

## **CHAPTER 21 MILITARY SPOUSE AUTHORIZATION TO ENGAGE IN THE PRACTICE OF LAW IN FLORIDA**

### **21-1 PREAMBLE**

#### **RULE 21-1.1 PURPOSE**

The Supreme Court of Florida may certify a lawyer who is the spouse of a full-time active duty member of the United States armed forces to engage in the practice of law in Florida while the lawyer's spouse is stationed within this jurisdiction, due to the unique mobility requirements of military families who support the defense of the United States. A lawyer certified under this chapter is considered a member of the Florida Bar during the period of certification.

Added July 19, 2018, effective September 17, 2018, (249 So.3d 1256).

### **21-2 ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS**

#### **RULE 21-2.1 ELIGIBILITY**

To be eligible for certification under this chapter, the applicant must:

**(a)** be identified and enrolled in the Department of Defense "Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System" (or identified and enrolled by the Department of Homeland Security for the Coast Guard when not operating as a service of the Navy) as the spouse of a full-time active duty member of the United States armed forces or a member of the Guard or Reserve components who is ordered to extend active duty under Title 10 of the U.S. Code and transferred from outside Florida to a duty station in Florida;

**(b)** hold a J.D. or LL.B. degree from a law school accredited by the American Bar Association at the time the applicant matriculated or graduated;

**(c)** have been admitted after passing a written examination to the practice of law in another United States jurisdiction;

**(d)** be an active member of the bar in good standing who is eligible to practice law in at least 1 United States jurisdiction;

(e) be a member of the bar in good standing in every jurisdiction to which the applicant has been admitted to practice law;

(f) establish that the applicant is not subject to lawyer discipline or the subject of a pending disciplinary matter in any other jurisdiction;

(g) not have failed the Florida Bar examination within 5 years of the date of application under this chapter or previously been denied admission to The Florida Bar for reasons of character and fitness;

(h) reside in Florida with the service member stationed in Florida or provide evidence that the applicant intends to reside in Florida with the service member stationed in Florida within 6 months of the application;

(i) certify having read the Florida Rules of Discipline, the Florida Rules of Professional Conduct and this chapter and agree to submit to the jurisdiction of the Supreme Court of Florida for disciplinary purposes;

(j) submit an application to the Florida Board of Bar Examiners in the form required by that board, including a copy of the military member's orders to a duty station within Florida;

(k) pay an application fee established by the Florida Board of Bar Examiners; and

(l) establish the applicant's qualifications as to character and fitness to the satisfaction of the Florida Board of Bar Examiners.

Added July 19, 2018, effective September 17, 2018, (249 So.3d 1256).

## **21-3 CONTINUING LEGAL EDUCATION REQUIREMENTS**

### **RULE 21-3.1 CONTINUING LEGAL EDUCATION**

**(a) Basic Skills Course Requirement.** A lawyer certified to practice law in Florida as a military spouse must complete the basic skills course requirement as set forth in subchapter 6-12 of these rules within 6 months of initial certification.

**(b) Exemption and Deferment.** A lawyer certified to practice law in Florida as a military spouse is not eligible for exemption from or deferral of the basic skills course requirement.

**(c) Florida Legal Professionalism Course.** A lawyer certified to practice law in Florida as a military spouse must complete the 2-credit hour Florida Legal Professionalism Course required in rule 6-10.3(b) within 1 year after certification and must complete the current approved Florida Legal Professionalism Course within 3 years after certification.

**(d) Minimum Ongoing Requirement.** A lawyer certified to practice law in Florida as a military spouse must complete 10 hours of continuing legal education during each year the authorization is renewed, including 1 hour of technology and 2 hours of legal ethics, professionalism, substance abuse, or mental health and wellness each year.

Added July 19, 2018, effective September 17, 2018, (249 So.3d 1256); amended March 3, 2022, effective May 2, 2022 (SC20-1467) ; amended February 2, 2023, effective April 3, 2023 (SC22-1291); amended February 29, 2024, effective January 8, 2024 (SC23-1412).

## **21-4 PERMISSIBLE ACTIVITIES AND PRACTICE REQUIREMENT**

### **RULE 21-4.1 ACTIVITIES AND REQUIREMENT**

**(a) Generally.** Except as provided elsewhere in this chapter, lawyers certified to practice law in Florida as military spouses are entitled to all privileges, rights, and benefits and subject to all duties, obligations, and responsibilities of members of The Florida Bar in good standing and eligible to practice law in Florida.

**(b) Required Association with Florida Bar Member.** A lawyer certified under this chapter must be employed by or in a mentorship relationship with a member of The Florida Bar who is eligible to practice law in Florida. The Military Affairs Committee will establish a mentor network for this purpose and may appoint its own committee members or other members of The Florida Bar as mentors.

**(c) Temporary Certification.** A military spouse who has made application under this rule may be certified by the Supreme Court of Florida to act as a certified legal intern while the application for certification as a military spouse lawyer is pending. A military spouse applicant certified as a legal intern must be a member of an out-of-state bar in good standing, employed by or in a mentorship relationship with a member of The Florida Bar who is eligible to practice law in Florida, and submit to the jurisdiction of the Supreme Court of Florida for disciplinary purposes. Certification as a legal intern will terminate on certification of the applicant as a military spouse lawyer or on denial of certification as a military spouse lawyer.

Added July 19, 2018, effective September 17, 2018 (249 So.3d 1256); amended May 21, 2020, effective July 20, 2020 (SC19-1861).

## **21-5 RENEWAL**

### **RULE 21-5.1 ANNUAL RENEWAL**

The authorization under this chapter is annual. Every member of the Florida Bar certified as a military spouse lawyer must pay annual membership fees equal to those paid by active members of the Florida Bar, must provide The Florida Bar with a statement that the certified lawyer continues to be eligible under this subchapter, and must provide any other information required by The Florida Bar.

Added July 19, 2018, effective September 17, 2018, (249 So.3d 1256).

## **21-6 TERMINATION**

### **RULE 21-6.1 TERMINATION**

#### **(a) Termination Due to Change in Status.**

(1) *Generally.* The certification to practice law under this chapter will terminate if:

(A) the service member is no longer an active duty member of the United States armed forces;

(B) the certified lawyer is no longer married to the service member;

(C) the service member receives a permanent transfer outside of Florida, except that the certified lawyer may continue to practice pursuant to this chapter if the service member has been assigned to an unaccompanied or remote assignment with no dependents authorized until the service member is assigned to a location with dependents authorized;

(D) the certified lawyer relocates outside of Florida for more than 6 continuous months;

(E) the certified lawyer requests that the certification be terminated;

(F) five years have elapsed since the certified lawyer was certified; or

(G) the certified lawyer becomes a member of The Florida Bar by meeting all admission requirements to The Florida Bar.

(2) *Notice.* Except on becoming a Florida Bar member by meeting all admission requirements, the certified lawyer must notify The Florida Bar in writing of any of the above events within 30 days of its occurrence, must simultaneously file in each matter pending before any court or tribunal a notice that the lawyer will no longer be involved in the case, and must provide written notice to all clients receiving representation from the lawyer that the lawyer will no longer represent them. The Florida Bar will notify the Supreme Court of Florida and request that the certification be terminated.

**(b) Termination for Cause.**

(1) *Generally.* The certification to practice law under this chapter will terminate if the certified lawyer:

(A) fails to pay the annual renewal as required elsewhere in this chapter;

(B) fails to meet the continuing education requirements as required elsewhere in this chapter;

(C) takes and fails the Florida Bar Examination or character and fitness investigation; or

(D) is disbarred or suspended by another jurisdiction.

(2) *Notice.* The Florida Bar will provide written notification to the certified lawyer and the Supreme Court of Florida of any of the above events within 30 days of its occurrence. On termination the lawyer must file in each matter pending before the court or tribunal a notice that the lawyer will no longer be involved in the case and must provide written notice to all of the lawyer's clients that the lawyer will no longer represent them.

Added July 19, 2018, effective September 17, 2018, (249 So.3d 1256).