

GOVERNMENT CODE
TITLE 2. JUDICIAL BRANCH
SUBTITLE D. JUDICIAL PERSONNEL AND OFFICIALS
CHAPTER 54A. ASSOCIATE JUDGES

SUBCHAPTER A. CRIMINAL ASSOCIATE JUDGES

Sec. 54A.001. APPLICABILITY. This subchapter applies to a district court or a statutory county court that hears criminal cases.

Added by Acts 2011, 82nd Leg., 1st C.S., Ch. 3 (H.B. 79), Sec. 6.01, eff. January 1, 2012.

Sec. 54A.002. APPOINTMENT. (a) A judge of a court subject to this subchapter may appoint a full-time or part-time associate judge to perform the duties authorized by this subchapter if the commissioners court of the county in which the court has jurisdiction has authorized the creation of an associate judge position.

(b) If a court has jurisdiction in more than one county, an associate judge appointed by that court may serve only in a county in which the commissioners court has authorized the appointment.

(c) If more than one court in a county is subject to this subchapter, the commissioners court may authorize the appointment of an associate judge for each court or may authorize one or more associate judges to share service with two or more courts.

(d) If an associate judge serves more than one court, the associate judge's appointment must be made as established by local rule, but in no event by less than a vote of two-thirds of the judges under whom the associate judge serves.

Added by Acts 2011, 82nd Leg., 1st C.S., Ch. 3 (H.B. 79), Sec. 6.01, eff. January 1, 2012.

Sec. 54A.003. QUALIFICATIONS. To qualify for appointment as an associate judge under this subchapter, a person must:

(1) be a resident of this state and one of the counties the person will serve;

(2) have been licensed to practice law in this state for at least four years;

(3) not have been removed from office by impeachment, by the supreme court, by the governor on address to the legislature, by a tribunal reviewing a recommendation of the State Commission on Judicial Conduct, or by the legislature's abolition of the judge's court; and

(4) not have resigned from office after having received notice that formal proceedings by the State Commission on Judicial Conduct had been instituted as provided by Section 33.022 and before final disposition of the proceedings.

Added by Acts 2011, 82nd Leg., 1st C.S., Ch. 3 (H.B. 79), Sec. 6.01, eff. January 1, 2012.

Sec. 54A.004. COMPENSATION. (a) An associate judge shall be paid a salary determined by the commissioners court of the county in which the associate judge serves.

(b) If an associate judge serves in more than one county, the associate judge shall be paid a salary as determined by agreement of the commissioners courts of the counties in which the associate judge serves.

(c) The associate judge's salary is paid from the county fund available for payment of officers' salaries.

Added by Acts 2011, 82nd Leg., 1st C.S., Ch. 3 (H.B. 79), Sec. 6.01, eff. January 1, 2012.

Sec. 54A.005. TERMINATION. (a) An associate judge who serves a single court serves at the will of the judge of that court.

(b) The employment of an associate judge who serves more than two courts may only be terminated by a majority vote of all the judges of the courts the associate judge serves.

(c) The employment of an associate judge who serves two courts may be terminated by either of the judges of the courts the associate judge serves.

(d) To terminate an associate judge's employment, the appropriate judges must sign a written order of termination. The order must state:

(1) the associate judge's name and state bar identification number;

(2) each court ordering termination; and

(3) the date the associate judge's employment ends.

Added by Acts 2011, 82nd Leg., 1st C.S., Ch. 3 (H.B. 79), Sec. 6.01, eff. January 1, 2012.

Sec. 54A.006. PROCEEDINGS THAT MAY BE REFERRED. (a) A judge may refer to an associate judge any matter arising out of a criminal case involving:

(1) a negotiated plea of guilty or no contest before the court;

(2) a bond forfeiture;

(3) a pretrial motion;

(4) a writ of habeas corpus;

(5) an examining trial;

(6) an occupational driver's license;

(7) an appeal of an administrative driver's license revocation hearing;

(8) a civil commitment matter under Subtitle C, Title 7, Health and Safety Code;

(9) setting, adjusting, or revoking bond;

(10) the issuance of search warrants, including a search warrant under Article 18.02(a)(10), Code of Criminal Procedure, notwithstanding Article 18.01(c), Code of Criminal Procedure; and

(11) any other matter the judge considers necessary and proper.

(b) An associate judge may accept an agreed plea of guilty or no contest from a defendant charged with misdemeanor, felony, or both misdemeanor and felony offenses and may assess punishment if a plea agreement is announced on the record between the defendant and the state.

(c) An associate judge has all of the powers of a magistrate under the laws of this state and may administer an oath for any purpose.

(d) An associate judge may select a jury. Except as

provided in Subsection (b), an associate judge may not preside over a trial on the merits, whether or not the trial is before a jury. Added by Acts 2011, 82nd Leg., 1st C.S., Ch. 3 (H.B. 79), Sec. 6.01, eff. January 1, 2012.

Amended by:

Acts 2019, 86th Leg., R.S., Ch. 467 (H.B. 4170), Sec. 8.005, eff. September 1, 2019.

Sec. 54A.007. ORDER OF REFERRAL. (a) To refer one or more cases to an associate judge, a judge must issue a written order of referral that specifies the associate judge's duties.

(b) An order of referral may:

(1) limit the powers of the associate judge and direct the associate judge to report only on specific issues, do particular acts, or receive and report on evidence only;

(2) set the time and place for the hearing;

(3) prescribe a closing date for the hearing;

(4) provide a date for filing the associate judge's findings;

(5) designate proceedings for more than one case over which the associate judge shall preside;

(6) direct the associate judge to call the court's docket; and

(7) set forth general powers and limitations or authority of the associate judge applicable to any case referred.

Added by Acts 2011, 82nd Leg., 1st C.S., Ch. 3 (H.B. 79), Sec. 6.01, eff. January 1, 2012.

Sec. 54A.008. POWERS. (a) Except as limited by an order of referral, an associate judge to whom a case is referred may:

(1) conduct hearings;

(2) hear evidence;

(3) compel production of relevant evidence;

(4) rule on the admissibility of evidence;

(5) issue summons for the appearance of witnesses;

(6) examine a witness;

(7) swear a witness for a hearing;

- (8) make findings of fact on evidence;
- (9) formulate conclusions of law;
- (10) rule on pretrial motions;
- (11) recommend the rulings, orders, or judgment to be made in a case;
- (12) regulate proceedings in a hearing;
- (13) order the attachment of a witness or party who fails to obey a subpoena;
- (14) accept a plea of guilty from a defendant charged with misdemeanor, felony, or both misdemeanor and felony offenses;
- (15) select a jury;
- (16) notwithstanding Article 18.01(c), Code of Criminal Procedure, issue a search warrant, including a search warrant under Article 18.02(a)(10), Code of Criminal Procedure; and
- (17) take action as necessary and proper for the efficient performance of the duties required by the order of referral.

(b) An associate judge may not enter a ruling on any issue of law or fact if that ruling could result in dismissal or require dismissal of a pending criminal prosecution, but the associate judge may make findings, conclusions, and recommendations on those issues.

(c) Except as limited by an order of referral, an associate judge who is appointed by a district or statutory county court judge and to whom a case is referred may accept a plea of guilty or nolo contendere in a misdemeanor case for a county criminal court. The associate judge shall forward any fee or fine collected for the misdemeanor offense to the county clerk.

(d) An associate judge may, in the interest of justice, refer a case back to the referring court regardless of whether a timely objection to the associate judge hearing the trial on the merits or presiding at a jury trial has been made by any party.

Added by Acts 2011, 82nd Leg., 1st C.S., Ch. 3 (H.B. 79), Sec. 6.01, eff. January 1, 2012.

Amended by:

Acts 2019, 86th Leg., R.S., Ch. 467 (H.B. 4170), Sec. 8.006, eff. September 1, 2019.

Sec. 54A.009. ATTENDANCE OF BAILIFF. A bailiff shall attend a hearing by an associate judge if directed by the referring court.

Added by Acts 2011, 82nd Leg., 1st C.S., Ch. 3 (H.B. 79), Sec. 6.01, eff. January 1, 2012.

Sec. 54A.010. COURT REPORTER. At the request of a party, the court shall provide a court reporter to record the proceedings before the associate judge.

Added by Acts 2011, 82nd Leg., 1st C.S., Ch. 3 (H.B. 79), Sec. 6.01, eff. January 1, 2012.

Sec. 54A.011. WITNESS. (a) A witness appearing before an associate judge is subject to the penalties for perjury provided by law.

(b) A referring court may issue attachment against and may fine or imprison a witness whose failure to appear after being summoned or whose refusal to answer questions has been certified to the court.

Added by Acts 2011, 82nd Leg., 1st C.S., Ch. 3 (H.B. 79), Sec. 6.01, eff. January 1, 2012.

Sec. 54A.012. PAPERS TRANSMITTED TO JUDGE. At the conclusion of the proceedings, an associate judge shall transmit to the referring court any papers relating to the case, including the associate judge's findings, conclusions, orders, recommendations, or other action taken.

Added by Acts 2011, 82nd Leg., 1st C.S., Ch. 3 (H.B. 79), Sec. 6.01, eff. January 1, 2012.

Sec. 54A.013. JUDICIAL ACTION. (a) Not later than the 30th day after the date an action is taken by an associate judge, a referring court may modify, correct, reject, reverse, or recommit for further information the action taken by the associate judge.

(b) If the court does not modify, correct, reject, reverse, or recommit an action to the associate judge, the action becomes the

decree of the court.

Added by Acts 2011, 82nd Leg., 1st C.S., Ch. 3 (H.B. 79), Sec. 6.01, eff. January 1, 2012.

Sec. 54A.014. JUDICIAL IMMUNITY. An associate judge has the same judicial immunity as a district judge.

Added by Acts 2011, 82nd Leg., 1st C.S., Ch. 3 (H.B. 79), Sec. 6.01, eff. January 1, 2012.

SUBCHAPTER B. CIVIL ASSOCIATE JUDGES

Sec. 54A.101. APPLICABILITY. This subchapter applies to a district court or a statutory county court that is assigned civil cases.

Added by Acts 2011, 82nd Leg., 1st C.S., Ch. 3 (H.B. 79), Sec. 6.01, eff. January 1, 2012.

Sec. 54A.102. APPOINTMENT. (a) A judge of a court subject to this subchapter may appoint a full-time or part-time associate judge to perform the duties authorized by this subchapter if the commissioners court of the county in which the court has jurisdiction has authorized the creation of an associate judge position.

(b) If a district court has jurisdiction in more than one county, an associate judge appointed by that court may serve only in a county in which the commissioners court has authorized the appointment.

(c) If more than one court in a county is subject to this subchapter, the commissioners court may authorize the appointment of an associate judge for each court or may authorize one or more associate judges to share service with two or more courts.

(d) If an associate judge serves more than one court, the associate judge's appointment must be made as established by local rule, but in no event by less than a vote of two-thirds of the judges under whom the associate judge serves.

Added by Acts 2011, 82nd Leg., 1st C.S., Ch. 3 (H.B. 79), Sec. 6.01, eff. January 1, 2012.

Sec. 54A.103. QUALIFICATIONS. To qualify for appointment as an associate judge under this subchapter, a person must:

(1) be a resident of this state and one of the counties the person will serve;

(2) have been licensed to practice law in this state for at least four years;

(3) not have been removed from office by impeachment, by the supreme court, by the governor on address to the legislature, by a tribunal reviewing a recommendation of the State Commission on Judicial Conduct, or by the legislature's abolition of the judge's court; and

(4) not have resigned from office after having received notice that formal proceedings by the State Commission on Judicial Conduct had been instituted as provided in Section 33.022 and before final disposition of the proceedings.

Added by Acts 2011, 82nd Leg., 1st C.S., Ch. 3 (H.B. 79), Sec. 6.01, eff. January 1, 2012.

Sec. 54A.104. COMPENSATION. (a) An associate judge shall be paid a salary determined by the commissioners court of the county in which the associate judge serves.

(b) If an associate judge serves in more than one county, the associate judge shall be paid a salary as determined by agreement of the commissioners courts of the counties in which the associate judge serves.

(c) The associate judge's salary is paid from the county fund available for payment of officers' salaries.

Added by Acts 2011, 82nd Leg., 1st C.S., Ch. 3 (H.B. 79), Sec. 6.01, eff. January 1, 2012.

Sec. 54A.105. TERMINATION. (a) An associate judge who serves a single court serves at the will of the judge of that court.

(b) The employment of an associate judge who serves more than two courts may only be terminated by a majority vote of all the judges of the courts the associate judge serves.

(c) The employment of an associate judge who serves two

courts may be terminated by either of the judges of the courts the associate judge serves.

(d) To terminate an associate judge's employment, the appropriate judges must sign a written order of termination. The order must state:

(1) the associate judge's name and state bar identification number;

(2) each court ordering termination; and

(3) the date the associate judge's employment ends.

Added by Acts 2011, 82nd Leg., 1st C.S., Ch. 3 (H.B. 79), Sec. 6.01, eff. January 1, 2012.

Sec. 54A.106. CASES THAT MAY BE REFERRED. (a) Except as provided by this section, a judge of a court may refer any civil case or portion of a civil case to an associate judge for resolution.

(b) Unless a party files a written objection to the associate judge hearing a trial on the merits, the judge may refer the trial to the associate judge. A trial on the merits is any final adjudication from which an appeal may be taken to a court of appeals.

(c) A party must file an objection to an associate judge hearing a trial on the merits or presiding at a jury trial not later than the 10th day after the date the party receives notice that the associate judge will hear the trial. If an objection is filed, the referring court shall hear the trial on the merits or preside at a jury trial.

Added by Acts 2011, 82nd Leg., 1st C.S., Ch. 3 (H.B. 79), Sec. 6.01, eff. January 1, 2012.

Sec. 54A.107. METHODS OF REFERRAL. (a) A case may be referred to an associate judge by an order of referral in a specific case or by an omnibus order.

(b) The order of referral may limit the powers or duties of an associate judge.

Added by Acts 2011, 82nd Leg., 1st C.S., Ch. 3 (H.B. 79), Sec. 6.01, eff. January 1, 2012.

Sec. 54A.108. POWERS. (a) Except as limited by an order of referral, an associate judge may:

- (1) conduct hearings;
- (2) hear evidence;
- (3) compel production of relevant evidence;
- (4) rule on the admissibility of evidence;
- (5) issue summons for the appearance of witnesses;
- (6) examine a witness;
- (7) swear a witness for a hearing;
- (8) make findings of fact on evidence;
- (9) formulate conclusions of law;
- (10) rule on pretrial motions;
- (11) recommend the rulings, orders, or judgment to be made in a case;
- (12) regulate proceedings in a hearing;
- (13) order the attachment of a witness or party who fails to obey a subpoena; and
- (14) take action as necessary and proper for the efficient performance of the duties required by the order of referral.

(b) An associate judge may, in the interest of justice, refer a case back to the referring court regardless of whether a timely objection to the associate judge hearing the trial on the merits or presiding at a jury trial has been made by any party.

Added by Acts 2011, 82nd Leg., 1st C.S., Ch. 3 (H.B. 79), Sec. 6.01, eff. January 1, 2012.

Sec. 54A.109. WITNESS. (a) A witness appearing before an associate judge is subject to the penalties for perjury provided by law.

- (b) A referring court may fine or imprison a witness who:
- (1) failed to appear before an associate judge after being summoned; or
 - (2) improperly refused to answer questions if the refusal has been certified to the court by the associate judge.

Added by Acts 2011, 82nd Leg., 1st C.S., Ch. 3 (H.B. 79), Sec. 6.01,

eff. January 1, 2012.

Sec. 54A.110. COURT REPORTER; RECORD. (a) A court reporter may be provided during a hearing held by an associate judge appointed under this subchapter. A court reporter is required to be provided when the associate judge presides over a jury trial.

(b) A party, the associate judge, or the referring court may provide for a reporter during the hearing if one is not otherwise provided.

(c) Except as provided by Subsection (a), in the absence of a court reporter or on agreement of the parties, the record may be preserved by any means approved by the associate judge.

(d) Repealed by Acts 2021, 87th Leg., R.S., Ch. 472 (S.B. 41), Sec. 5.01(c)(15), eff. January 1, 2022.

(e) On appeal of the associate judge's report or proposed order, the referring court may consider testimony or other evidence in the record if the record is taken by a court reporter.

Added by Acts 2011, 82nd Leg., 1st C.S., Ch. 3 (H.B. 79), Sec. 6.01, eff. January 1, 2012.

Amended by:

Acts 2021, 87th Leg., R.S., Ch. 472 (S.B. 41), Sec. 5.01(c)(15), eff. January 1, 2022.

Sec. 54A.111. NOTICE OF DECISION; APPEAL. (a) After hearing a matter, an associate judge shall notify each attorney participating in the hearing of the associate judge's decision. An associate judge's decision has the same force and effect as an order of the referring court unless a party appeals the decision as provided by Subsection (b).

(b) To appeal an associate judge's decision, other than the issuance of a temporary restraining order or temporary injunction, a party must file an appeal in the referring court not later than the seventh day after the date the party receives notice of the decision under Subsection (a).

(c) A temporary restraining order issued by an associate judge is effective immediately and expires on the 15th day after the date of issuance unless, after a hearing, the order is modified or

extended by the associate judge or referring judge.

(d) A temporary injunction issued by an associate judge is effective immediately and continues during the pendency of a trial unless, after a hearing, the order is modified by a referring judge.

(e) A matter appealed to the referring court shall be tried de novo and is limited to only those matters specified in the appeal. Except on leave of court, a party may not submit on appeal any additional evidence or pleadings.

Added by Acts 2011, 82nd Leg., 1st C.S., Ch. 3 (H.B. 79), Sec. 6.01, eff. January 1, 2012.

Sec. 54A.112. NOTICE OF RIGHT TO DE NOVO HEARING; WAIVER.

(a) Notice of the right to a de novo hearing before the referring court shall be given to all parties.

(b) The notice may be given:

(1) by oral statement in open court;

(2) by posting inside or outside the courtroom of the referring court; or

(3) as otherwise directed by the referring court.

(c) Before the start of a hearing by an associate judge, a party may waive the right of a de novo hearing before the referring court in writing or on the record.

Added by Acts 2011, 82nd Leg., 1st C.S., Ch. 3 (H.B. 79), Sec. 6.01, eff. January 1, 2012.

Sec. 54A.113. ORDER OF COURT. (a) Pending a de novo hearing before the referring court, a proposed order or judgment of the associate judge is in full force and effect and is enforceable as an order or judgment of the referring court, except for an order providing for the appointment of a receiver.

(b) If a request for a de novo hearing before the referring court is not timely filed or the right to a de novo hearing before the referring court is waived, the proposed order or judgment of the associate judge becomes the order or judgment of the referring court only on the referring court's signing the proposed order or judgment.

(c) An order by an associate judge for the temporary

detention or incarceration of a witness or party shall be presented to the referring court on the day the witness or party is detained or incarcerated. The referring court, without prejudice to the right to a de novo hearing provided by Section [54A.115](#), may approve the temporary detention or incarceration or may order the release of the party or witness, with or without bond, pending a de novo hearing. If the referring court is not immediately available, the associate judge may order the release of the party or witness, with or without bond, pending a de novo hearing or may continue the person's detention or incarceration for not more than 72 hours.

Added by Acts 2011, 82nd Leg., 1st C.S., Ch. 3 (H.B. [79](#)), Sec. 6.01, eff. January 1, 2012.

Sec. 54A.114. JUDICIAL ACTION ON ASSOCIATE JUDGE'S PROPOSED ORDER OR JUDGMENT. Unless a party files a written request for a de novo hearing before the referring court, the referring court may:

(1) adopt, modify, or reject the associate judge's proposed order or judgment;

(2) hear additional evidence; or

(3) recommit the matter to the associate judge for further proceedings.

Added by Acts 2011, 82nd Leg., 1st C.S., Ch. 3 (H.B. [79](#)), Sec. 6.01, eff. January 1, 2012.

Sec. 54A.115. DE NOVO HEARING. (a) A party may request a de novo hearing before the referring court by filing with the clerk of the referring court a written request not later than the seventh working day after the date the party receives notice of the substance of the associate judge's decision as provided by Section [54A.111](#).

(b) A request for a de novo hearing under this section must specify the issues that will be presented to the referring court. The de novo hearing is limited to the specified issues.

(c) Notice of a request for a de novo hearing before the referring court shall be given to the opposing attorney in the manner provided by Rule 21a, Texas Rules of Civil Procedure.

(d) If a request for a de novo hearing before the referring

court is filed by a party, any other party may file a request for a de novo hearing before the referring court not later than the seventh working day after the date the initial request was filed.

(e) The referring court, after notice to the parties, shall hold a de novo hearing not later than the 30th day after the date the initial request for a de novo hearing was filed with the clerk of the referring court.

(f) In the de novo hearing before the referring court, the parties may present witnesses on the issues specified in the request for hearing. The referring court may also consider the record from the hearing before the associate judge, including the charge to and verdict returned by a jury, if the record was taken by a court reporter.

(g) The denial of relief to a party after a de novo hearing under this section or a party's waiver of the right to a de novo hearing before the referring court does not affect the right of a party to file a motion for new trial, a motion for judgment notwithstanding the verdict, or other posttrial motions.

(h) A party may not demand a second jury in a de novo hearing before the referring court if the associate judge's proposed order or judgment resulted from a jury trial.

Added by Acts 2011, 82nd Leg., 1st C.S., Ch. 3 (H.B. 79), Sec. 6.01, eff. January 1, 2012.

Sec. 54A.116. APPELLATE REVIEW. (a) A party's failure to request a de novo hearing before the referring court or a party's waiver of the right to request a de novo hearing before the referring court does not deprive the party of the right to appeal to or request other relief from a court of appeals or the supreme court.

(b) Except as provided by Subsection (c), the date an order or judgment by the referring court is signed is the controlling date for the purposes of appeal to or request for other relief from a court of appeals or the supreme court.

(c) The date an agreed order or a default order is signed by an associate judge is the controlling date for the purpose of an appeal to, or a request for other relief relating to the order from,

a court of appeals or the supreme court.

Added by Acts 2011, 82nd Leg., 1st C.S., Ch. 3 (H.B. 79), Sec. 6.01, eff. January 1, 2012.

Sec. 54A.117. JUDICIAL ACTION. (a) Not later than the 30th day after the date an action is taken by an associate judge, a referring court may modify, correct, reject, reverse, or recommit for further information the action taken by the associate judge.

(b) If the court does not modify, correct, reject, reverse, or recommit an action to the associate judge, the action becomes the decree of the court.

Added by Acts 2011, 82nd Leg., 1st C.S., Ch. 3 (H.B. 79), Sec. 6.01, eff. January 1, 2012.

Sec. 54A.118. JUDICIAL IMMUNITY. An associate judge appointed under this subchapter has the judicial immunity of a district judge.

Added by Acts 2011, 82nd Leg., 1st C.S., Ch. 3 (H.B. 79), Sec. 6.01, eff. January 1, 2012.

SUBCHAPTER C. STATUTORY PROBATE COURT ASSOCIATE JUDGES

Sec. 54A.201. DEFINITION. In this subchapter, "statutory probate court" has the meaning assigned by Chapter 22, Estates Code.

Transferred, redesignated and amended from Government Code, Subchapter G, Chapter 54 by Acts 2011, 82nd Leg., 1st C.S., Ch. 3 (H.B. 79), Sec. 6.02, eff. January 1, 2012.

Amended by:

Acts 2017, 85th Leg., R.S., Ch. 324 (S.B. 1488), Sec. 22.030, eff. September 1, 2017.

Sec. 54A.202. APPLICABILITY. This subchapter applies to a statutory probate court.

Transferred, redesignated and amended from Government Code, Subchapter G, Chapter 54 by Acts 2011, 82nd Leg., 1st C.S., Ch. 3 (H.B. 79), Sec. 6.02, eff. January 1, 2012.

Sec. 54A.203. APPOINTMENT. (a) After obtaining the approval of the commissioners court to create an associate judge position, the judge of a statutory probate court by order may appoint one or more full-time or part-time associate judges to perform the duties authorized by this subchapter.

(b) If a statutory probate court has jurisdiction in more than one county, an associate judge appointed by that court may serve only in a county in which the commissioners court has authorized the appointment.

(c) The commissioners court may authorize the appointment of an associate judge for each court or may authorize one or more associate judges to share service with two or more courts, if more than one statutory probate court exists in a county.

(d) If an associate judge serves more than one court, the associate judge's appointment must be made with the unanimous approval of all the judges under whom the associate judge serves.

(e) An associate judge appointed under this subchapter may serve as an associate judge appointed under Section 574.0085, Health and Safety Code.

Transferred, redesignated and amended from Government Code, Subchapter G, Chapter 54 by Acts 2011, 82nd Leg., 1st C.S., Ch. 3 (H.B. 79), Sec. 6.02, eff. January 1, 2012.

Sec. 54A.204. QUALIFICATIONS. To qualify for appointment as an associate judge under this subchapter, a person must:

(1) be a resident of this state and one of the counties the person will serve;

(2) have been licensed to practice law in this state for at least five years;

(3) not have been removed from office by impeachment, by the supreme court, by the governor on address to the legislature, by a tribunal reviewing a recommendation of the State Commission on Judicial Conduct, or by the legislature's abolition of the judge's court; and

(4) not have resigned from office after having received notice that formal proceedings by the State Commission on

Judicial Conduct had been instituted as provided in Section [33.022](#) and before final disposition of the proceedings.

Transferred, redesignated and amended from Government Code, Subchapter G, Chapter 54 by Acts 2011, 82nd Leg., 1st C.S., Ch. 3 (H.B. [79](#)), Sec. 6.02, eff. January 1, 2012.

Sec. 54A.205. COMPENSATION. (a) An associate judge is entitled to the compensation set by the appointing judge and approved by the commissioners court or commissioners courts of the counties in which the associate judge serves.

(b) If an associate judge serves in more than one county, the associate judge shall be paid a salary as determined by agreement of the commissioners courts of the counties in which the associate judge serves.

(c) Except as provided by Subsection (d), the compensation of the associate judge shall be paid by the county from the county general fund. The compensation must be paid in the same manner that the appointing judge's salary is paid.

(d) On the recommendation of the statutory probate court judges in the county and subject to the approval of the county commissioners court, the county may pay all or part of the compensation of the associate judge from the excess contributions remitted to the county under Section [25.00212](#) and deposited in the contributions fund created under Section [25.00213](#).

Transferred, redesignated and amended from Government Code, Subchapter G, Chapter 54 by Acts 2011, 82nd Leg., 1st C.S., Ch. 3 (H.B. [79](#)), Sec. 6.02, eff. January 1, 2012.

Sec. 54A.206. TERMINATION OF ASSOCIATE JUDGE. (a) An associate judge who serves a single court serves at the will of the judge of that court.

(b) The employment of an associate judge who serves more than two courts may only be terminated by a majority vote of all the judges of the courts that the associate judge serves.

(c) The employment of an associate judge who serves two courts may be terminated by either of the judges of the courts that the associate judge serves.

(d) The appointment of the associate judge terminates if:

(1) the associate judge becomes a candidate for election to public office; or

(2) the commissioners court does not appropriate funds in the county's budget to pay the salary of the associate judge.

(e) If an associate judge serves a single court and the appointing judge vacates the judge's office, the associate judge's employment continues, subject to Subsections (d) and (h), unless the successor appointed or elected judge terminates that employment.

(f) If an associate judge serves two courts and one of the appointing judges vacates the judge's office, the associate judge's employment continues, subject to Subsections (d) and (h), unless the successor appointed or elected judge terminates that employment or the judge of the other court served by the associate judge terminates that employment as provided by Subsection (c).

(g) If an associate judge serves more than two courts and an appointing judge vacates the judge's office, the associate judge's employment continues, subject to Subsections (d) and (h), unless:

(1) if no successor judge has been elected or appointed, the majority of the judges of the other courts the associate judge serves vote to terminate that employment; or

(2) if a successor judge has been elected or appointed, the majority of the judges of the courts the associate judge serves, including the successor judge, vote to terminate that employment as provided by Subsection (b).

(h) Notwithstanding the powers of an associate judge provided by Section [54A.209](#), an associate judge whose employment continues as provided by Subsection (e), (f), or (g) after the judge of a court served by the associate judge vacates the judge's office may perform administrative functions with respect to that court, but may not perform any judicial function, including any power prescribed by Section [54A.209](#), with respect to that court until a successor judge is appointed or elected.

Transferred, redesignated and amended from Government Code, Subchapter G, Chapter 54 by Acts 2011, 82nd Leg., 1st C.S., Ch. 3 (H.B. [79](#)), Sec. 6.02, eff. January 1, 2012.

Sec. 54A.207. CASES THAT MAY BE REFERRED. (a) Except as provided by this section, a judge of a court may refer to an associate judge any aspect of a suit over which the probate court has jurisdiction, including any matter ancillary to the suit.

(b) Unless a party files a written objection to the associate judge hearing a trial on the merits, the judge may refer the trial to the associate judge. A trial on the merits is any final adjudication from which an appeal may be taken to a court of appeals.

(c) A party must file an objection to an associate judge hearing a trial on the merits or presiding at a jury trial not later than the 10th day after the date the party receives notice that the associate judge will hear the trial. If an objection is filed, the referring court shall hear the trial on the merits or preside at a jury trial.

Transferred, redesignated and amended from Government Code, Subchapter G, Chapter 54 by Acts 2011, 82nd Leg., 1st C.S., Ch. 3 (H.B. 79), Sec. 6.02, eff. January 1, 2012.

Sec. 54A.2071. OATH. An associate judge must take the constitutional oath of office required of appointed officers of this state.

Transferred, redesignated and amended from Government Code, Subchapter G, Chapter 54 by Acts 2011, 82nd Leg., 1st C.S., Ch. 3 (H.B. 79), Sec. 6.02, eff. January 1, 2012.

Sec. 54A.208. METHODS OF REFERRAL. (a) A case may be referred to an associate judge by an order of referral in a specific case or by an omnibus order specifying the class and type of cases to be referred.

(b) The order of referral may limit the power or duties of an associate judge.

Transferred, redesignated and amended from Government Code, Subchapter G, Chapter 54 by Acts 2011, 82nd Leg., 1st C.S., Ch. 3 (H.B. 79), Sec. 6.02, eff. January 1, 2012.

Sec. 54A.209. POWERS OF ASSOCIATE JUDGE. (a) Except as limited by an order of referral, an associate judge may:

- (1) conduct a hearing;
- (2) hear evidence;
- (3) compel production of relevant evidence;
- (4) rule on the admissibility of evidence;
- (5) issue a summons for the appearance of witnesses;
- (6) examine a witness;
- (7) swear a witness for a hearing;
- (8) make findings of fact on evidence;
- (9) formulate conclusions of law;
- (10) rule on pretrial motions;
- (11) recommend the rulings, orders, or judgment to be made in a case;
- (12) regulate all proceedings in a hearing before the associate judge;
- (13) take action as necessary and proper for the efficient performance of the duties required by the order of referral;
- (14) order the attachment of a witness or party who fails to obey a subpoena;
- (15) order the detention of a witness or party found guilty of contempt, pending approval by the referring court as provided by Section [54A.214](#);
- (16) without prejudice to the right to a de novo hearing under Section [54A.216](#), render and sign:
 - (A) a final order agreed to in writing as to both form and substance by all parties;
 - (B) a final default order;
 - (C) a temporary order;
 - (D) a final order in a case in which a party files an unrevoked waiver made in accordance with Rule 119, Texas Rules of Civil Procedure, that waives notice to the party of the final hearing or waives the party's appearance at the final hearing;
 - (E) an order specifying that the court clerk shall issue:
 - (i) letters testamentary or of

administration; or

(ii) letters of guardianship; or

(F) an order for inpatient or outpatient mental health, intellectual disability, or chemical dependency services or an order authorizing psychoactive medications; and

(17) sign a final order that includes a waiver of the right to a de novo hearing in accordance with Section [54A.216](#).

(b) An associate judge may, in the interest of justice, refer a case back to the referring court regardless of whether a timely objection to the associate judge hearing the trial on the merits or presiding at a jury trial has been made by any party.

(c) An order described by Subsection (a)(16) that is rendered and signed by an associate judge constitutes an order of the referring court. The judge of the referring court shall sign the order not later than the 30th day after the date the associate judge signs the order.

(d) An answer filed by or on behalf of a party who previously filed a waiver described in Subsection (a)(16)(D) revokes that waiver.

Transferred, redesignated and amended from Government Code, Subchapter G, Chapter 54 by Acts 2011, 82nd Leg., 1st C.S., Ch. 3 (H.B. [79](#)), Sec. 6.02, eff. January 1, 2012.

Amended by:

Acts 2023, 88th Leg., R.S., Ch. 30 (H.B. [446](#)), Sec. 5.01, eff. September 1, 2023.

Sec. 54A.2091. ATTENDANCE OF BAILIFF. A bailiff shall attend a hearing conducted by an associate judge if directed to attend by the referring court.

Transferred, redesignated and amended from Government Code, Subchapter G, Chapter 54 by Acts 2011, 82nd Leg., 1st C.S., Ch. 3 (H.B. [79](#)), Sec. 6.02, eff. January 1, 2012.

Sec. 54A.210. WITNESS. (a) A witness appearing before an associate judge is subject to the penalties for perjury provided by law.

(b) A referring court may issue attachment against and may

fine or imprison a witness whose failure to appear after being summoned or whose refusal to answer questions has been certified to the court.

Transferred, redesignated and amended from Government Code, Subchapter G, Chapter 54 by Acts 2011, 82nd Leg., 1st C.S., Ch. 3 (H.B. 79), Sec. 6.02, eff. January 1, 2012.

Sec. 54A.211. COURT REPORTER; RECORD. (a) A court reporter may be provided during a hearing held by an associate judge appointed under this subchapter. A court reporter is required to be provided when the associate judge presides over a jury trial.

(b) A party, the associate judge, or the referring court may provide for a reporter during the hearing if one is not otherwise provided.

(c) Except as provided by Subsection (a), in the absence of a court reporter or on agreement of the parties, the record may be preserved by any means approved by the associate judge.

(d) The referring court or associate judge may assess the expense of preserving the record as court costs.

(e) On appeal of the associate judge's report or proposed order, the referring court may consider testimony or other evidence in the record if the record is taken by a court reporter.

Transferred, redesignated and amended from Government Code, Subchapter G, Chapter 54 by Acts 2011, 82nd Leg., 1st C.S., Ch. 3 (H.B. 79), Sec. 6.02, eff. January 1, 2012.

Sec. 54A.212. REPORT. (a) The associate judge's report may contain the associate judge's findings, conclusions, or recommendations and may be in the form of a proposed order.

(b) The associate judge shall prepare a report in the form directed by the referring court, including in the form of:

(1) a notation on the referring court's docket sheet or in the court's jacket; or

(2) a proposed order.

(c) After a hearing, the associate judge shall provide the parties participating in the hearing notice of the substance of the associate judge's report, including any proposed order.

(d) Notice may be given to the parties:

(1) in open court, by an oral statement, or by providing a copy of the associate judge's written report, including any proposed order;

(2) by certified mail, return receipt requested;

(3) by facsimile transmission; or

(4) by electronic mail.

(e) There is a rebuttable presumption that notice is received on the date stated on:

(1) the signed return receipt, if notice was provided by certified mail;

(2) the confirmation page produced by the facsimile machine, if notice was provided by facsimile transmission; or

(3) a printout evidencing submission of the electronic mail message, if notice was provided by electronic mail.

(f) After a hearing conducted by an associate judge, the associate judge shall send the associate judge's signed and dated report, including any proposed order, and all other papers relating to the case to the referring court.

Transferred, redesignated and amended from Government Code, Subchapter G, Chapter 54 by Acts 2011, 82nd Leg., 1st C.S., Ch. 3 (H.B. 79), Sec. 6.02, eff. January 1, 2012.

Sec. 54A.213. NOTICE OF RIGHT TO DE NOVO HEARING BEFORE REFERRING COURT. (a) An associate judge shall give all parties notice of the right to a de novo hearing before the referring court.

(b) The notice may be given:

(1) by oral statement in open court;

(2) by posting inside or outside the courtroom of the referring court; or

(3) as otherwise directed by the referring court.

(c) Before the start of a hearing by an associate judge, a party may waive the right to a de novo hearing before the referring court in writing or on the record.

Transferred, redesignated and amended from Government Code, Subchapter G, Chapter 54 by Acts 2011, 82nd Leg., 1st C.S., Ch. 3 (H.B. 79), Sec. 6.02, eff. January 1, 2012.

Sec. 54A.214. ORDER OF COURT. (a) Pending a de novo hearing before the referring court, the decisions and recommendations of the associate judge or a proposed order or judgment of the associate judge has the full force and effect, and is enforceable as, an order or judgment of the referring court, except for an order providing for the appointment of a receiver.

(b) Except as provided by Section 54A.209(c), if a request for a de novo hearing before the referring court is not timely filed or the right to a de novo hearing before the referring court is waived, the decisions and recommendations of the associate judge or the proposed order or judgment of the associate judge becomes the order or judgment of the referring court at the time the judge of the referring court signs the proposed order or judgment.

(c) An order by an associate judge for the temporary detention or incarceration of a witness or party shall be presented to the referring court on the day the witness or party is detained or incarcerated. The referring court, without prejudice to the right to a de novo hearing provided by Section 54A.216, may approve the temporary detention or incarceration or may order the release of the party or witness, with or without bond, pending a de novo hearing. If the referring court is not immediately available, the associate judge may order the release of the party or witness, with or without bond, pending a de novo hearing or may continue the person's detention or incarceration for not more than 72 hours.

Transferred, redesignated and amended from Government Code, Subchapter G, Chapter 54 by Acts 2011, 82nd Leg., 1st C.S., Ch. 3 (H.B. 79), Sec. 6.02, eff. January 1, 2012.

Sec. 54A.215. JUDICIAL ACTION ON ASSOCIATE JUDGE'S PROPOSED ORDER OR JUDGMENT. (a) Unless a party files a written request for a de novo hearing before the referring court, the referring court may:

- (1) adopt, modify, or reject the associate judge's proposed order or judgment;
- (2) hear further evidence; or
- (3) recommit the matter to the associate judge for

further proceedings.

(b) The judge of the referring court shall sign a proposed order or judgment the court adopts as provided by Subsection (a)(1) not later than the 30th day after the date the associate judge signed the order or judgment.

Transferred, redesignated and amended from Government Code, Subchapter G, Chapter 54 by Acts 2011, 82nd Leg., 1st C.S., Ch. 3 (H.B. 79), Sec. 6.02, eff. January 1, 2012.

Sec. 54A.216. DE NOVO HEARING BEFORE REFERRING COURT.

(a) A party may request a de novo hearing before the referring court by filing with the clerk of the referring court a written request not later than the seventh working day after the date the party receives notice of the substance of the associate judge's report as provided by Section 54A.212.

(b) A request for a de novo hearing under this section must specify the issues that will be presented to the referring court. The de novo hearing is limited to the specified issues.

(c) In the de novo hearing before the referring court, the parties may present witnesses on the issues specified in the request for hearing. The referring court may also consider the record from the hearing before the associate judge, including the charge to and verdict returned by a jury, if the record was taken by a court reporter.

(d) Notice of a request for a de novo hearing before the referring court must be given to the opposing attorney in the manner provided by Rule 21a, Texas Rules of Civil Procedure.

(e) If a request for a de novo hearing before the referring court is filed by a party, any other party may file a request for a de novo hearing before the referring court not later than the seventh working day after the date of filing of the initial request.

(f) The referring court, after notice to the parties, shall hold a de novo hearing not later than the 30th day after the date on which the initial request for a de novo hearing was filed with the clerk of the referring court.

(g) Before the start of a hearing conducted by an associate judge, the parties may waive the right of a de novo hearing before

the referring court. The waiver may be in writing or on the record.

(h) The denial of relief to a party after a de novo hearing under this section or a party's waiver of the right to a de novo hearing before the referring court does not affect the right of a party to file a motion for new trial, motion for judgment notwithstanding the verdict, or other post-trial motion.

(i) A party may not demand a second jury in a de novo hearing before the referring court if the associate judge's proposed order or judgment resulted from a jury trial.

Transferred, redesignated and amended from Government Code, Subchapter G, Chapter 54 by Acts 2011, 82nd Leg., 1st C.S., Ch. 3 (H.B. 79), Sec. 6.02, eff. January 1, 2012.

Sec. 54A.217. APPELLATE REVIEW. (a) A party's failure to request a de novo hearing before the referring court or a party's waiver of the right to request a de novo hearing before the referring court does not deprive the party of the right to appeal to or request other relief from a court of appeals or the supreme court.

(b) Except as provided by Subsection (c), the date the judge of a referring court signs an order or judgment is the controlling date for the purposes of appeal to or request for other relief from a court of appeals or the supreme court.

(c) The date an order described by Section 54A.209(a)(16) is signed by an associate judge is the controlling date for the purpose of an appeal to, or a request for other relief relating to the order from, a court of appeals or the supreme court.

Transferred, redesignated and amended from Government Code, Subchapter G, Chapter 54 by Acts 2011, 82nd Leg., 1st C.S., Ch. 3 (H.B. 79), Sec. 6.02, eff. January 1, 2012.

Sec. 54A.218. IMMUNITY. An associate judge appointed under this subchapter has the judicial immunity of a probate judge. All existing immunity granted an associate judge by law, express or implied, continues in full force and effect.

Transferred, redesignated and amended from Government Code, Subchapter G, Chapter 54 by Acts 2011, 82nd Leg., 1st C.S., Ch. 3

(H.B. 79), Sec. 6.02, eff. January 1, 2012.

Sec. 54A.219. VISITING ASSOCIATE JUDGES. (a) This section does not limit the authority of the presiding judge of the statutory probate courts to assign a judge under Section 25.0022 to assist with processing cases in a reasonable time.

(b) The local administrative probate judge or, for a county without a local administrative probate judge, a statutory probate court judge of the county in which an associate judge appointed under this subchapter serves may assign a visiting associate judge to perform the duties of an associate judge appointed under this subchapter only if:

(1) the associate judge is temporarily unable to perform the associate judge's official duties because of absence resulting from:

- (A) illness;
- (B) injury;
- (C) disability;
- (D) personal emergency;
- (E) military service;
- (F) vacation; or
- (G) attendance at a continuing legal education program;

(2) the associate judge requests assistance due to a heavy workload or a pandemic-related emergency; or

(3) a vacancy occurs in the position of associate judge.

(c) A visiting associate judge assigned under this section may be assigned to serve during the period an associate judge is unable to perform the associate judge's duties, during the period the associate judge needs assistance in managing the judge's workload, or until another associate judge is appointed to fill a vacancy in the position of associate judge.

(d) A person is not eligible for assignment under this section unless the person has served as an associate judge under this subchapter for at least two years before the date of assignment.

(e) A visiting associate judge assigned under this section is subject to each provision of this subchapter that applies to an associate judge appointed under this subchapter. An assigned visiting associate judge is entitled to compensation equal to the salary of the associate judge, prorated for time served. A visiting associate judge is not considered a county employee for any purpose.

Added by Acts 2023, 88th Leg., R.S., Ch. 861 (H.B. 3474), Sec. 5.006, eff. September 1, 2023.

SUBCHAPTER D. ASSOCIATE JUDGE FOR GUARDIANSHIP PROCEEDINGS AND PROTECTIVE SERVICES PROCEEDINGS IN CERTAIN COURTS

Sec. 54A.301. DEFINITIONS. In this subchapter:

(1) "Guardianship proceeding" has the meaning assigned by Section 1002.015, Estates Code.

(2) "Office of court administration" means the Office of Court Administration of the Texas Judicial System.

(3) "Protective services proceeding" means a proceeding commenced under Chapter 48, Human Resources Code.

(4) "Ward" has the meaning assigned by Section 1002.030, Estates Code.

Added by Acts 2021, 87th Leg., R.S., Ch. 627 (H.B. 79), Sec. 1, eff. September 1, 2021.

Sec. 54A.302. APPLICABILITY. This subchapter applies only with respect to:

(1) a county court with jurisdiction over guardianship proceedings or protective services proceedings; and

(2) a statutory county court with jurisdiction over:

(A) guardianship proceedings, other than a court created by statute and designated as a statutory probate court under Chapter 25; or

(B) protective services proceedings.

Added by Acts 2021, 87th Leg., R.S., Ch. 627 (H.B. 79), Sec. 1, eff. September 1, 2021.

Sec. 54A.303. APPLICABILITY OF OTHER LAW; CONSTRUCTION OF SUBCHAPTER. (a) Subchapter C applies to an associate judge appointed under this subchapter except to the extent of a conflict with this subchapter.

(b) Nothing in this subchapter limits the authority of a court to which this subchapter applies to issue an order under Title 3, Estates Code, or Chapter 48, Human Resources Code.

Added by Acts 2021, 87th Leg., R.S., Ch. 627 (H.B. 79), Sec. 1, eff. September 1, 2021.

Sec. 54A.304. APPOINTMENT. (a) The presiding judge of each administrative judicial region, after conferring with the judges of courts to which this subchapter applies in the region, shall determine whether those courts require the appointment of a full-time or part-time associate judge to assist the courts with conducting:

(1) guardianship proceedings, including with conducting annual reviews of guardianships; or

(2) protective services proceedings.

(b) If the presiding judge of an administrative judicial region determines the courts described by Subsection (a) require the appointment of an associate judge, the presiding judge shall appoint an associate judge from a list of applicants who submit an application to the office of court administration and meet the qualifications prescribed by Section 54A.305. Before making the appointment, the presiding judge must provide the list to each judge of a court from which guardianship proceedings or protective services proceedings will be referred to the associate judge. Each of those judges and the presiding judge of the statutory probate courts may recommend to the presiding judge of the administrative judicial region one or more of the listed applicants for appointment.

(c) Before reappointing an associate judge appointed under Subsection (b), a presiding judge of an administrative judicial region must notify each judge of a court from which guardianship proceedings or protective services proceedings will be referred to the associate judge of the presiding judge's intent to reappoint

the associate judge for another term. Each of those judges and the presiding judge of the statutory probate courts may submit to the presiding judge of the administrative judicial region a recommendation on whether the associate judge should be reappointed.

(d) An associate judge appointed under this subchapter serves the courts to which this subchapter applies in the administrative judicial region that are specified by the appointing presiding judge. Two or more presiding judges of administrative judicial regions may jointly appoint one or more associate judges under this subchapter to serve specified courts to which this subchapter applies in the presiding judges' regions.

Added by Acts 2021, 87th Leg., R.S., Ch. 627 (H.B. 79), Sec. 1, eff. September 1, 2021.

Sec. 54A.305. QUALIFICATIONS. (a) To be eligible for appointment as an associate judge under this subchapter, a person must:

(1) be a citizen of the United States;

(2) be a resident of this state for the two years preceding the date of appointment; and

(3) be:

(A) eligible for assignment under Section 74.054 because the person is named on the list of retired and former judges maintained by the presiding judge of the administrative judicial region under Section 74.055;

(B) eligible for assignment under Section 25.0022 by the presiding judge of the statutory probate courts; or

(C) licensed to practice law in this state and have at least four years of experience in guardianship proceedings or protective services proceedings before the date of appointment as a practicing attorney in this state or a judge of a court in this state.

(b) An associate judge appointed under this subchapter to serve in one administrative judicial region shall, during the term of appointment, reside in that region or in a county adjacent to that region. An associate judge appointed to serve in two or more

administrative judicial regions may reside anywhere in the regions. Added by Acts 2021, 87th Leg., R.S., Ch. 627 (H.B. 79), Sec. 1, eff. September 1, 2021.

Sec. 54A.306. TERM OF APPOINTMENT; TERMINATION. (a) An associate judge appointed under this subchapter serves for a term of four years from the date the associate judge is appointed and qualifies for office.

(b) The appointment of an associate judge for a term does not affect the at-will employment status of the associate judge. An appointing presiding judge of an administrative judicial region or the successor presiding judge of the region may terminate the associate judge's appointment at any time.

Added by Acts 2021, 87th Leg., R.S., Ch. 627 (H.B. 79), Sec. 1, eff. September 1, 2021.

Sec. 54A.307. COMPENSATION OF ASSOCIATE JUDGE. (a) An associate judge appointed under this subchapter is entitled to a salary in an amount equal to 90 percent of the salary paid to a district judge as set by the General Appropriations Act.

(b) The associate judge's salary shall be paid from:

(1) money available from the federal government;

(2) county money available for payment of officers' salaries, subject to the approval of the commissioners courts of the counties in which the associate judge serves; or

(3) a combination of money specified by Subdivisions (1) and (2).

Added by Acts 2021, 87th Leg., R.S., Ch. 627 (H.B. 79), Sec. 1, eff. September 1, 2021.

Sec. 54A.308. DESIGNATION AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF HOST COUNTY. (a) Subject to the approval of the commissioners court of the proposed host county:

(1) the appointing presiding judge of the administrative judicial region shall determine the host county of an associate judge appointed to serve in one administrative judicial region; and

(2) the appointing presiding judges of the administrative judicial regions shall by majority vote determine the host county of an associate judge appointed to serve in more than one administrative judicial region.

(b) The host county shall provide an adequate courtroom and quarters, including furniture, necessary utilities, and telephone equipment and service, for the associate judge and other personnel assisting the associate judge.

(c) Except as provided by Section 54A.305(b), an associate judge is not required to reside in the host county.

Added by Acts 2021, 87th Leg., R.S., Ch. 627 (H.B. 79), Sec. 1, eff. September 1, 2021.

Sec. 54A.309. METHODS OF REFERRAL. (a) Guardianship proceedings or protective services proceedings shall be referred to an associate judge appointed under this subchapter by a general order issued by the judge of each court the associate judge is appointed to serve.

(b) A general order issued under this section may be amended or withdrawn at any time by the judge of the court issuing the order.

(c) In lieu of a general order, the judge of a court the associate judge is appointed to serve by order may refer a specific guardianship proceeding or a specific protective services proceeding to the associate judge.

Added by Acts 2021, 87th Leg., R.S., Ch. 627 (H.B. 79), Sec. 1, eff. September 1, 2021.

Sec. 54A.310. GENERAL POWERS OF ASSOCIATE JUDGE. (a) On the motion of a party or the associate judge, an associate judge may return a complex guardianship proceeding to the referring court for final disposition after recommending temporary orders for the protection of a ward.

(b) An associate judge may:

(1) render and sign any pretrial order; and

(2) recommend to the referring court any order after a trial on the merits.

Added by Acts 2021, 87th Leg., R.S., Ch. 627 (H.B. 79), Sec. 1, eff. September 1, 2021.

Sec. 54A.311. JUDICIAL ACTION ON ASSOCIATE JUDGE'S PROPOSED ORDER OR JUDGMENT. If a request for a de novo hearing before the referring court is not timely filed or the right to a de novo hearing before the referring court is waived, the proposed order or judgment of the associate judge for the guardianship proceeding or protective services proceeding becomes the order or judgment of the referring court by operation of law without ratification by the referring court.

Added by Acts 2021, 87th Leg., R.S., Ch. 627 (H.B. 79), Sec. 1, eff. September 1, 2021.

Sec. 54A.312. PERSONNEL. (a) The appointing presiding judge of an administrative judicial region or appointing presiding judges of the administrative judicial regions, by majority vote, as applicable, may appoint the personnel needed to assist an associate judge in implementing and administering this subchapter.

- (b) The salaries of the personnel shall be paid from:
- (1) money available from the federal government;
 - (2) county money available for payment of officers' salaries, subject to the approval of the commissioners courts of the counties in which the associate judge serves; or
 - (3) a combination of money specified by Subdivisions (1) and (2).

Added by Acts 2021, 87th Leg., R.S., Ch. 627 (H.B. 79), Sec. 1, eff. September 1, 2021.

Sec. 54A.313. SUPERVISION, TRAINING, AND EVALUATION OF ASSOCIATE JUDGES. (a) The office of court administration shall assist the presiding judges of the administrative judicial regions in:

- (1) monitoring associate judges' compliance with job performance standards, uniform practices adopted by the presiding judges, and federal and state laws and policies;
- (2) addressing the training needs and resource

requirements of associate judges;

(3) conducting annual performance evaluations for associate judges and other personnel appointed under this subchapter based on written personnel performance standards adopted by the presiding judges and performance information solicited from the referring courts and other relevant persons; and

(4) receiving, investigating, and resolving complaints about an individual associate judge or the associate judge program under this subchapter based on a uniform process adopted by the presiding judges.

(b) The office of court administration shall develop procedures and a written evaluation form to be used by the presiding judges in conducting the annual performance evaluations under Subsection (a)(3).

(c) The office of court administration shall develop caseload standards for associate judges to ensure adequate staffing.

(d) Each judge of a court that refers guardianship proceedings or protective services proceedings to an associate judge under this subchapter may submit to the appropriate presiding judges or the office of court administration information on the associate judge's performance during the preceding year based on a uniform process adopted by the presiding judges.

Added by Acts 2021, 87th Leg., R.S., Ch. 627 (H.B. 79), Sec. 1, eff. September 1, 2021.

Sec. 54A.314. FUNDING AND PERSONNEL. (a) The office of court administration may:

(1) contract for available county and federal money from any available source; and

(2) employ personnel, including investigators, auditors, court coordinators, and other judicial staff, necessary to implement and administer this subchapter.

(b) The presiding judges of the administrative judicial regions and counties may contract for federal money available from any source to reimburse the costs and salaries of the associate judges and personnel appointed under this subchapter and may also

use public or private grants.

(c) The presiding judges of the administrative judicial regions and the office of court administration in cooperation with other agencies shall take action necessary to maximize the amount of federal money available to fund the use of associate judges under this subchapter.

Added by Acts 2021, 87th Leg., R.S., Ch. 627 (H.B. 79), Sec. 1, eff. September 1, 2021.

Sec. 54A.315. ASSIGNMENT OF JUDGES AND APPOINTMENT OF VISITING ASSOCIATE JUDGES. (a) This subchapter does not limit the authority of a presiding judge of an administrative judicial region to assign a judge eligible for assignment under Chapter 74 to assist in processing guardianship proceedings or protective services proceedings in a reasonable time.

(b) If an associate judge appointed under this subchapter is temporarily unable to perform the associate judge's official duties because of absence resulting from family circumstances, illness, injury, disability, or military service, or if a vacancy occurs in the position of associate judge, the presiding judge of the administrative judicial region, or the presiding judges of the administrative judicial regions by majority vote, as applicable, in which the associate judge serves or the vacancy occurs may appoint a visiting associate judge to perform the duties of the associate judge during the period the associate judge is unable to perform the associate judge's duties or until another associate judge is appointed to fill the vacancy.

(c) A person is not eligible for appointment under this section unless the person has served for at least two years before the date of appointment as an associate judge under this subchapter, a district judge, a statutory county court judge, or a statutory probate judge.

(d) A visiting associate judge appointed under this section:

(1) is subject to each provision of this subchapter that applies to an associate judge appointed under this subchapter;

(2) is entitled to compensation in the amount

determined by a majority vote of the presiding judges of the administrative judicial regions using money available under this subchapter; and

(3) is not considered a state employee for any purpose.

(e) Section [2252.901](#) does not apply to the appointment of a visiting associate judge under this section.

Added by Acts 2021, 87th Leg., R.S., Ch. 627 (H.B. [79](#)), Sec. 1, eff. September 1, 2021.

Sec. 54A.316. LIMITATION ON LAW PRACTICE. An associate judge appointed under this subchapter may not engage in the private practice of law.

Added by Acts 2021, 87th Leg., R.S., Ch. 627 (H.B. [79](#)), Sec. 1, eff. September 1, 2021.

Sec. 54A.317. IMMUNITY. An associate judge appointed under this subchapter has the judicial immunity of a district judge. All existing immunity granted an associate judge by law, express or implied, continues in full force and effect.

Added by Acts 2021, 87th Leg., R.S., Ch. 627 (H.B. [79](#)), Sec. 1, eff. September 1, 2021.