

CITIZEN ADVISORY COMMITTEES



**This publication is produced with IV-D funds.
Updated September 2016.**

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Michigan law authorizes each county to establish a citizen advisory committee for the friend of the court (FOC). Below are commonly asked questions and answers about these committees.

Who can serve on the Citizen Advisory Committee?

The Committee is comprised of members who are residents of the county and must include:

1. A noncustodial parent.
2. A custodial parent.
3. An attorney who engages primarily in family law practice.
4. The county sheriff or the sheriff's designee.
5. The prosecuting attorney or the prosecuting attorney's designee.
6. The director of the Department of Health and Human Services or the director's designee.
7. A mental health professional who provides family counseling.
8. Two members of the general public who do not meet the requirements listed in the first seven categories.

Who appoints members to the Citizen Advisory Committee?

The county board of commissioners, or the county executive with the advice and consent of the county board, appoints members to the Citizen Advisory Committee.

Neither the FOC nor the chief judge appoints members to the Committee. If you wish to serve as a member of the Committee, you should contact one of your county commissioners, the county executive, or the county administrator to obtain information about how to apply.

What authority does the Committee have?

A Citizen Advisory Committee is advisory only. The responsibilities of the Committee are to:

- a. Meet not less than six times annually, keep minutes of each meeting, and submit a copy of the minutes to the county board.
- b. Review and investigate grievances that are filed with the Committee concerning FOC operations.
- c. Advise the court and the county board with regard to:
 - i. the FOC office,
 - ii. the FOC's duties and performance,
 - iii. the community's needs relating to office services.
- d. Submit an annual report of its activities to the county board, the county circuit court, the State Court Administrative Office, the Governor's office, and the Senate and House committees and appropriations subcommittees that are responsible for legislation concerning the judicial branch.

What does the Citizen Advisory Committee do after it reviews a grievance?

The Committee advises the county board and the circuit court on the performance of the FOC. The Committee's conclusions about the review of grievances should be part of the information the court and county board receive. The Committee has no authority to make changes in FOC procedures, referee recommendations, or court orders.

Can I attend Citizen Advisory Committee meetings?

Citizen Advisory Committee meetings are open to the public except meetings in which the Committee is reviewing, investigating, or holding a hearing on a grievance. Members of the public must be given the opportunity to comment on any issue under consideration. The public can comment before the Committee takes any votes.

How do I find out when and where the Citizen Advisory Committee for my FOC meets?

Your county board of commissioners, the county executive, or the county administrator can tell you how to obtain information about Citizen Advisory Committee meeting places and times. The FOC may also have this information available if it is provided by the Committee to the FOC.

What if I have a complaint about the FOC?

Grievance forms should be available at your local FOC office or online at: <http://courts.mi.gov/Administration/SCAO/Forms/courtforms/domesticrelations/generalfoc/foc1a.pdf>.

A party who has a complaint concerning FOC office operations or FOC employees may use the grievance procedure as follows:

- a. File the grievance, in writing, with the FOC office where your case is located. The FOC office is required to investigate and decide the grievance within 30 days, or give the party that filed the grievance a reason why a response is not possible within the 30-day period.
- b. A party who is not satisfied with the decision of the FOC may file a further grievance, in writing, with the chief judge of the circuit court. The chief judge is required to investigate and decide that grievance within 30 days, or give the party filing the grievance reasons why a response is not possible within that time period.
- c. At any time during the grievance procedure, a party with a complaint regarding FOC office operations may file a written grievance with the Citizen Advisory Committee. In its discretion, the Committee may decide to conduct a review or investigation, or hold a hearing on the grievance.

The Citizen Advisory Committee may appoint subcommittees to review grievances. If a Citizen Advisory Committee reviews or investigates a grievance, the Committee must respond to the grievance within a reasonable period of time.

Can I file a grievance about an FOC employee or about a court order with the Citizen Advisory Committee?

No, a Citizen Advisory Committee grievance can only be about FOC office operations. The Committee cannot review grievances about an employee, a recommendation by a referee, a court order, or an office decision.

How does the Committee review the performance of the FOC if no grievances are submitted directly to the Committee?

The Committee is required to randomly select and review grievances that are submitted to the FOC, as well as the FOC's responses to the grievances. The Committee must report its findings to the court and the county board, either immediately or in its annual report. Finally, the Citizen Advisory Committee must examine grievances that are filed with the FOC and review or

investigate any grievance that alleges that a decision made by an employee of the FOC was decided on the basis of gender rather than the best interests of the child.

Can the Citizen Advisory Committee review my FOC file?

A Citizen Advisory Committee has access to a grievance that is filed with the FOC and to the information that is related to the case, with the exception of confidential information. The Committee may be allowed access to confidential information if the court orders the Committee to have access.

Friend of the Court Bureau/ State Court Administrative Office

Michigan Supreme Court

<http://courts.mi.gov/administration/scao>
