



SUPREME COURT (GENERAL DIVISION) LAUNCHES PILOT PROJECT TO IMPROVE ACCESS TO SETTLEMENT CONFERENCES IN HALIFAX

Monday, Aug. 16, 2021

The Supreme Court of Nova Scotia (General Division) is launching a pilot project at the Halifax Law Courts to improve the availability of settlement conferences for parties involved in civil proceedings at that location.

Effective today, counsel can apply in writing to Janet Hawes in the Scheduling Office at the Halifax Law Courts to submit a case as part of the Last-Minute Settlement Conference Pilot Project. This process is completely voluntary.

“Settlement conferences are one of the most valuable services offered by the Supreme Court,” said The Hon. Chief Justice Deborah K. Smith. “They allow parties to resolve their disputes without the time and expense of a trial. In addition, they offer certainty in relation to the outcome.”

“Unfortunately, the pandemic has created a significant backlog of cases that need to be rescheduled, which is severely hampering the Court’s ability to schedule settlement conferences in a timely fashion,” the Chief Justice said. “Dates are often not available for a year or more, unless cases settle, and judges become available at the last minute. This pilot will make it quicker and easier for parties to potentially settle their own matters, which can help reduce backlog and enhance access to services for other court users.”

Counsel who write to Ms. Hawes will be placed on the last-minute settlement conference list. Counsel should indicate in their request which judges they would prefer to conduct their conference. Settlement conferences and criminal resolution conferences are the only types of matters in the Supreme Court where parties are permitted to request a specific judge. Counsel are reminded that the more judges’ names submitted, the greater the likelihood one will become available and a date will be offered.

Within five business days of submitting their request, all counsel involved in a file must then submit an email or a letter to Ms. Hawes undertaking to prepare their settlement conference brief within 10 business days from the date of their undertaking. This step ensures that briefs are ready to be filed immediately should a judge become available. **Please note that briefs should not be filed with the Court until a settlement conference is scheduled.**

Counsel are reminded that if they are not called for a last-minute settlement conference, the settlement conference brief that they prepared can serve as the foundation for their pre-trial brief.

By their very nature, these matters will be held on short notice. In order for a case to be considered for a last-minute settlement conference, all counsel involved in a file must agree to participate and they should be prepared to adjust their schedules to accommodate scheduling on short notice.

This pilot project will be available for civil proceedings in Halifax until further notice. It will be evaluated throughout and any changes to the process will be communicated through an updated notice from the Supreme Court.

Any questions or feedback on this process should be directed to Caroline McInnes in the Prothonotary's Office at the Halifax Law Courts.

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