointed by the Governor to fill the vacancy until a successor is chosen at election must be enrolled in the same political party as the judge of probate whose term is vacant. In making the appointment, the Governor shall choose from any recommendations submitted to the Governor by the county committee of the political party from which the appointment is to be made. [PL 1995, c. 683, §1 (AMD).]

Judges of probate in the several counties are entitled to receive annual salaries as set forth in Title 30-A, section 2. [PL 1995, c. 245, §1 (AMD).]

The fees to which judges of probate are entitled by law must be taxed and collected and paid over by the registers of probate to the county treasurers by the 15th day of every month following the month in which they were collected for the use of their counties with the exception of the fees provided in section 304, which must be retained by the judge who collects those fees in addition to the judge's salary. [PL 1995, c. 245, §1 (AMD).]

SECTION HISTORY

PL 1981, c. 40, §1 (AMD). PL 1987, c. 737, §§C3,C106 (AMD). PL 1989, c. 6 (AMD). PL 1989, c. 9, §2 (AMD). PL 1989, c. 104, §§C8,C10 (AMD). PL 1995, c. 245, §1 (AMD). PL 1995, c. 683, §1 (AMD).

§302. Officers execute processes and attend courts

Sheriffs, their deputies and constables shall execute all legal processes directed to them by any such judge of probate, who may, when necessary, require such officer, when not in attendance upon any other court, to attend during the sitting of the probate court, for which that officer must be paid as in other courts for similar services. [RR 2021, c. 1, Pt. B, §8 (COR).]

SECTION HISTORY

RR 2021, c. 1, Pt. B, §8 (COR).

§303. Continuous session; return day for matters requiring public notice

Probate court shall always be open in each county for all matters over which it has jurisdiction, except upon days on which by law no court is held, but it shall have certain fixed days and places to be made known by public notification thereof in their respective counties to which all matters requiring public notice shall be made returnable, except as otherwise ordered by the judge. In case of the absence of the judge or vacancy in the office at the time of holding any court, the register or acting register may adjourn the same until the judge can attend or some other probate judge can be notified and attend. [PL 1965, c. 238 (AMD).]

SECTION HISTORY

PL 1965, c. 238 (AMD).

§304. Equity and contested cases; time and place of hearing

Judges of probate may hold hearings for matters in equity and contested cases at such time and place in the county as the judge of probate may appoint and make all necessary orders and decrees relating thereto, and when hearings are held at other places than those fixed for holding the regular terms of court, the judge is allowed, in addition to that judge's regular salary, \$5 per day and actual expenses, which must be paid by the State unless otherwise provided by law. [RR 2021, c. 1, Pt. B, §9 (COR).]

SECTION HISTORY

RR 2021, c. 1, Pt. B, §9 (COR).

§305. Term of Fort Kent and Caribou probate court

The judge of probate in and for the County of Aroostook shall hold a court of probate at least twice in each year at Fort Kent and at least 4 times each year at Caribou in the county. The time for holding the court shall be appointed by the judge and made known by public notification as provided in section 303. [PL 1979, c. 41 (RPR).]

SECTION HISTORY

PL 1979, c. 41 (RPR).

§306. Interchange of judicial duties; expenses

During the sickness, absence from the State or inability of any judge of probate to hold the regular terms of that judge's court, such terms, at the judge's request or that of the register of the county, may be held by the judge of any other county. The judges may interchange service or perform each others' duties when they find it necessary or convenient, and in case of a vacancy in the office of a judge, all necessary terms of the probate court for the county may, at the request of the register, be held by the judge of another county until the vacancy is filled. The orders, decrees and decisions of the judge

holding such terms have the same force and validity as if made by the judge of the county in which such terms are held. [RR 2021, c. 1, Pt. B, §10 (COR).]

When any judge of probate holds court or a hearing in any probate matter, or in equity, in any county other than the one in which that judge resides, that judge must be reimbursed by the county in which such court or hearing is held for that judge's expenses actually and reasonably incurred, upon presentation to the county commissioners of that county of a detailed statement of such expenses. [RR 2021, c. 1, Pt. B, §10 (COR).]

SECTION HISTORY

PL 1965, c. 513, §5-A (AMD). RR 2021, c. 1, Pt. B, §10 (COR).

§307. Conflict of interest; transfer of case

When a judge or register of probate is interested in that judge's or register of probate's own right, trust, or in any other manner, or is within the degree of kindred, by which in law that judge or register of probate may, by possibility, be heir to any part of the estate of the person deceased, or is named as executor, trustee or guardian of minor children in the will of any deceased resident of the county, such estate must be settled in the probate court of any adjoining county, which has as full jurisdiction thereof as if the deceased had died in that adjoining county. If the judge's or register of probate's interest arises after jurisdiction of such estate has been regularly assumed or existed at the time of the judge's or register of probate's appointment to office, and in all cases where an executor, administrator, guardian or trustee, whose trust is not fully executed, becomes judge or register of probate for the county in which that judge's or register of probate's letters were granted, further proceedings in that county must be transferred to the probate court in any adjoining county and there remain until completed, as if such court had had original jurisdiction thereof, unless said disability is removed before that time. Whenever in any case under this section the disability of the judge or register is removed before the proceedings have been fully completed, the proceedings must then be transferred to the probate court in the county of original jurisdiction or to the probate court that otherwise would have had jurisdiction. In all such cases the register in such adjoining county shall transmit copies of all records relating to such estate to the probate office of the county where such estate belongs, to be there recorded. If there are fewer than 4 counties adjoining the county of a probate court that is required to transfer proceedings to an adjoining county under this section, the proceedings must be transferred to a probate court in one of the 4 counties nearest to the transferring probate court, as measured by the shortest distance along paved roads between the building in which the registry of probate is located in the transferring county and the building in which the registry of probate is located in the other county. [PL 2023, c. 4, §1 (AMD).]

This section may not be construed to require removal to another county by reason of the judge or register of probate having been named as executor, trustee or guardian of minor children in a will, as long as the judge or register of probate does not receive a benefit from the will and the record of the court discloses the filing of the judge's or register of probate's declination to act as such executor, trustee or guardian, if no objection is raised by any interested party at the hearing on the petition for probate of the will. [RR 2021, c. 1, Pt. B, §11 (COR).]

A judge is considered to be interested in an estate or other probate proceeding, including adoptions, if the judge or a person with whom the judge practices law represents a party in the proceeding. When such representation begins, the judge shall transfer the matter as provided in this section, after which transfer the judge or the person with whom the judge practices law may continue such representation, except that, after a formal probate proceeding has been initiated before a judge, that judge is forever barred from assuming representation of a party in that same proceeding without regard to whether or not the proceeding has been transferred. A petition requesting a transfer and the petition related to the matter being transferred filed simultaneously are not considered formal probate proceedings for the purposes of this paragraph. [PL 1991, c. 697, §1 (NEW).]

SECTION HISTORY

PL 1991, c. 697, §1 (AMD). RR 2021, c. 1, Pt. B, §11 (COR). PL 2023, c. 4, §1 (AMD).

§308. Certification of unfinished acts of predecessor judge

Every judge, upon entering on the duties of that judge's office, shall examine the records, decrees, certificates and all proceedings connected therewith that the judge's predecessor left unsigned or unauthenticated. If the judge finds them correct, the judge shall sign and authenticate them and they are then as valid to all intents and purposes as if such duty had been done by the judge's predecessor while in office. [RR 2021, c. 1, Pt. B, §12 (COR).]

SECTION HISTORY

RR 2021, c. 1, Pt. B, §12 (COR).

§309. Judge not to counsel or draft documents

A judge of probate may not have a voice in judging and determining or be attorney or counselor in or out of court in any civil action or matter that depends on or relates to any sentence or decree made by that judge of probate in that judge of probate's office, or in any civil action for or against any executor, administrator, guardian or trustee under any last will and testament, as such, within that judge of probate's county. Any process or proceeding commenced by a judge of probate in the probate court for that judge of probate's county in violation of this section is void, and that judge of probate is liable to the party injured in damages. A judge of probate may not draft or aid in drafting any document or paper that the judge of probate is by law required to pass upon. [RR 2021, c. 1, Pt. B, §13 (COR).]

SECTION HISTORY

RR 2021, c. 1, Pt. B, §13 (COR).

§310. Perpetual care of cemetery lots by order

Judges of probate, in any case in which an estate is under their jurisdiction for probate, shall have the power to order that an appropriate amount out of the estate be set aside for perpetual care and suitable memorials for the cemetery lot in which the deceased is buried, and to order special care of such lots when the conditions and size of the estate seem to warrant such order.

§311. Contracts for support

All contracts for support for life shall be approved by the Probate Court in the county in which the support for life is to be rendered. The Probate Court shall grant approval after such reasonable notice as the court shall determine to be appropriate, if the court shall find, after hearing, that the contract is just and equitable under all of the circumstances. [PL 1969, c. 434 (NEW).]

A contract or agreement for support for life without such Probate Court approval shall not be received in evidence unless the person offering the contract or agreement shall establish by a preponderance of the evidence that the contract or agreement is just and equitable under all of the circumstances. [PL 1969, c. 434 (NEW).]

This section shall not apply to such contracts or agreements between persons related within the 3rd degree. [PL 1969, c. 434 (NEW).]

SECTION HISTORY

PL 1969, c. 434 (NEW).

§312. Political activities of judges of probate

As a candidate for the elective office of judge of probate or as an elected judge, a person seeking or holding the office of judge of probate may engage in any political activity that would be lawful for a candidate for any other elected county office or for an incumbent elected county official. Any such judge may hold any other elected office or offices not made incompatible by the Constitution of Maine. [PL 1993, c. 695, §1 (NEW).]

SECTION HISTORY

PL 1993, c. 695, §1 (NEW).

SUBCHAPTER 4

RULES OF PRACTICE

§351. Procedural rules; blanks; revision; approval

(REPEALED)

SECTION HISTORY

PL 1971, c. 94, §§1,2 (AMD). PL 1979, c. 540, §§7-A (RP).

§352. Blanks and records provided

Each county shall provide all necessary printed blanks and record books for its probate courts and courts of insolvency, and said record books may be printed to correspond with the printed blanks.

SUBCHAPTER 5

APPEALS

§401. Appellate jurisdiction; special guardians; appeal to law court

(REPEALED)

SECTION HISTORY

PL 1979, c. 540, §7-B (RP).

§402. Bond on appeal; service of reasons for appeal

(REPEALED)

SECTION HISTORY

PL 1979, c. 540, §7-B (RP).

§403. Allowance of appeal accidentally omitted

(REPEALED)

SECTION HISTORY

PL 1979, c. 540, §7-B (RP).

§404. Failure to prosecute appeal

(REPEALED)

SECTION HISTORY

PL 1979, c. 540, §7-B (RP).

§405. Stay of proceedings on appeal

(REPEALED)

SECTION HISTORY

PL 1979, c. 540, §7-B (RP).

§406. Hearing on appeal

(REPEALED)

SECTION HISTORY

PL 1973, c. 625, §11 (AMD). PL 1979, c. 540, §7-B (RP).

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