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CHAPTER 11.

MASTERS AND REFEREES

ARTICLE 1.

GENERAL PROVISIONS

**SECTION 14‑11‑10.** Establishment of master‑in‑equity court.

As a part of the unified judicial system, there is established in each of the counties of this State having a population of at least one hundred thirty thousand, according to the latest official United States Decennial Census, a master‑in‑equity court. The master‑in‑equity for the court must be appointed pursuant to the provisions of Section 14‑11‑20. Nothing in this section prohibits a county or area with a population of less than one hundred thirty thousand, according to the latest official United States Decennial Census, from having a part‑time master‑in‑equity. The governing bodies of any two or more counties may join together to fund the office of master‑in‑equity to serve two or more counties. Funding of this master‑in‑equity must be borne by each county included on a per capita population basis.

**SECTION 14‑11‑15.** Equity courts.

The equity court is considered a division of the circuit court, and the master‑in‑equity, as judge of the equity court, is entitled to all the benefits and subject to all the requirements of the South Carolina Bar and the rules of the Supreme Court in the same respect as circuit court and family court judges. This section may not be construed as providing retirement for masters‑in‑equity under the provisions of Chapter 8 of Title 9.

**SECTION 14‑11‑20.** Appointment of master‑in‑equity; term.

Pursuant to the provisions of Section 2‑19‑110, masters‑in‑equity must be appointed by the Governor with the advice and consent of the General Assembly for a term of six years and until their successors are appointed and qualify. No person is eligible to hold the office of master‑in‑equity who is not at the time of his appointment a citizen of the United States and of this State, has not attained the age of thirty‑two years upon his appointment, has not been a licensed attorney for at least eight years upon his appointment, has not been a resident of this State for five years immediately preceding his appointment, and has not been found qualified by the Judicial Merit Selection Commission.

Each master‑in‑equity of this State qualifies by taking the oath required by the Constitution of this State before a justice of the Supreme Court, a judge of the Court of Appeals, the President of the Senate, the Speaker of the House of Representatives, a circuit judge, the Clerk of the Supreme Court, a clerk of the court of common pleas, or a probate judge of the county and immediately enters upon his duties. The oath must be filed in the office of the Secretary of State.

A full‑time master‑in‑equity is prohibited from engaging in the practice of law. A part‑time master‑in‑equity may practice law but is prohibited from appearing before another master‑in‑equity. A standing master‑in‑equity may not serve as the probate judge of any county.

**SECTION 14‑11‑30.** Compensation of master‑in‑equity.

The governing body of the county or counties in which a master‑in‑equity serves shall provide the salary, equipment, facilities, and supplies of the master‑in‑equity, together with the salaries of support personnel and all other costs for the necessary and proper operation of the master‑in‑equity’s office. The salaries of the masters‑in‑equity are as follows:

(1) Where the area served has a population of up to thirty‑four thousand, nine hundred ninety‑nine, according to the latest official United States Decennial Census, the master‑in‑equity serving that area is part time and must be paid a salary equal to ten percent of that of a circuit judge.

(2) Where the area served has a population of between thirty‑five thousand and forty‑nine thousand, nine hundred ninety‑nine, according to the latest official United States Decennial Census, the master‑in‑equity serving that area is part time and must be paid a salary equal to fifteen percent of that of a circuit judge.

(3) Where the area served has a population of between fifty thousand and seventy‑nine thousand, nine hundred ninety‑nine, according to the latest official United States Decennial Census, the master‑in‑equity serving that area is part time and must be paid a salary equal to twenty‑five percent of that of a circuit judge.

(4) Where the area served has a population of between eighty thousand and ninety‑nine thousand, nine hundred ninety‑nine, according to the latest official United States Decennial Census, the master‑in‑equity serving that area is part time and must be paid a salary equal to forty‑five percent of that of a circuit judge.

(5) Where the area served has a population of between one hundred thousand and one hundred twenty‑nine thousand, nine hundred ninety‑nine, according to the latest official United States Decennial Census, the master‑in‑equity serving that area is part time and must be paid a salary equal to fifty‑five percent of that of a circuit judge.

(6) Where the area served has a population of between one hundred thirty thousand and one hundred forty‑nine thousand, nine hundred ninety‑nine, according to the latest official United States Decennial Census, the master‑in‑equity serving that area is full time and must be paid a salary equal to seventy‑five percent of that of a circuit judge.

(7) Where the area served has a population of between one hundred fifty thousand and one hundred ninety‑nine thousand, nine hundred ninety‑nine, according to the latest official United States Decennial Census, the master‑in‑equity serving that area is full time and must be paid a salary equal to eighty percent of that of a circuit judge.

(8) Where the area served has a population of between two hundred thousand and two hundred forty‑nine thousand, nine hundred ninety‑nine, according to the latest official United States Decennial Census, the master‑in‑equity serving that area is full time and must be paid a salary equal to eighty‑five percent of that of a circuit judge.

(9) Where the area served has a population of over two hundred fifty thousand, according to the latest official United States Decennial Census, or where the area served is located in a county which generates four million dollars or more in accommodations tax revenue, the master‑in‑equity serving that area is full time and must be paid a salary equal to ninety percent of that of a circuit judge.

No sitting master‑in‑equity, whether full time or part time, may have his salary reduced during his tenure in office. Tenure in office continues at the expiration of a term if the incumbent master‑in‑equity is reappointed.

**SECTION 14‑11‑40.** Accounting for fees and costs received.

All fees and costs received and recovered by any master‑in‑equity shall be accounted for and paid into the general fund of the county as directed by the governing body thereof.

**SECTION 14‑11‑50.** Vacancies.

All vacancies in the office of master from death, resignation, removal from the State or any cause whatsoever shall be filled in the manner of original appointment for the unexpired term.

**SECTION 14‑11‑60.** Appointment of special referee.

In case of a vacancy in the office of master‑in‑equity or in case of the disqualification or disability of the master‑in‑equity from interest or any other reason for which cause can be shown the presiding circuit court judge, upon agreement of the parties, may appoint a special referee in any case who as to the case has all the powers of a master‑in‑equity. The special referee must be compensated by the parties involved in the action.

**SECTION 14‑11‑70.** Limitation on practice of law.

No person while he holds the office of full time master shall practice or be a partner with anyone engaged in the practice of law in this State.

**SECTION 14‑11‑80.** General duties.

The master shall make all such sales as the circumstances may require or as the court may order him to make in granting equitable relief and shall execute all proper conveyances thereof. Such sales shall be conducted at the county courthouse or at such other public places in the county designated in the notice of sale. He shall execute and perform all orders of the court upon references to him conformably to the practice of the court.

**SECTION 14‑11‑85.** Appeals from final judgments of masters‑in‑equity.

When some or all of the causes of action in a case are referred to a master‑in‑equity or special referee, the master or referee shall enter final judgment as to those causes of action, and an appeal from an order or judgment of the master or referee must be to the Supreme Court or the court of appeals as provided by the South Carolina Appellate Court Rules. A matter may not be referred to a master or referee for the purpose of making a report to the circuit court.

**SECTION 14‑11‑90.** Repealed by 1988 Act No. 678, Part V, eff January 1, 1989.

**SECTION 14‑11‑100.** Authority to administer oaths, and to take testimony, depositions, renunciations of dower, affidavits, and other instruments; fees.

The masters in this State, while in office, may administer oaths, take depositions, affidavits and renunciation of dower, probate deeds and other instruments and take testimony by commission as fully and effectually as the clerks of courts and notaries public. Their fees therefor shall be the same as allowed by law to other officers for similar services.

**SECTION 14‑11‑110.** Master shall take testimony on application of party; procedure.

The master shall, upon the application of either party to any cause or proceedings in which equitable relief is demanded pending and at issue in his county, take in writing the testimony of any witness who may be produced before him by any party to the cause, ten days’ notice of such application having been given to the opposite party. Such witness shall be subject to the same examination, cross‑examination and reply and the same exceptions as to the admissibility of testimony may be taken as are allowed by law upon examination before the court except that in case any testimony be objected to the master shall receive the same subject to the exceptions, reporting the exceptions and his ruling thereon.

**SECTION 14‑11‑120.** Admission of deposition in evidence.

The deposition so taken may be read in evidence at the hearing, subject to the right of either party upon good cause shown to require the personal attendance and viva voce examination of the witness at the hearing.

**SECTION 14‑11‑130.** Power to compel attendance of witnesses and to punish for contempt.

The master may compel the attendance of witnesses before him and punish for any contempt.

**SECTION 14‑11‑140.** Repealed by 1988 Act No. 678, Part V, eff January 1, 1989.

**SECTION 14‑11‑150.** Master may sell lands in another county.

Whenever the court of common pleas in any county shall have acquired jurisdiction over real estate lying in another county the master for the county in which the action is brought may sell such real estate in the county in which the land is situated and all such sales heretofore made, otherwise valid and not appealed from, are hereby confirmed.

**SECTION 14‑11‑160.** Master may sell real estate in any county under order by consent.

Whenever real estate is adjudged to be sold by a master such sale may take place by consent of the parties to the cause or their attorneys or, when infants are parties, by the consent of the guardians ad litem of such infants or their attorneys in any county which the court may direct. All such sales heretofore made and otherwise valid are hereby confirmed.

**SECTION 14‑11‑170.** Deposit of funds.

The master shall deposit all funds in his hands in some bank located in the county.

**SECTION 14‑11‑180.** Repealed by 1979 Act No. 164, Part V, Section 1 eff July 1, 1979.

**SECTION 14‑11‑190.** Books of office.

The master shall keep a reference book in which he shall record all references held by him and the proceedings therein and a ledger in which shall be kept the account of all cases in his hands to the credit of which he may receive funds. When he shall cease to be master these books shall be deposited in the office of the clerk of the court of common pleas of his county.

ARTICLE 3.

FEES

**SECTION 14‑11‑310.** Masters.

Masters‑in‑equity shall collect the following fees which must be deposited in the general fund of the county:

(1) in actions for partitions, foreclosure of liens upon real property, or sales of real property, either in private or by auction, a fee of one hundred dollars. If the matter requires more than one day of hearing, there is a thirty‑five dollar charge for each additional day or portion of the day until the matter is concluded;

(2) for the preparation of a deed, a fee of twenty‑five dollars;

(3) on sales of land, a fee equal to one percent of the bid or of the funds passing through the court, whichever is greater. The minimum commission collectible under this item is twenty‑five dollars, and the maximum commission is two thousand, five hundred dollars;

(4) for a supplemental proceeding, a fee of twenty‑five dollars;

(5) in all other cases, fifty dollars for the first day’s hearing or any portion of the day and for each day after the first day, thirty‑five dollars. The fees must be assessed at the time of the order or report of the master‑in‑equity.

The fees provided for in this section, including the first day’s fee provided for in item (5) and excluding the commission on sale, must be paid at the time the order of reference is signed and is nonrefundable unless so ordered by the master‑in‑equity on proper cause being shown. The cost of transcribing the record is in addition to the fees provided for in this section and must be assessed at the rate prescribed for circuit courts.

**SECTION 14‑11‑320.** Repealed by 1988 Act No. 678, Part V, eff January 1, 1989.