

MAGISTRATE JUDGE MARIA VALDEZ
219 South Dearborn Street
Courtroom 1041, Chambers 1058
Chicago, IL 60604
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INSTRUCTIONS FOR SETTLEMENT CONFERENCE

The Court believes that the parties should fully explore and consider settlement and should do so at the earliest reasonable opportunity in the case. For those cases that can be resolved through settlement, early consideration of settlement can allow the parties to avoid unnecessary litigation. This will allow the parties to also avoid the substantial cost, expenditure of time, and distractions that are typically a part of the litigation process. Even for those cases that cannot be resolved through settlement, early consideration of settlement can allow the parties to better understand the factual and legal nature of their dispute. This often can result in focusing and streamlining the issues to be litigated, which again can save the parties considerable time and money.

Consideration of settlement is a serious matter; it therefore deserves and requires serious and thorough preparation prior to the settlement conference. Set forth below are the procedures that the Court will require the parties to follow in preparing for the settlement conference, and the procedures that the Court typically will employ in conducting the conference. Counsel are directed to provide a copy of this Standing Order to their clients, and to discuss these procedures with them.

- **Pre-settlement Conference Demand and Offer.** The Court has found that settlement conferences are more likely to be productive if, before the conference, the parties have had a written exchange of their settlement positions.

Accordingly, **at least fourteen (14) calendar days** prior to the date of the settlement conference, plaintiff's counsel shall serve on defense counsel a letter that sets forth at least the following information: (a) a brief summary of the evidence and legal principles that plaintiff asserts will allow it to establish liability; (b) a brief explanation of why damages or other relief would appropriately be granted at trial; (c) an itemization of the damages plaintiff believes can be proven at trial, and a brief summary of the evidence and legal principles supporting those damages; and (d) a settlement demand.

At least seven (7) calendar days before the settlement conference, defendant's counsel shall serve on plaintiff's counsel a letter that sets forth at least the following information: (a) any points in plaintiff's letter with which the defendant *agrees*; (b) any points in plaintiff's letter with which defendant *disagrees*, with references to supporting evidence and legal principles;

and (c) a settlement offer. The Court expects that each of these letters typically should be five pages or fewer.

Settlement letters should reflect each party's good faith efforts to settle the case, and the Court generally believes that settlement demands seeking full recovery and settlement offers of no value are not made in good faith. *If the Court believes a party's letter does not meet the good faith standard, the Settlement Conference may be summarily stricken.*

- **Counsel shall provide copies of both parties' settlement letters to their respective clients prior to the settlement conference date.**
- Plaintiff's counsel shall deliver copies of these letters to the Courtroom Deputy by **no later than four (4) business days** before the conference. **DO NOT FILE COPIES OF THESE LETTERS IN THE CLERK'S OFFICE.** The foregoing schedule is designed to ensure that the Court and the parties have enough time to prepare for the conference, and must be followed unless the Court issues an order in the case establishing a different schedule.
- **ATTENDANCE OF PARTIES REQUIRED. Parties with full and complete settlement authority are required to personally attend the conference.** This means that if a party is an individual, that individual must personally attend; if a party is a corporation or governmental entity, a representative of that corporation or governmental entity (other than counsel of record) with full and complete settlement authority must personally attend; if the approval of an insurer is required, the insurance adjuster must attend, along with the party representative.


"Full and complete settlement authority" means the authority to negotiate and agree to a binding settlement agreement at any level up to the settlement demand of the plaintiff or any level as low as the offer provided by the defendant.

The Court sets aside a significant block of time for each settlement conference. The Court strongly believes that the personal presence of the parties, and their direct participation in the discussions and "give and take" that occur, will materially increase the chances of settlement. The Court requires that parties attending the conference read the settlement letters exchanged between the parties before coming to the conference.

- **CONFERENCE FORMAT.** The Court generally will follow a mediation format: that is, each side will have an opportunity to make a presentation to the other side, which will be followed by joint discussion with the Court and private meetings by the Court with each side. The Court expects both the lawyers and the party representatives to be fully prepared to participate in the discussions and meetings. In these discussions, the Court encourages all parties to be willing to reassess their previous positions, and to be willing to explore creative means for resolving the dispute.
- **STATEMENTS INADMISSIBLE.** Any statements made by any party during the settlement conference will not be admissible at trial. The Court expects the parties to address each other with courtesy and respect, but at the same time strongly encourages the parties to speak frankly and openly about their views of the case.

ANY PARTY WISHING TO VARY ANY OF THE PROCEDURES SET FORTH IN THIS STANDING ORDER MUST MAKE AN APPROPRIATE REQUEST TO THE COURT BY MOTION. NO MODIFICATIONS MAY BE MADE THROUGH TELEPHONIC REQUESTS TO CHAMBERS STAFF.

ENTER:

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Maria Valdez". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "M" and a long, sweeping underline.

MARIA VALDEZ
United States Magistrate Judge

August 26, 2015