

GOVERNMENT CODE
TITLE 2. JUDICIAL BRANCH
SUBTITLE A. COURTS
CHAPTER 27. JUSTICE COURTS

SUBCHAPTER A. GENERAL PROVISIONS

Sec. 27.001. BOND. Each justice of the peace must give a bond payable to the county judge, in an amount of not more than \$5,000, and conditioned that the justice will:

(1) faithfully and impartially discharge the duties required by law; and

(2) promptly pay to the entitled party all money that comes into the justice's hands during the term of office.

Acts 1985, 69th Leg., ch. 480, Sec. 1, eff. Sept. 1, 1985.

Sec. 27.002. COMMISSION; NOTARY. Each justice of the peace shall be commissioned as justice of the peace of the applicable precinct and ex officio notary public of the county.

Acts 1985, 69th Leg., ch. 480, Sec. 1, eff. Sept. 1, 1985.

Sec. 27.003. EFFECT OF PRECINCT BOUNDARY CHANGES. A person who has served as justice of the peace of a precinct for 10 or more consecutive years preceding a change in boundaries of the precinct is not ineligible for reelection in the precinct because of residence outside the precinct as long as the justice's residence is within the boundaries of the precinct as they existed before the change.

Acts 1985, 69th Leg., ch. 480, Sec. 1, eff. Sept. 1, 1985.

Sec. 27.004. RECORDS AND OTHER PROPERTY. (a) Each justice shall arrange and safely keep all dockets, books, and papers transmitted to the justice by the justice's predecessors in office, and all papers filed in a case in justice court, subject to the public access requirements prescribed by Rule 12, Rules of Judicial Administration.

(a-1) If a person vacates the office of justice of the

peace, the person shall transfer all court records, documents, property, and unfinished business to the person's successor on the date the successor takes office. After the transfer, the business of the office must be completed as if the successor had begun the business.

(b) A person who has possession of dockets, books, or papers belonging to the office of any justice of the peace shall deliver them to the justice on demand. If the person refuses to deliver them, on a motion supported by an affidavit, the person may be attached and imprisoned by the order of the county judge until the person makes delivery. The county judge may issue the order in termtime or vacation. The person against whom the motion is made must be given three days' notice of the motion before the person may be attached.

Acts 1985, 69th Leg., ch. 480, Sec. 1, eff. Sept. 1, 1985.

Amended by:

Acts 2005, 79th Leg., Ch. 711 (S.B. 436), Sec. 1, eff. September 1, 2005.

Sec. 27.005. EDUCATIONAL REQUIREMENTS. (a) For purposes of removal under Chapter 87, Local Government Code, "incompetency" in the case of a justice of the peace includes the failure of the justice to successfully complete:

(1) within one year after the date the justice is first elected:

(A) an 80-hour course in the performance of the justice's duties; and

(B) the course described by Article 17.024(a)(1), Code of Criminal Procedure;

(2) each following year, a 20-hour course in the performance of the justice's duties, including not less than 10 hours of instruction regarding substantive, procedural, and evidentiary law in civil matters; and

(3) each following state fiscal biennium, the course described by Article 17.024(a)(2), Code of Criminal Procedure.

(b) The courses may be completed in an accredited state-supported school of higher education.

(c) A course described by Subsection (a)(1)(A) may include a course described by Subsection (a)(1)(B).

Acts 1985, 69th Leg., ch. 480, Sec. 1, eff. Sept. 1, 1985. Amended by Acts 1989, 71st Leg., ch. 802, Sec. 1, eff. Sept. 1, 1989; Acts 2001, 77th Leg., ch. 147, Sec. 1, eff. Sept. 1, 2001.

Amended by:

Acts 2011, 82nd Leg., 1st C.S., Ch. 3 (H.B. 79), Sec. 5.01(a), eff. January 1, 2012.

Acts 2021, 87th Leg., 2nd C.S., Ch. 11 (S.B. 6), Sec. 15, eff. January 1, 2022.

Sec. 27.006. COLLECTING DEBT FOR ANOTHER; OFFENSE. (a) A justice commits an offense if the justice:

(1) accepts for collection or undertakes the collection of a claim for a debt for another, unless the justice acts under a law that prescribes the duties of the justice; or

(2) accepts compensation not prescribed by law for accepting for collection or undertaking the collection of a claim for debt for another.

(b) An offense under Subsection (a) is a misdemeanor punishable by a fine of not less than \$200 or more than \$500.

(c) In addition to the fine, the justice may be removed from office.

(d) This section does not prohibit a justice who is authorized by law to act for others in the collection of debts from undertaking to collect a debt for another if the amount of the debt is beyond the jurisdiction of the justice court.

Added by Acts 1993, 73rd Leg., ch. 268, Sec. 9, eff. Sept. 1, 1993.

SUBCHAPTER B. JURISDICTION AND POWERS

Sec. 27.031. JURISDICTION.

(a) In addition to the jurisdiction and powers provided by the constitution and other law, the justice court has original jurisdiction of:

(1) civil matters in which exclusive jurisdiction is not in the district or county court and in which the amount in

controversy is not more than \$20,000, exclusive of interest;

(2) cases of forcible entry and detainer; and

(3) foreclosure of mortgages and enforcement of liens on personal property in cases in which the amount in controversy is otherwise within the justice court's jurisdiction.

(b) A justice court does not have jurisdiction of:

(1) a suit in behalf of the state to recover a penalty, forfeiture, or escheat;

(2) a suit for divorce;

(3) a suit to recover damages for slander or defamation of character;

(4) a suit for trial of title to land; or

(5) a suit for the enforcement of a lien on land.

(c) A justice court has concurrent jurisdiction with a municipal court in cases that arise in the municipality's extraterritorial jurisdiction and that arise under an ordinance of the municipality applicable to the extraterritorial jurisdiction under Section [216.902](#), Local Government Code.

(d) A corporation need not be represented by an attorney in justice court.

(e) A justice court has concurrent jurisdiction with a district court and a municipal court of record over expunction proceedings relating to the arrest of a person for an offense punishable by fine only.

Acts 1985, 69th Leg., ch. 480, Sec. 1, eff. Sept. 1, 1985. Amended by Acts 1987, 70th Leg., ch. 745, Sec. 2, eff. June 20, 1987; Acts 1991, 72nd Leg., ch. 776, Sec. 2, eff. Sept. 1, 1991.

Amended by:

Acts 2007, 80th Leg., R.S., Ch. 383 (S.B. [618](#)), Sec. 2, eff. September 1, 2007.

Acts 2007, 80th Leg., R.S., Ch. 612 (H.B. [413](#)), Sec. 12, eff. September 1, 2007.

Acts 2007, 80th Leg., R.S., Ch. 1149 (S.B. [1119](#)), Sec. 2, eff. September 1, 2007.

Acts 2009, 81st Leg., R.S., Ch. 87 (S.B. [1969](#)), Sec. 27.001(18), eff. September 1, 2009.

Acts 2017, 85th Leg., R.S., Ch. 1149 (H.B. [557](#)), Sec. 6, eff.

September 1, 2017.

Acts 2019, 86th Leg., R.S., Ch. 372 (H.B. [1631](#)), Sec. 3, eff. June 2, 2019.

Acts 2019, 86th Leg., R.S., Ch. 696 (S.B. [2342](#)), Sec. 32, eff. September 1, 2020.

Sec. 27.032. EXTRAORDINARY REMEDIES. A justice of the peace may issue writs of attachment, garnishment, and sequestration within the justice's jurisdiction in the same manner as judges and clerks of the district and county courts.

Acts 1985, 69th Leg., ch. 480, Sec. 1, eff. Sept. 1, 1985.

Sec. 27.033. OTHER POWERS. A justice of the peace may:

(1) exercise jurisdiction over other matters cognizable before a justice of the peace under any law of this state; and

(2) proceed with all unfinished business of the office as if the business had been originally begun before that justice.

Acts 1985, 69th Leg., ch. 480, Sec. 1, eff. Sept. 1, 1985.

Sec. 27.034. DEED RESTRICTION JURISDICTION. (a) A justice court has jurisdiction of suits relating to enforcement of a deed restriction of a residential subdivision that does not concern a structural change to a dwelling.

(b) The petitioner in a dispute concerning a deed restriction shall present as evidence at the first hearing in the dispute:

(1) a certified copy of the deed or other document that establishes the restriction on the property; and

(2) other documents necessary to demonstrate that the restriction applies to the property in dispute.

(c) In a dispute concerning a deed restriction, a justice of the peace may order any alternative method of dispute resolution provided by Title 7, Civil Practice and Remedies Code.

(d) The jurisdiction provided by this section is concurrent with the jurisdiction of the district court.

(e) A justice court has jurisdiction of suits under this

section regardless of the amount in controversy.

(f) In a dispute concerning a deed restriction, a justice of the peace may consolidate disputes relating to the same issues and parties.

(g) An appeal under this section is by trial de novo.

(h) In this section, "deed restriction" means one or more restrictive covenants contained or incorporated by reference in a properly recorded deed, map, plat, replat, declaration, or other instrument filed in the real property records, map records, or deed records of the county in which the property is located.

(i) In this section, a "dwelling" does not include an external structure such as a carport, fence, storage building, or unattached garage.

(j) Nothing in this section authorizes a justice of the peace to grant a writ of injunction.

Added by Acts 1995, 74th Leg., ch. 1022, Sec. 1, eff. June 17, 1995.

Amended by Acts 1997, 75th Leg., ch. 136, Sec. 1, eff. May 19, 1997;

Acts 1999, 76th Leg., ch. 672, Sec. 1, eff. June 18, 1999.

SUBCHAPTER C. CONDUCTING COURT AND INQUESTS

Sec. 27.051. TERMS OF COURT; PLACE FOR HOLDING COURT. (a) Each justice shall hold a term of court for civil business once each month and may transact such business out of termtime as is authorized by law.

(b) Each justice shall hold the regular term of court at the justice's office at times prescribed by the commissioners court. The commissioners court shall set the time and place for holding justice court.

(c) A justice may hold court from day to day until all business is disposed of or may adjourn the court or trial of a case to a particular day.

(d) If the regular term does not begin on the day set by law, the court is considered adjourned until its next regular term.

(e) If the justice precinct in which the courthouse is located has more than 75,000 inhabitants, the commissioners court shall provide and furnish a suitable place in the courthouse for the

justice of that precinct to hold court.

(f) A justice of the peace of a precinct in a county with a population of less than 30,000 may hold court in the county courthouse or another facility provided under Section 292.002(a), Local Government Code, for that purpose. If requested by the justice, the commissioners court of the county may provide and furnish a suitable place in the courthouse or another facility provided under Section 292.002(a), Local Government Code, for the justice to hold court.

Acts 1985, 69th Leg., ch. 480, Sec. 1, eff. Sept. 1, 1985. Amended by Acts 1989, 71st Leg., ch. 1223, Sec. 1, eff. June 16, 1989; Acts 1993, 73rd Leg., ch. 825, Sec. 2, eff. Sept. 1, 1993.

Sec. 27.0515. LOCATION FOR COURT PROCEEDINGS AND TERMS AND SESSIONS OF COURT FOLLOWING CERTAIN DISASTERS.

(a) Notwithstanding any other law, if a disaster, as defined by Section 418.004, precludes a justice court from conducting its proceedings at a location in the court's precinct or in the county seat of that county, the presiding judge of the administrative judicial region in which the county is located, with the approval of the justice of the affected justice court, may designate for the proceedings an alternate location:

(1) in the county; or

(2) outside the county at the location the presiding judge determines is closest in proximity to the court's precinct that allows the court to safely and practicably conduct its proceedings, provided the presiding judge of the administrative judicial region for the designated location approves if that presiding judge is not the presiding judge making the designation.

(b) Notwithstanding any other law, if a disaster, as defined by Section 418.004, precludes a justice court from holding its terms in accordance with the times prescribed by the commissioners court, the presiding judge of the administrative judicial region, with the approval of the justice of the affected justice court, may designate the terms and sessions of court.

Added by Acts 2019, 86th Leg., R.S., Ch. 507 (S.B. 40), Sec. 12, eff. June 7, 2019.

Sec. 27.052. VACANCY OR ABSENCE. If the office of justice of the peace is vacant in a precinct or if the justice is absent or unable or unwilling to perform his duties, the nearest justice in the county may temporarily perform the duties of the office.

Acts 1985, 69th Leg., ch. 480, Sec. 1, eff. Sept. 1, 1985.

Sec. 27.054. EXCHANGE OF BENCHES. (a) A justice of the peace may hold court for any other justice in any county at the request of that justice.

(b) The justices of any county may exchange benches for a period not to exceed five days if they consider it expedient.

(c) A justice who exchanges benches with another justice is not entitled to receive compensation from the commissioners court of the county in which the regular justice serves.

Acts 1985, 69th Leg., ch. 480, Sec. 1, eff. Sept. 1, 1985.

Amended by:

Acts 2005, 79th Leg., Ch. 1164 (H.B. [3441](#)), Sec. 1, eff. September 1, 2005.

The following section was amended by the 89th Legislature. Pending publication of the current statutes, see H.B. [1610](#), 89th Legislature, Regular Session, for amendments affecting the following section.

Sec. 27.0545. EXCHANGE OF BENCHES: INQUESTS. (a) If a justice of the peace or the county judge of a county to which Subchapter [A](#), Chapter [49](#), Code of Criminal Procedure, applies is not available to conduct an inquest into a person's death occurring in the county, the justice of the peace of the precinct in which the death occurred or the county judge may request a justice of the peace of another county to which that subchapter applies to conduct the inquest.

(b) A justice of the peace who on request conducts an inquest under this section shall, not later than the fifth day after the date the inquest is initiated, transfer all information related to the inquest to the justice of the peace of the precinct in which the death occurred for final disposition of the matter.

(c) A justice of the peace who conducts an inquest under this section is not entitled to receive from the commissioners court of the county in which the death occurred any compensation, other than mileage, for conducting the inquest.

Added by Acts 2017, 85th Leg., R.S., Ch. 84 (H.B. 799), Sec. 2, eff. September 1, 2017.

Sec. 27.055. SPECIAL AND TEMPORARY JUSTICES. (a) If a justice of the peace is disqualified from a civil case, is sick, or is absent from the precinct, the parties may agree on a person to try the case. If the parties fail to agree at the first term of the court after service is perfected, the county judge shall, on application of the justice or either party, appoint a qualified person to try the case. The disqualification, absence, or illness of the justice and the selection by agreement or appointment of another person to try the case shall be noted on the docket of the justice.

(b) If a justice is temporarily unable to perform official duties because of absence, recusal, illness, injury, or other disability, the county judge, on the judge's own motion or at the request of the justice of the peace, may appoint a qualified person to serve as temporary justice for the duration of the absence of the justice of the peace from the bench. The commissioners court shall compensate the temporary justice by the day, week, or month in an amount equal to the compensation of the regular justice. If the temporary justice is also serving as a justice of the peace in another justice precinct in the county, the commissioners court may authorize reimbursement for the mileage expenses incurred in performing the official duties of the temporary justice's appointment, notwithstanding Chapter 152, Local Government Code. A temporary justice has all the rights and powers of the justice of the peace while serving in that capacity but may not make personnel decisions about, or significant changes in, the justice of the peace's office.

(c) In this section, "qualified person" means a person who has served as a justice of the peace, county judge, or the judge of a county court at law for not less than four years and who has not been

convicted of a criminal offense that involves moral turpitude.

(d) A person appointed under Subsection (b) or (f) may reside in a county other than the county in which the person is appointed as a temporary justice of the peace.

(e) The county judge may appoint any qualified voter under Section [11.002](#), Election Code, who has experience and knowledge relevant to judicial or justice court processes and procedures and is approved by the county judge and a justice of the peace in the county, to serve as a temporary justice of the peace if the judge cannot find a qualified person who agrees to serve under this section.

(f) In a county that has a population of more than 800,000 and that has not more than five justices of the peace, the county judge may appoint a qualified person to serve as a temporary justice of the peace to hold court when necessary to dispose of accumulated business in the precinct. The county judge may designate the local administrative statutory county court judge to act on behalf of the county judge in making the appointment under this subsection.

(g) This subsection applies to a county with a population of at least 135,000 but not more than 145,000, with territory less than 940 square miles that includes a state park, and with not more than two justice precincts provided that at least one of the precincts contains all or part of a municipality with a population of at least 195,000 but not more than 205,000. The county judge of a county to which this subsection applies may appoint a qualified person to serve as a temporary justice of the peace for the precinct within which a municipality or part of a municipality is located to hold court and perform the duties of the justice when necessary to dispose of accumulated business in the precinct.

Acts 1985, 69th Leg., ch. 480, Sec. 1, eff. Sept. 1, 1985. Amended by Acts 1995, 74th Leg., ch. 716, Sec. 1, eff. Sept. 1, 1995.

Amended by:

Acts 2005, 79th Leg., Ch. 1326 (H.B. [3519](#)), Sec. 1, eff. September 1, 2005.

Acts 2015, 84th Leg., R.S., Ch. 1182 (S.B. [1139](#)), Sec. 7.01, eff. September 1, 2015.

Acts 2017, 85th Leg., R.S., Ch. 236 (H.B. [431](#)), Sec. 1, eff.

May 29, 2017.

Acts 2019, 86th Leg., R.S., Ch. 1151 (H.B. [3081](#)), Sec. 1, eff. September 1, 2019.

Acts 2021, 87th Leg., R.S., Ch. 343 (H.B. [2430](#)), Sec. 1, eff. September 1, 2021.

Acts 2023, 88th Leg., R.S., Ch. 644 (H.B. [4559](#)), Sec. 35, eff. September 1, 2023.

Sec. 27.056. CLERK. (a) Each justice of the peace may designate one or more persons to serve as clerk of the justice court.

(b) The clerk may administer oaths and affidavits and make certificates and affix the court's seal to those certificates.

(c) The clerk shall:

(1) maintain central docket records for all cases filed in the justice court;

(2) maintain an index of all court judgments for cases arising in the justice court; and

(3) perform the other duties required by law and assist the judge in handling matters before the court.

Added by Acts 1989, 71st Leg., ch. 802, Sec. 2, eff. Sept. 1, 1989.

Amended by Acts 1995, 74th Leg., ch. 96, Sec. 1, eff. Sept. 1, 1995.

Sec. 27.057. CITATION. A clerk of a justice court may issue citation in the manner provided for justices of the peace by the Texas Rules of Civil Procedure.

Added by Acts 1989, 71st Leg., ch. 802, Sec. 3, eff. Sept. 1, 1989.

Sec. 27.058. CIVIL DOCKET. Information in the civil docket of a justice of the peace may be processed and stored by the use of electronic data processing equipment, at the discretion of the justice.

Added by Acts 1991, 72nd Leg., ch. 776, Sec. 3, eff. Sept. 1, 1991.

Sec. 27.059. JUSTICE OF THE PEACE SEAL. (a) The commissioners court shall furnish to each justice of the peace a seal that has a star with five points in the center. The seal must

also have "Justice Court, _____ County, Texas" and any applicable precinct number on it.

(b) The seal may be attached to all process other than subpoenas issued out of the justice court and may be used to authenticate the official acts of the justice clerk and the justice of the peace.

(c) The seal may be affixed by a seal press or stamp that embosses or prints the seal.

Added by Acts 1991, 72nd Leg., ch. 747, Sec. 1, eff. Sept. 1, 1991.

Renumbered from Sec. 27.058 by Acts 1991, 72nd Leg., 1st C.S., ch. 14, Sec. 8.01(12), eff. Nov. 12, 1991.

Sec. 27.060. SMALL CLAIMS. (a) A justice court shall conduct proceedings in a small claims case, as that term is defined by the supreme court, in accordance with rules of civil procedure promulgated by the supreme court to ensure the fair, expeditious, and inexpensive resolution of small claims cases.

(b) Except as provided by Subsection (c), rules of the supreme court must provide that:

(1) if both parties appear, the judge shall proceed to hear the case;

(2) formal pleadings other than the statement are not required;

(3) the judge shall hear the testimony of the parties and the witnesses that the parties produce and shall consider the other evidence offered;

(4) the hearing is informal, with the sole objective being to dispense speedy justice between the parties;

(5) discovery is limited to that considered appropriate and permitted by the judge; and

(6) the judge shall develop the facts of the case, and for that purpose may question a witness or party and may summon any party to appear as a witness as the judge considers necessary to a correct judgment and speedy disposition of the case.

(c) The rules of the supreme court must provide specific procedures for an action by:

(1) an assignee of a claim or other person seeking to

bring an action on an assigned claim;

(2) a person primarily engaged in the business of lending money at interest; or

(3) a collection agency or collection agent.

(d) The rules adopted by the supreme court may not:

(1) require that a party in a case be represented by an attorney;

(2) be so complex that a reasonable person without legal training would have difficulty understanding or applying the rules; or

(3) require that discovery rules adopted under the Texas Rules of Civil Procedure or the Texas Rules of Evidence be applied except to the extent the justice of the peace hearing the case determines that the rules must be followed to ensure that the proceeding is fair to all parties.

(e) A committee established by the supreme court to recommend rules to be adopted under this section must include justices of the peace.

Added by Acts 2011, 82nd Leg., 1st C.S., Ch. 3 (H.B. 79), Sec. 5.02, eff. August 31, 2013.

Sec. 27.061. RULES OF ADMINISTRATION. The justices of the peace in each county shall, by majority vote, adopt local rules of administration.

Added by Acts 2011, 82nd Leg., 1st C.S., Ch. 3 (H.B. 79), Sec. 5.03, eff. January 1, 2012.