

**UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
WESTERN DISTRICT OF MICHIGAN**

**CASE EVALUATION
PROGRAM DESCRIPTION**

Definition

Case evaluation affords litigants an ADR process patterned after that extensively used in the state courts of Michigan. See MICH. COMP. LAWS §§ 600.4951-.4969; MICH. CT. R. 2.403. Case evaluation principally involves establishment of the settlement value of a case by a panel of three attorneys.

Authorization

[W.D. Mich. LCivR 16.5](#)

THE CASE EVALUATORS

List of Case Evaluators

The ADR Administrator maintains a current list of case evaluators certified by practice area for the Northern and Southern Divisions and updates the list yearly. The ADR Administrator appoints evaluators for standard track case evaluations from this list.

Certification of Case Evaluators

Standard Track - A certified case evaluator:

- 1) is a member in good standing of the Bar of this Court with ten (10) years practice experience;
- 2) has acted as a case evaluator three times, in either state or federal court, in a particular substantive area in the previous five (5) years to be certified in that area.

Blue Ribbon Track: Not certified by the Court.

Disqualification Rules

No person serves as a case evaluator in any action in which any of the circumstances specified in 28 U.S.C. § 455 exist, or, in good faith, is believed to exist.

Immunity

Case evaluators are entitled to quasi-judicial immunity as officers of the Court.

CASE SELECTION

Eligible Cases

All civil cases in which damages are sought, except social security cases, are eligible for case evaluation. Certain tort cases in which the rule of decision is supplied by Michigan law must be submitted to case evaluation, unless the parties have agreed to use voluntary facilitative mediation.

Referral Method and Notice to Parties

In preparation for the initial Rule 16 scheduling conference, all parties are required to discuss the use of alternative dispute resolution and indicate their preference in the joint status report. Qualified cases may be referred to case evaluation with or without the parties' consent.

Selection of Case Evaluators

Standard Track: Case evaluators are selected by the ADR Administrator.

Blue Ribbon: Case evaluators are selected by the parties.

Compensation of Evaluators

- A. Standard Panel: Within seven (7) days after the filing and mailing of the notice of case evaluation hearing, each plaintiff and each defendant pays each case evaluator the sum of two hundred dollars (\$200.00) for a total of six hundred dollars (\$600.00) per party. Proof of payment must be filed in the case upon payment. Once paid, the fee is not subject to a refund.

- 1) Multiple parties, derivative claims: Multiple parties with derivative claims (e.g., husband/wife or parent/child) are treated as one party. Multiple parties, non-derivative claims: Each party shall pay the sum of six hundred dollars (\$600.00) for each award. However, in those cases in which an attorney certifies at the time of paying the case evaluation fees that the attorney represents multiple parties without conflict of interest and that there presently exists a substantial unity of interest between the parties on all issues, the parties may pay one fee. The case evaluation may include one lump sum award or separate awards to these parties, or a combination thereof, in the panel's discretion.
 - 2) Multiple claims by members of a single family: When the plaintiffs are members of a single family, they may elect to treat the case as involving one claim, with the payment of one fee and the rendering of one lump sum award to be accepted or rejected. If no such election is made, a separate fee must be paid by each plaintiff, and the case evaluation panel will then make separate awards for each claim.
 - 3) A party failing to pay fees within the time designated must pay an additional fee of fifty dollars (\$50.00) per evaluator.
- B. Blue Ribbon Panel: Evaluators are paid their normal hourly rate, to be assessed in as many equal parts as there are separately represented parties, or as otherwise agreed by the parties at the time the case is submitted to evaluation. The evaluators bill counsel directly.
- C. Noncompliance: In the event of noncompliance, a case evaluator may petition the Court for an order directing payment of fees.

Chairperson

Each case evaluation panel has a chairperson. The ADR Administrator chooses the chairperson for standard track case evaluation; the attorneys agree on a chairperson for Blue Ribbon mediation. The duties of the chairperson are:

- A. presiding at the case evaluation session to ensure a fair and orderly presentation;
- B. filing with the ADR Administrator and serving upon all parties the evaluation award, with proof of service; and
- C. in Blue Ribbon evaluation only, coordinating the scheduling of hearings and deciding whether a request for an adjournment should be granted and, if so, coordinating the rescheduled evaluation session with the other evaluators and counsel, and filing and serving the notice thereof.

Timing for the Case Evaluation Hearing

Within a time frame fixed by the Court:

- A. Standard Track: Plaintiff's counsel coordinates a specific time, date, and place for the case evaluation hearing. The hearing is held in a suitably neutral setting (e.g., at the office of an evaluator or in the courthouse). Plaintiff's counsel serves the notice of hearing upon all parties and files the notice in the case, along with a proof of service. Thereafter, adjournments of the hearing are by unanimous stipulation only.
- B. Blue Ribbon Track: The chairperson in consultation with the parties and evaluators, arranges the date, time, and place of the case evaluation hearing. The chairperson serves the notice of hearing upon all parties, and files the notice in the case, along with a proof of service. Thereafter, the chairperson may grant an adjournment of the case evaluation session for good cause, within the time limit set by the Court. The chairperson is responsible for coordinating the scheduling of the original or adjourned session and for filing with the ADR Administrator and serving a notice of the date and time thereof.
- C. Any notices of hearing or adjournment may be made by e-mail.

Timing and Nature of Submissions Required Before the Case Evaluation Session

- A. Standard Track: Not less than fourteen (14) days before the evaluation session, each party provides each evaluator with a written evaluation statement, with copies to all counsel and proof of service is filed in the case. The evaluation statement must not exceed twenty (20) pages, and any attachments to the brief must not exceed twenty (20) pages. Failure to submit such documents in a timely manner subjects the offending party or attorney to a one hundred fifty dollar (\$150.00) penalty.
- B. Blue Ribbon Track: There are no limits for the filing of case evaluation briefs or their length, unless agreed to in writing by all parties.

Status of Discovery and Motions During Case Evaluation Process

Any case referred to case evaluation continues to be subject to management by the judge to whom it is assigned. Unless otherwise ordered, parties are not precluded from filing pretrial motions or pursuing discovery.

Procedure at the Case Evaluation Hearing

- A. The parties may attend but do not actively participate. If scars, disfigurement, or other conditions exist, that may be demonstrated to the panel by a personal appearance. However, no testimony is taken or permitted of any party.
- B. The rules of evidence do not apply before the case evaluation panel. Factual information having a bearing on damages or liability must be supported by documentary evidence, if possible.
- C. Oral presentation:
 - 1) Standard Track: Each attorney is limited to 30 minutes oral presentation.
 - 2) Blue Ribbon Track: Oral presentations are not limited.

Panel's Decision

- A. At the conclusion of the hearing, the panel will make a written evaluation and personally serve a copy upon each party. In an extraordinary case, where the award cannot reasonably be rendered at the conclusion of the hearing, the evaluators in a Blue-Ribbon evaluation may render their written evaluation within seven days of the conclusion of the hearing. In such circumstances, the chairperson is responsible for serving a copy on each party, with proof of service. The original evaluation is forwarded to the ADR Administrator. **This document may not be electronically filed.**
- B. The evaluation must include a separate award as to the plaintiff's claim against each defendant and as to each crossclaim, counterclaim, or third-party claim that has been filed in the action. All such claims filed by any one party against any other party are treated as a single claim.
- C. The evaluation may not include a separate award on any claim for equitable relief, but the panel may consider such claims in determining the amount of an award.
- D. In a tort case to which MICH. COMP. LAWS § 600.4915(2) or MICH. COMP. LAWS § 600.4963(2) applies, if the panel unanimously finds that a party's action or defense as to any other party is frivolous, the panel must so indicate on the evaluation. For these purposes, an action or defense is "frivolous" if, as to all a plaintiff's claims or all a defendant's defenses to liability, at least one of the following conditions is met:

- 1) The party's primary purpose in initiating the action or asserting the defense was to harass, embarrass, or injure the opposing party;
 - 2) The party had no reasonable basis to believe that the facts underlying that party's legal position were in fact true; or
 - 3) The party's legal position was devoid of arguable legal merit.
- E. In an action alleging medical malpractice to which MICH. COMP. LAWS § 600.4915 applies, the evaluation must include a specific finding that:
- 1) there has been a breach of the applicable standard of care;
 - 2) there has not been a breach of the applicable standard of care; or
 - 2) reasonable minds could differ as to whether there has been a breach of the applicable standard of care.

Acceptance or Rejection of the Case Evaluation

- A. Each party must file with the ADR Administrator a written acceptance or rejection of the panel's evaluation within 28 days after service of the panel's evaluation. If there are separate awards on multiple claims, each party must either accept or reject the evaluation in its entirety as to each opposing party. The failure to file a written acceptance or rejection within 28 days constitutes rejection.
- B. There must be no disclosure of a party's acceptance or rejection of the panel's evaluation until the expiration of the 28-day period, at which time the ADR Administrator enters a notice in the case indicating each party's acceptance or rejection of the panel's evaluation.
- C. In case evaluations involving multiple parties, the following rules apply:
- 1) Each party has the option of accepting all the awards covering the claims by or against that party or of accepting some and rejecting others. However, as to any particular opposing party, the party must either accept or reject the evaluation in its entirety.
 - 2) A party who accepts all the awards may specifically indicate that he or she intends the acceptance to be effective only if all opposing parties accept, or only if the opposing parties accept as to specified coparties. If such a limitation is not included in the acceptance, an accepting party is deemed to have agreed to entry of judgment or dismissal as provided below [Effect of acceptance of evaluation, ¶A] as to that party and those of the opposing parties who accept, with the action to continue between the accepting party and those opposing parties who reject.

- 3) If a party makes a limited acceptance under the preceding provision [¶C. 2 *above*], and some of the opposing parties accept and others reject, for the purposes of the cost provisions [Rejecting party's liability for costs, *below*] the party who made the limited acceptance is deemed to have rejected as to those opposing parties who accept.

Effect of Acceptance of Evaluation

- A. If all the parties accept the panel's evaluation, judgment will be entered in accordance with the evaluation unless the amount of the award is paid within 28 days after notification of the acceptances, in which case the Court dismisses the action with prejudice. The judgment or dismissal is deemed to dispose of all claims in the action and includes all fees, costs, and interest to the date it is entered.
- B. In a case involving multiple parties, judgment or dismissal is entered as to those opposing parties who have accepted the portions of the evaluation that apply to them.

Proceedings after Rejection

- A. If all or part of the evaluation by the panel is rejected, the action proceeds to trial as to all remaining claims.
- B. If the panel finds a party's claim or defense to be frivolous, that party may request that the Court review the panel's finding by filing a motion within 14 days after the ADR Administrator files the notice of rejection in the case.
 - 1) The motion must be submitted to the Court on the case evaluation summaries and documents that were considered by the case evaluation panel. No other exhibits or testimony may be submitted. However, oral argument on the motion is permitted.
 - 2) After reviewing the material submitted, the Court determines whether the action or defense is frivolous.
 - 3) If the Court agrees with the panel's determination, the provisions below [C.] apply, except that the bond must be filed within 28 days after the entry of the Court's order determining the action or defense to be frivolous.
 - 4) The judge who hears a motion under this provision may not preside at a nonjury trial of the action.

- C. Unless the finding is overturned by the Court, if the panel finds unanimously a party's claim or defense to be frivolous in a tort case governed by MICH. COMP. LAWS 600.4915(2) or MICH. COMP. LAWS §600.4963(2) [Panel's decision, ¶ D.], that party must post a cash or surety bond in the amount of \$5,000 for each party against whom the action or defense was determined to be frivolous.
- 1) The bond must be posted within 56 days after the case evaluation hearing or at least 14 days before trial, whichever is earlier.
 - 2) If a surety bond is filed, an insurance company that insures the defendant against a claim made in the action may not act as surety.
 - 3) If the bond is not posted as required, the Court dismisses a claim found to have been frivolous or enters a default of a defendant whose defense was found to be frivolous. The action proceeds to trial as to the remaining claims and parties, and as to the amount of damages against a defendant in default.
 - 4) If judgment is entered against the party who posted the bond, the bond shall be used to pay any costs awarded against that party by the Court under any applicable law or court rule.
- D. The ADR Administrator places a copy of the case evaluation and the parties' acceptances and rejections in a sealed envelope for filing with the Clerk of the Court. In a nonjury action, the envelope may not be opened, and the parties may not reveal the amount of the evaluation until the judge has rendered judgment.

Confidentiality

All case evaluation proceedings are considered compromise negotiations within the meaning of Fed. R. Evid. 408.

COURT ADMINISTRATION OF THE CASE EVALUATION PROGRAM

Administrative Structure

The case evaluation program is administered by the Clerk's Office. Any issues are initially addressed by the ADR Administrator.

Evaluation of the Program

The ADR Administrator gathers data relevant to a careful, in-depth analysis of the efficacy of the program, and reports to the Court on a regular basis. In an effort to gather information, the Court may develop questionnaires for participants, counsel, and evaluators, to be completed and returned at the close of the evaluation process. Responses will be kept confidential and not divulged to the Court, the attorneys, or the parties. Only aggregate information about the program will be reported.

Retention of Sealed Case Evaluations by the Court

All sealed case evaluations will be destroyed six months after the deadline to seek certiorari to the United States Supreme Court, or the denial of the certiorari by the United States Supreme Court.

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