



Justice Administrative Commission  
Policies and Procedures

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For Pro Se Defendants  
(Pro Se Information Packet)



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## Authority

The Justice Administrative Commission (JAC) is authorized to approve payment of due process costs for indigent persons who have a statutory or constitutional right to court-appointed counsel. JAC processes bills for due process services (such as court reporters, investigators, and expert witnesses) on behalf of indigent defendants including those that are pro se (self-represented). The types of services that JAC pays for are listed in s. 29.007, F.S. Pursuant to s. 27.52(5), F.S., before JAC can process bills for due process services, a court must find that the self-represented defendant is “indigent for costs” (meaning that the state will pay for due process costs). If a defendant is represented by the public defender, regional counsel, privately retained counsel, or private court-appointed counsel, then due process services are handled through the attorney unless the attorney is acting as standby counsel.

## Requirements

A pro se individual must be qualified as indigent for costs under section 27.52(5), Florida Statutes.

In order to process the due process invoice(s) of a pro se individual, JAC must be provided with the following:

- A copy of the completed application to the clerk of the court for determination of indigent status;
- A copy of the court order determining the individual to be indigent for costs under section 27.52(5), Florida Statutes, and eligible for the provision of due process services;
- A copy of the motion seeking payment of due process costs;
- A copy of the order approving the payment of due process costs which specifies the name of the provider and the dollar amount approved by the court;
- A completed and signed JAC Invoice/Voucher Cover; and
- An original invoice where the service provider chooses to use his or her own invoice along with the JAC Invoice/Voucher Cover.

## Establishing Indigency

To have the JAC pay for due process costs, the trial court must find the defendant “indigent for costs” under s. 27.52(5), F.S. This finding must occur before a defendant seeks the court’s appointment/authorization of any due process service or service provider. A clerk of court’s determination of indigence for appointment of counsel under s. 27.52(1), F.S., is not sufficient. The defendant must obtain a separate order from the trial court declaring the defendant “indigent for costs” under s. 27.52(5), F.S. A copy of this order must be provided to JAC along with a copy of the charging document (the information or indictment).

## Allowable Costs

Due process services are those that are necessary to defend a case. JAC is authorized to process bills for due process services authorized by ss. 27.425, 27.5305, and 29.007, F.S. Allowable due process costs include:

- Court reporting and transcription costs;
- Interpreters and translators at depositions or witness interviews;
- Private service of process when the sheriff is not available or unable to provide service;
- Private investigator services including costs to obtain case-related materials or documents;
- Mitigation specialist services in capital death cases;
- Witness and expert witness fees;
- Mental health professionals;
- Reasonable pretrial consultation fees and costs; and
- Travel costs for witness.

**Established Rates.** Each year, the Legislature sets the rates paid to due process service providers in the General Appropriations Act. The Legislature has adopted uniform statewide rates for court reporting services, investigator services, and mitigation specialist services in capital death cases. Rates for other due process services may be different in each circuit. A rate chart is included in your packet at page 48. Rate charts for other circuits are can be found at:

[https://www.justiceadmin.org/court\\_app\\_counsel/formsandrates.aspx](https://www.justiceadmin.org/court_app_counsel/formsandrates.aspx).

**What JAC Cannot Process.** JAC has no authority to process bills for legal materials, office supplies, access to legal research materials, postage, or telephone charges. A defendant is not entitled to additional costs because the defendant is in jail. Such supplies are provided at the institution in which the defendant is incarcerated. If being in jail makes self-representation difficult, a defendant may wish to request that the court appoint a lawyer. Please know that *pro se* (self-represented) defendants cannot be paid for representing themselves.

JAC generally does not process bills for costs in civil cases such as family law cases, probate cases, and civil law suits. Those cases are not within the scope of s. 27.52(5), F.S. In post-conviction cases, JAC is not authorized to process any bills for costs until a motion for post-conviction relief has been filed with the trial court and the trial court has issued an order stating that there are issues that need further review or consideration (evidentiary hearing) by a court.

## **Motion and Order for Due Process Services**

**Motion for Court Authorization of Due Process Services.** Due process services must be authorized by a court order, except where JAC has indicated that prior court authorization is not required. A motion requesting authorization for due process services should state the due process services requested (such as expert and/or investigator) and the amount (cost) for those services (the maximum amount to be spent). The motion should also explain why those services are needed by the defense. The defendant must show that the due process services are reasonable and necessary for the defense of the case.

Unless JAC has expressly waived its right to a hearing, JAC must be provided with a copy of the written motion and notice of hearing prior to a court entering an order regarding any motion for due process costs or related expenses.

The written motion requesting the services and payment by the state should be filed and decided by the trial court before ordering any due process services. A copy of the motion must be sent (served) to JAC before the trial court considers the motion. JAC is entitled to reasonable notice, which is at least five business days' notice, of any hearing set on a motion for due process services. The defendant is responsible for sending the notice of hearing to JAC. When providing JAC notice, the defendant needs to take into account mailing time.

**JAC Response.** JAC will respond to any motion for due process services typically within five business days after receiving the motion. JAC may oppose the request for any due process services and/or the amount to be paid for the due process services. JAC's response will state whether JAC desires a hearing on the motion or not. When a defendant requests due process services at a rate higher than the established rates, the motion must state the need for services at the higher rate. The defendant must show that the requested due process services are necessary to the defense of the case and that the defendant made diligent efforts to obtain the services within the established rates. Generally, requests seeking rates higher than the established rates apply to experts. Requests for investigators, court reporters, interpreters, and private process servers must be within the established rates.

**Court Order.** The court order authorizing due process services must contain necessary information for JAC to process a bill for payment. The court order should be obtained by the defendant before the services are performed. For payment purposes, the order should list each

service authorized and the maximum amount authorized for each service. If the defendant is seeking a rate that is higher than the established rates or there is no rate established for the type of service, then the order must state the rate authorized by the court. JAC cannot process a bill for any rate higher than the established rates without an order allowing the higher rate.

As long as the order sets forth the due process services authorized, the maximum amount authorized, and the applicable rate when required, JAC can process a bill for those services without need for another court order. The bill must be consistent with the amounts authorized by the court order. If JAC has objections to a bill, JAC will issue a letter of objection explaining JAC concerns.

## Court Reporter Services

**Court Reporter Appearance Fees.** JAC may process bills for court reporter appearance fees for payment without a court order. As long as the deposition may be taken without the need for prior court approval under the Florida Rules of Criminal Procedure, JAC does not need an order authorizing payment of court reporter appearance fees. In most instances, Category A witnesses under Fla. R. Crim. P. 3.220(b) may be deposed without prior court approval. Payment for transcription of this type of deposition does require a court order.

**Transcripts.** All transcripts, except appellate transcripts, require a court order. Unlike other due process services, orders authorizing transcripts do not need to indicate the amount authorized. When deposition transcripts are authorized by the court, JAC will pay for one original and one copy. The court order should state the name of the witness and the date of the deposition. An order may authorize transcripts for more than one witness. For hearing transcripts (other than appellate), the order should contain the type and the date of the hearing. For transcription of audiotapes, the order should contain the name of the witness or type of recording (i.e., 911 call) and date of recording. For appellate transcripts, the designation of the record (hearings to be transcribed for the appeal) required by Fla. R. App. P. 9.200 may be used instead of a court order.

**Transcript Copies.** JAC can only pay for the cost of one original transcript of any deposition, hearing, or other proceeding. Once an original has been paid by JAC, any future copies are paid for at the copy rate, even if the transcript is designated as an original.

**Expedited Rates for Transcripts.** For JAC to pay expedited (“rush job”) rates for any transcript, a motion stating the reason for expedited rates and an order approving the rates must be provided. Both the motion and the order need to state the reason for the expedited rates. JAC generally does not pay expedited rates when the need for expedited rates is the result of inaction. It is a defendant’s responsibility to request transcription in a timely manner.

**Videotaped Depositions.** A court order is required for the videotaping of a deposition, except where a deposition is legally required to be videotaped. The main reason where an order is not required is when the deposition is of a child under the age of 16. A videotaped deposition should not be attended by both a court reporter and the person taping the deposition absent extraordinary circumstances. The videotape is an electronic record from which a court reporter can prepare a transcript at a later date.

## Investigator Services

**Court Order.** A court order authorizing private investigator services is required for JAC to process a bill for payment. The order authorizing investigator services should be obtained before the investigator provides any services. The order should set forth the specific need for private investigator services and the maximum amount of costs authorized for those services.

**Private Investigator's role.** The role of a private investigator is limited to providing investigative services, such as locating and interviewing witnesses; locating and securing documents and other evidence relevant to the case; performing background checks; and researching any other factual issue relevant to the case, such as credibility and character of witnesses. An investigator is not a substitute for a paralegal or secretary and cannot be used to perform administrative tasks.

With prior court approval, JAC may pay process bills for costs to obtain documents such as charges for discovery-related costs or for medical records of the defendant. These costs are usually handled by the investigator and then reimbursed by JAC.

## Private Service of Process

**Service on In-County Law Enforcement Officers.** As a general rule, JAC does not process bills for service of process on in-county law enforcement officers. Under s. 57.081, F.S., the sheriff may provide service of process without prepayment in cases involving indigent persons. In order to use a private process server to serve in-county law enforcement officers, a motion must be filed stating the need for a private process server.

**Service on Other Witnesses.** For other (non-law enforcement) witnesses, if the circuit has authorized a rate for private service of process, then a court order is not required. If the circuit has not authorized a rate, then the sheriff must be used when there is no court order authorizing private service of process. When authorized, a private investigator for the defendant can provide service of process. However, the investigator may only bill the established rate for private service of process.

## Mitigation Specialist Services in Capital Death Cases

JAC can only process bills for mitigation specialists in capital cases in which the state is seeking death. A mitigation specialist must have a valid Class "C"-Private Investigator License, issued by the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, and be affiliated with an investigative firm with a valid Class "A"-Private Investigative Agency license. The only exception is if the mitigation specialist has another professional license that substitutes for the investigator license such as a license in social work or mental health.

## Expert Services

**Motion for Expert Services.** Prior to retaining an expert, the defendant must file a written motion seeking the court's authorization to pay for expert services. Experts include psychologists, medical doctors, crime scene experts, accident reconstructionists, DNA experts, ballistic/firearms experts,

and other persons with specialized knowledge and training that permits them to testify as experts before a court.

The defendant has the burden to show the particularized (specific) need for the expert's services. The information in the motion should be sufficiently detailed for the trial court and the JAC to understand the need for the requested expert. Generally, experts are paid on an hourly basis. In limited circumstances, a court may authorize compensation in a different manner such as a flat fee for a competency evaluation; a set rate for a type of DNA test; or a fee for medical procedures like MRIs, CAT scans, or PET scans. In those situations, the motion and order must state the set rate or fee for those services. JAC does not prepay retainers for expert services or any other due process services.

**Out of State Experts.** The use of out-of-state experts is not authorized when there are competent experts available in Florida. A defendant should not request out-of-state experts without showing that there are no other experts with appropriate skills or expertise available, first, in the county in which the case was filed, and second, in any other county in Florida.

**Number of Experts.** Generally, the defendant is only entitled to one expert in an area (such as mental health). If the defendant desires more than one expert in similar categories, the defendant must establish the reason for the appointment of multiple experts in the same general area.

## Exhaustion of Amount Authorized

When using a due process vendor, the defendant should inform the due process vendor of the amount authorized by the trial court. This can be done by providing the due process vendor with a copy of the court order. If the vendor is going to exceed the amount authorized, the vendor should immediately notify the defendant if additional services are required so that the defendant can file a motion with the court. The defendant should file a motion requesting additional services before the due process vendor performs any additional services in the matter.

## Travel Expenses

When authorized by law, JAC can process bills for travel expenses pursuant to s. 112.061, F.S. Generally, travel expenses must be approved by a specific court order. All travel must be pursuant to Florida law, particularly the requirements of s. 112.061, F.S. Travel reimbursement is only for witnesses and due process vendors. Reimbursement for travel expenses must be submitted on the State of Florida Voucher for Reimbursement of Travel which is accepted by the Department of Financial Services.

## Submission of Bills

**JAC Invoice/Voucher Cover.** The JAC Invoice/Voucher cover is necessary to process a bill for due process services. The defendant and/or due process vendor must complete, sign, and submit the correct JAC Invoice/Voucher cover as well as all supporting documents. JAC only accepts bills submitted with JAC Invoice/Voucher covers. Bills sent without a JAC Invoice/Voucher are not reviewed. Generally, the due process vendor will prepare the JAC Invoice/Voucher cover.

The JAC Invoice/Voucher cover must be fully completed and include all the information requested on the voucher cover. After reviewing the bill packet, the defendant must sign the Invoice/Voucher cover to allow payment to a due process vendor. By signing the “Certification” the defendant certifies (confirms) that the work was necessary and completed satisfactorily. JAC cannot process any Invoice/Voucher cover for payment that is not signed by the defendant or standby counsel. (Standby counsel can act as an authorized representative of the defendant for this purpose.) The only instance when JAC can process a JAC Invoice/Voucher cover that is not signed by the defendant is where appellate transcripts are certified by the clerk of the court.

**Audit Deficiency Notice.** When JAC receives a bill for due process services without necessary documentation or information, JAC may send the due process vendor and the defendant an Audit Deficiency Notice. The Notice will state the reason JAC is unable to process the bill and will request that the due process vendor and/or the defendant provide the lacking documentation or information. When JAC issues an Audit Deficiency Notice, the due process vendor and/or defendant needs to provide the additional documentation to resolve the issue quickly. Failure to resolve the issues listed in the Audit Deficiency Notice may result in JAC paying the billing at a lower rate or returning the bill.

**Letter of Objection.** If JAC has an objection to a due process vendor’s bill, JAC may send a letter of objection. The letter will list JAC’s objection(s) and whether JAC requires a hearing on the matter. Until JAC issues a letter of objection, a defendant is not permitted to file a motion for payment. An Audit Deficiency Notice is not a letter of objection. When a defendant receives a letter of objection, the defendant is responsible for filing a motion for payment of the invoice with the court. A copy of JAC’s letter of objection must be attached to the motion. JAC must be served with a copy of the motion.

## **JAC’s Due Process Vendor Lists**

JAC maintains lists of due process vendors with current JAC contracts. The information on the list is from the vendors and has not been approved or checked by JAC. It is the responsibility of the defendant using the services of a listed vendor to check their professional qualifications. The listing of a vendor on JAC’s list does not mean that JAC recommends or approves the hiring of the vendor. In addition, even if a vendor is listed, JAC may still object to the trial court’s authorization/payment of the vendor including any objection to rates higher than the rates established by law. It is the defendant’s responsibility to make diligent efforts to obtain services within the rates established by law.