

IOP 34 | ORAL ARGUMENT

1. Non-Argument Calendar. When the last brief is filed an appeal is sent to the office of staff attorney for classification. If the staff attorney is of the opinion that the appeal of a party does not warrant oral argument, the appeal is returned to the clerk for routing to one of the court's judges, selected in rotation. In appeals involving multiple parties, the staff attorney may recommend that appeals of fewer than all parties be decided without oral argument but that the appeals of the remaining parties be scheduled for oral argument. If the judge to whom an appeal is directed for such consideration agrees that the appeal of a party does not warrant oral argument, that judge forwards the briefs, together with a proposed opinion, to the two other judges on the non-argument panel. If a party requests oral argument, all panel judges must concur not only that the appeal of that party does not warrant oral argument, but also in the panel opinion as a proper disposition without any special concurrence or dissent. If a party does not request oral argument, all panel judges must concur that the appeal of that party does not warrant oral argument.

In other appeals, when oral argument is requested by a party and the staff attorney is of the opinion that oral argument should be heard, the staff attorney may recommend that an appeal be assigned to the oral argument calendar, subject to later review by the assigned oral argument panel.

If a determination is made that oral argument should be heard, the appeal is placed on the next appropriate calendar, consistent with the court's calendaring priorities. At that time a determination is made of the oral argument time to be allotted to each side.

The assignment of an appeal to the non-argument calendar does not mean that it is considered to be an appeal of less importance than an orally argued appeal.

2. Oral Argument.

a. Court Year Schedule - A proposed court schedule for an entire year is prepared by the circuit executive in collaboration with the clerk's office, and then approved by the scheduling committee of the court which consists of active judges. The court schedule does not consider



what specific appeals are to be heard, but only sets the weeks of court in relation to the probable volume of appeals and judgeship availability for the year.

b. Separation of Assignment of Judges and Calendaring of Appeals - To insure complete objectivity in the assignment of judges and the calendaring of appeals, the two functions of judge assignment to panels and calendaring of appeals are intentionally separated. The circuit executive and the scheduling committee take into account a fixed number of weeks for each active judge and the available sittings from the court's senior judges, visiting circuit judges, and district judges. After this determination, names of the active judges for the sessions of the court are drawn by lot from a matrix for the entire court year.

This schedule is available only to judges and the circuit executive for their advance planning, not to the clerk. The clerk is not furnished with names of the panel members for any session until after the court calendars of appeals have been prepared and approved as described below.

3. Preparation and Issuing of Calendars.

a. General - The clerk's office prepares oral argument calendars approximately one month in advance of oral argument.

b. Calendaring by Case Type - The clerk attempts to balance the calendars by dividing the appeals scheduled for oral argument among the panels by case type so that each panel for a particular week has an equitable number of different types of litigation for consideration.

c. Non-Preference Appeals - Appeals are calendared for hearing in accordance with the court's "first-in first-out" rule. Absent special priority, those appeals which are oldest in point of time of availability of briefs are calendared first for hearing, insofar as practicable with other requirements of the docket.

d. Number of Appeals Assigned - Ordinarily the court hears argument Tuesday through Friday. A regular oral argument session consists of up to 22 appeals with up to 6 appeals scheduled per day.



e. Advance Notice - Counsel are provided the maximum advance notice of scheduling for oral argument practicable. Ordinarily counsel will receive notice of oral argument at least three weeks in advance. Counsel are expected to make all reasonable efforts to adjust conflicts in their schedule which will permit them to attend oral argument as scheduled. Motions for continuance are disfavored in recognition of the difficulty in scheduling panels and the commitment of the court to dispose of appeals as promptly as possible and of the fact that there is no backlog of appeals awaiting oral argument.

4. Location of Court Sessions - Convenience of Counsel. Appeals to be assigned to oral argument sessions are, if possible, selected from the area where the session is to be held.

5. Forwarding Briefs to Judges. Immediately after issuance of the calendar and receipt by the clerk of names of the panel members, the clerk forwards to panel members copies of the briefs for the appeals set on the calendar.

6. Pre-Argument Preparation. The judges read the briefs prior to oral argument.

7. Identity of Panel. The clerk's office may disclose the names of the panel members for a particular session two weeks in advance of the session, or earlier as determined by the court. At the time the clerk issues a calendar assigning an appeal to a specific day of oral argument, the clerk will advise counsel of when the clerk's office may be contacted to learn the identity of the panel members.

8. Checking In with Clerk's Office. On the day of hearing counsel should check in with the clerk's office at least 30 minutes in advance of the convening of court to advise the courtroom deputy of the name of the attorney or attorneys who will present argument for each party and how the argument time will be divided between opening and rebuttal. Timely check-in is necessary so that the clerk can inform the panel of the names of attorneys presenting argument and their time division.



9. Submission Without Argument. When an appeal is placed on the oral argument calendar, a judge of the court has determined that oral argument would be helpful in that particular appeal. Therefore, requests by the parties to waive oral argument are not looked upon with favor, and counsel may be excused only by the court for good cause shown. Attorneys appointed by the court under the Criminal Justice Act must personally appear for oral argument unless excused by the court for good cause shown.

10. Time for Oral Argument. The time for oral argument will be indicated on the calendar. The time specified is per side. In the event that more than one attorney will present oral argument per side, arrangements among counsel regarding the division of time and the order of presentation should be made before counsel check in with the clerk's office.

11. Additional Time for Oral Argument. Additional time for oral argument is sparingly permitted. Requests for additional time for oral argument should be set forth in a motion to the clerk filed well in advance of the oral argument.

12. Calling the Calendar. Usually the court hears the appeals in the order in which they appear on the calendar, and will not call the calendar unless there are some special problems requiring attention. All counsel, however, must be present at the beginning of the court session for the day.

13. Presenting Argument. Counsel should prepare oral arguments with the knowledge that the judges have already studied the briefs. Reading from briefs, decisions or the record is not permitted except in unusual circumstances. Counsel should be prepared to answer questions by the court. The essay Twenty Pages and Twenty Minutes Revisited by Judge John C. Godbold is available from the clerk on request.

14. Timer and Lighting Signal Procedure. The courtroom deputy will monitor time and use lighting signals. In Atlanta, Miami, and Montgomery, and sometimes in other locations where court is held, an easily readable timer visible both to counsel and the court is also used.



a. Appellant's Argument - A green light signals the beginning of the opening argument of appellant. Two minutes prior to expiration of the time allowed for opening argument, the green light goes off and a yellow light comes on. When the time reserved for opening has expired, the yellow light goes off and a red light comes on.

b. Appellee's Argument - The same procedure as outlined above for appellant is used.

c. Appellant's Rebuttal - A green light signals commencement of time; a red light comes on when the time expires. No yellow caution light is displayed for this argument.

15. Appeals Conference and Designation of Writing Judge. At the conclusion of each day's arguments the panel usually has a conference on the appeals heard that day. A tentative decision is usually reached, a tentative determination is made as to the kind of opinion necessary and the presiding judge, when in the majority, makes opinion writing assignments. Judges do not specialize. Writing assignments are made so as to equalize the workload of the entire session.

16. CD Recordings of Oral Arguments. Copies of the court's audio recordings of oral arguments are available for purchase on CD upon payment of the fee prescribed by the Judicial Conference of the United States in the Court of Appeals Miscellaneous Fee Schedule issued pursuant to 28 U.S.C. §1913, payable to Clerk, U.S. Court of Appeals, Eleventh Circuit. CD recordings of oral arguments are available for oral arguments held after August 1, 2012. The court makes no representations about the quality of the CD recordings or about how quickly they will become available.

17. Posting of Oral Argument Recordings on the Website. Recordings of oral arguments held after April 1, 2017 are available on this court's website. Recordings are posted as soon as practicable after the date of argument. The court makes no representations about the quality of the posted recordings.

