

Public Law 96-82  
96th Congress

An Act

To improve access to the Federal courts by enlarging the civil and criminal jurisdiction of United States magistrates, and for other purposes.

Oct. 10, 1979  
[S. 237]

*Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,* That this Act may be cited as the "Federal Magistrate Act of 1979".

SEC. 2. Section 636 of title 28, United States Code, is amended—

(1) by redesignating subsections (c) through (f) thereof as subsections (d) through (g), respectively; and

(2) by inserting immediately after subsection (b) thereof the following new subsection:

“(c) Notwithstanding any provision of law to the contrary—

“(1) Upon the consent of the parties, a full-time United States magistrate or a part-time United States magistrate who serves as a full-time judicial officer may conduct any or all proceedings in a jury or nonjury civil matter and order the entry of judgment in the case, when specially designated to exercise such jurisdiction by the district court or courts he serves. Upon the consent of the parties, pursuant to their specific written request, any other part-time magistrate may exercise such jurisdiction, if such magistrate meets the bar membership requirements set forth in section 631(b)(1) and the chief judge of the district court certifies that a full-time magistrate is not reasonably available in accordance with guidelines established by the judicial council of the circuit. When there is more than one judge of a district court, designation under this paragraph shall be by the concurrence of a majority of all the judges of such district court, and when there is no such concurrence, then by the chief judge.

“(2) If a magistrate is designated to exercise civil jurisdiction under paragraph (1) of this subsection, the clerk of court shall, at the time the action is filed, notify the parties of their right to consent to the exercise of such jurisdiction. The decision of the parties shall be communicated to the clerk of court. Thereafter, neither the district judge nor the magistrate shall attempt to persuade or induce any party to consent to reference of any civil matter to a magistrate. Rules of court for the reference of civil matters to magistrates shall include procedures to protect the voluntariness of the parties' consent.

“(3) Upon entry of judgment in any case referred under paragraph (1) of this subsection, an aggrieved party may appeal directly to the appropriate United States court of appeals from the judgment of the magistrate in the same manner as an appeal from any other judgment of a district court. In this circumstance, the consent of the parties allows a magistrate designated to exercise civil jurisdiction under paragraph (1) of this subsection to direct the entry of a judgment of the district court in accordance with the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure. Nothing in this paragraph shall be construed as a limitation of any party's right to seek review by the Supreme Court of the United States.

Federal  
Magistrate Act  
of 1979.  
28 USC 631 note.

28 USC 631.

Appeal.

## Appeal.

"(4) Notwithstanding the provisions of paragraph (3) of this subsection, at the time of reference to a magistrate, the parties may further consent to appeal on the record to a judge of the district court in the same manner as on an appeal from a judgment of the district court to a court of appeals. Wherever possible the local rules of the district court and the rules promulgated by the conference shall endeavor to make such appeal expeditious and inexpensive. The district court may affirm, reverse, modify, or remand the magistrate's judgment.

"(5) Cases in the district courts under paragraph (4) of this subsection may be reviewed by the appropriate United States court of appeals upon petition for leave to appeal by a party stating specific objections to the judgment. Nothing in this paragraph shall be construed to be a limitation on any party's right to seek review by the Supreme Court of the United States.

"(6) The court may, for good cause shown on its own motion, or under extraordinary circumstances shown by any party, vacate a reference of a civil matter to a magistrate under this subsection.

"(7) The magistrate shall determine, taking into account the complexity of the particular matter referred to the magistrate, whether the record in the proceeding shall be taken, pursuant to section 753 of this title, by electronic sound recording means, by a court reporter appointed or employed by the court to take a verbatim record by shorthand or by mechanical means, or by an employee of the court designated by the court to take such a verbatim record. Notwithstanding the magistrate's determination, (A) the proceeding shall be taken down by a court reporter if any party so requests, (B) the proceeding shall be recorded by a means other than a court reporter if all parties so agree, and (C) no record of the proceeding shall be made if all parties so agree. Reporters referred to in this paragraph may be transferred for temporary service in any district court of the judicial circuit for reporting proceedings under this subsection, or for other reporting duties in such court."

Record of  
proceedings.

28 USC 753.

SEC. 3. (a) Section 631(a) of title 28, United States Code, is amended by striking out the last sentence and inserting in lieu thereof the following: "Where the conference deems it desirable, a magistrate may be designated to serve in one or more districts adjoining the district for which he is appointed. Such a designation shall be made by the concurrence of a majority of the judges of each of the district courts involved and shall specify the duties to be performed by the magistrate in the adjoining district or districts."

(b) Section 631(b) of title 28, United States Code, is amended—  
(1) by inserting "reappointed to" immediately after "appointed or";

(2) in paragraph (1), by inserting ", and has been for at least 5 years," immediately after "He is"; and

(3) in paragraph (1), by inserting "or" at the end of subparagraph (A), by striking out "or" at the end of subparagraph (B), and by striking out subparagraph (C).

(c) Section 631(b) of title 28, United States Code, is amended—

(1) by striking out the period at the end of paragraph (4) and inserting in lieu thereof "; and"; and

(2) by adding at the end thereof the following new paragraph:

"(5) He is selected pursuant to standards and procedures promulgated by the Judicial Conference of the United States. Such standards and procedures shall contain provision for public notice of all vacancies in magistrate positions and for the establishment by the district courts of merit selection panels,

Selection  
standards.

composed of residents of the individual judicial districts, to assist the courts in identifying and recommending persons who are best qualified to fill such positions.”.

(d) Section 631 of title 28, United States Code, is amended—

(1) by redesignating subsections (f) through (j) thereof as subsections (g) through (k), respectively; and

(2) by inserting immediately after subsection (e) thereof the following new subsection:

“(f) Upon the expiration of his term, a magistrate may, by a majority vote of the judges of the appointing district court or courts and with the approval of the judicial council of the circuit, continue to perform the duties of his office until his successor is appointed, or for 60 days after the date of the expiration of the magistrate’s term, whichever is earlier.”.

(e) The merit selection panels established under section 631(b)(5) of title 28, United States Code, in recommending persons to the district court, shall give due consideration to all qualified individuals, especially such groups as women, blacks, Hispanics, and other minorities.

(f) Magistrates serving prior to the promulgation of magistrate selection standards and procedures by the Judicial Conference of the United States may only exercise the jurisdiction conferred under the amendment made by section 2 of this Act after having been reappointed under such standards and procedures or after having been certified as qualified to exercise such jurisdiction by the judicial council of the circuit in which the magistrate serves.

(g) The amendment made by subsection (c) of this section shall not take effect until 30 days after the meeting of the Judicial Conference of the United States next following the effective date of this Act.

SEC. 4. Section 633(c) of title 28, United States Code, is amended by striking out the final sentence.

SEC. 5. Section 604(d)(3) of title 28, United States Code, is amended by inserting immediately before the semicolon the following: “, including (A) the number of matters in which the parties consented to the exercise of jurisdiction by a magistrate, (B) the number of appeals taken pursuant to the decisions of magistrates and the disposition of such appeals, and (C) the professional background and qualifications of individuals appointed under section 631 of this title to serve as magistrate”.

SEC. 6. Section 1915(b) of title 28, United States Code, is amended to read as follows:

“(b) Upon the filing of an affidavit in accordance with subsection (a) of this section, the court may direct payment by the United States of the expenses of (1) printing the record on appeal in any civil or criminal case, if such printing is required by the appellate court; (2) preparing a transcript of proceedings before a United States magistrate in any civil or criminal case, if such transcript is required by the district court, in the case of proceedings conducted under section 636(b) of this title or under section 3401(b) of title 18, United States Code; and (3) printing the record on appeal if such printing is required by the appellate court, in the case of proceedings conducted pursuant to section 636(c) of this title. Such expenses shall be paid when authorized by the Director of the Administrative Office of the United States Courts.”.

SEC. 7. (a) Section 3401 of title 18, United States Code, is amended—

(1) by amending subsection (a) to read as follows:

“(a) When specially designated to exercise such jurisdiction by the district court or courts he serves, any United States magistrate shall have jurisdiction to try persons accused of, and sentence persons convicted of, misdemeanors committed within that judicial district.”;

Selection  
recommenda-  
tions.  
28 USC 631 note.

28 USC 631 note.

Effective date.  
28 USC 631 note.

28 USC 631.

Court expenses.

28 USC 636.

Ante, p. 643.

Misdemeanors,  
jurisdiction.

Defendant's  
rights.

(2) by amending subsection (b) to read as follows:

"(b) Any person charged with a misdemeanor may elect, however, to be tried before a judge of the district court for the district in which the offense was committed. The magistrate shall carefully explain to the defendant that he has a right to trial, judgment, and sentencing by a judge of the district court and that he may have a right to trial by jury before a district judge or magistrate. The magistrate shall not proceed to try the case unless the defendant, after such explanation, files a written consent to be tried before the magistrate that specifically waives trial, judgment, and sentencing by a judge of the district court."

Misdemeanor  
proceedings.

(3) by amending subsection (f) to read as follows:

"(f) The district court may order that proceedings in any misdemeanor case be conducted before a district judge rather than a United States magistrate upon the court's own motion or, for good cause shown, upon petition by the attorney for the Government. Such petition should note the novelty, importance, or complexity of the case, or other pertinent factors, and be filed in accordance with regulations promulgated by the Attorney General."; and

Youth offenders.

(4) by adding at the end thereof the following new subsections:

"(g) The magistrate may, in a case involving a youth offender in which consent to trial before a magistrate has been filed under subsection (b) of this section, impose sentence and exercise the other powers granted to the district court under chapter 402 and section 4216 of this title, except that—

18 USC 5005 *et*  
*seq.*, 4216.

"(1) the magistrate may not sentence the youth offender to the custody of the Attorney General pursuant to such chapter for a period in excess of 1 year for conviction of a misdemeanor or 6 months for conviction of a petty offense;

"(2) such youth offender shall be released conditionally under supervision no later than 3 months before the expiration of the term imposed by the magistrate, and shall be discharged unconditionally on or before the expiration of the maximum sentence imposed; and

"(3) the magistrate may not suspend the imposition of sentence and place the youth offender on probation for a period in excess of 1 year for conviction of a misdemeanor or 6 months for conviction of a petty offense.

18 USC 5031 *et*  
*seq.*

"(h) The magistrate may, in a petty offense case involving a juvenile in which consent to trial before a magistrate has been filed under subsection (b) of this section, exercise all powers granted to the district court under chapter 403 of this title. For purposes of this subsection, proceedings under chapter 403 of this title may be instituted against a juvenile by a violation notice or complaint, except that no such case may proceed unless the certification referred to in section 5032 of this title has been filed in open court at the arraignment. No term of imprisonment shall be imposed by the magistrate in any such case."

18 USC 5032.

(b) The heading for section 3401 of title 18, United States Code, is amended by striking out "Minor offenses" and inserting in lieu thereof "Misdemeanors".

(c) The item relating to section 3401 in the table of sections of chapter 219 of title 18, United States Code, is amended by striking out "Minor offenses" and inserting in lieu thereof "Misdemeanors".

SEC. 8. (a) The first sentence of section 635(a) of title 28, United States Code, is amended by inserting after "including" the following: "the compensation of such legal assistants as the Judicial Conference, on the basis of the recommendations of the judicial councils of the circuits, considers necessary, and".

(b) The first sentence of section 634(c) of title 28, United States Code, is amended by striking out "clerical" and inserting in lieu thereof "legal, clerical,".

SEC. 9. The Judicial Conference of the United States shall undertake a study, to begin within 90 days after the effective date of this Act and to be completed and made available to Congress within 24 months thereafter, concerning the future of the magistrate system, the precise scope of such study to be recommended by the Chairmen of the Judiciary Committees of each House of Congress.

SEC. 10. Such sums as may be necessary to carry out the purposes of this Act are hereby authorized to be appropriated for expenditure on or after October 1, 1979.

Study,  
availability to  
Congress.  
28 USC 631 note.

Appropriations  
authorization.  
28 USC 631 note.

Approved October 10, 1979.

#### LEGISLATIVE HISTORY:

HOUSE REPORTS: No. 96-287 accompanying H.R. 1046 (Comm. on the Judiciary) and No. 96-444 (Comm. of Conference).

SENATE REPORTS: No. 96-74 (Comm. on the Judiciary) and No. 96-322 (Comm. of Conference).

CONGRESSIONAL RECORD, Vol. 125 (1979):

May 2, considered and passed Senate.

June 25, 26, H.R. 1046 considered and passed House; passage vacated and S. 237, amended, passed in lieu.

Sept. 20, Senate agreed to conference report.

Sept. 28, House agreed to conference report.

WEEKLY COMPILATION OF PRESIDENTIAL DOCUMENTS, Vol. 15, No. 41:

Oct. 10, Presidential statement.