Rule 58A

Advisory Committee Notes

2015 amendments

The 2015 amendments to Rule 58A adopt the requirement, found in Rule 58 of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure, that a judgment be set out in a separate document. In the past, problems have arisen when the district court entered a decision with dispositive language, but without the other formal elements of a judgment, resulting in uncertainty about whether the decision started the time for appeals. This problem was compounded by uncertainty under Rule 7 about whether the decision was the court's final ruling on the matter or whether the prevailing party was expected to prepare an order confirming the decision.

The 2015 amendments of Rule 7, Rule 54 and Rule 58A are intended to reduce this confusion by requiring "that there be a judgment set out on a separate document—distinct from any opinion or memorandum—which provides the basis for the entry of judgment." See Advisory Committee Notes to 1963 Amendments to Fed. R. Civ. P. 58. Courts and practitioners are encouraged to use appropriate titles with separate documents intended to operate as judgments, such as "Judgment" or "Decree," and to avoid using such titles on documents that are not appealable. The parties should consider the form of judgment included in the Appendix of Forms. On the question of what constitutes a separate document, the Committee refers courts and practitioners to existing case law interpreting Fed. R. Civ. P. 58. For example, *In re Cendant Corp.*, 454 F.3d 235, 242-244 (3d Cir. 2006) offers three criteria:

1) the judgment must be set forth in a document that is independent of the court's opinion or decision;

2) it must contain ordering clauses stating the relief to which the prevailing party is entitled, and not merely refer to orders made in other documents or state that a motion has been granted; and

3) it must substantially omit recitation of facts, procedural history, and the reasons for disposing of the parties' claims.

While "some trivial departures" from these criteria—such as a one-sentence explanation of reasoning, a single citation to authority, or a reference to a separate memorandum decision—"must be tolerated in the name of common sense," any explanation must be "very sparse." *Kidd v. District of Columbia*, 206 F.3d 35, 39 (D.C. Cir. 2000).

The concurrent amendments to Rule 7 remove the separate document requirement formerly applicable to interlocutory orders. Henceforward, the separate document requirement will apply only to judgments, a change that should reduce the tendency to confuse judgments with other orders. Rule 7 has also been amended to modify the process by which orders on motions are prepared. The process for preparing judgments is the same.

Under amended Rule 7(j), a written decision, however designated, is complete—is the judge's last word on the motion—when it is signed, unless the court expressly requests a party to prepare an order confirming the decision. But this should not be confused with the need to prepare a separate judgment when the decision has the effect of disposing of all clams in the case. If a decision disposes of all claims

in the action, a separate judgment is required whether or not the court directs a party to prepare an order confirming the decision.

State Rule 58A is similar to Fed. R. Civ. P. 58 in determining the time of entry of judgment when a separate document is required but not prepared. This situation involves the "hanging appeals" problem that the Supreme Court asked this Committee to address in *Central Utah Water Conservancy District v. King*, 2013 UT 13, ¶27. Under the 2015 amendments, if a separate document is required but is not prepared, judgment is deemed to have been entered 150 days from the date the decision—or the order confirming the decision—was entered on the docket.

2016 amendments

The 2016 amendments in paragraphs (b) and (f) are part of a coordinated effort with the Advisory Committee on the Rules of Appellate Procedure to change the effect of a motion for attorney fees on the appealability of a judgment. The combined amendments of this rule and Rule of Appellate Procedure 4 effectively overturn *ProMax Development Corp. v. Raile*, 2000 UT 4, 998 P.2d 254 and *Meadowbrook, LLC v. Flower*, 959 P.2d 115 (Utah 1998). Paragraph (f) also addresses any doubts about the enforceability of a judgment while a motion for attorney fees is pending.

Under *ProMax* and *Meadowbrook* a judgment was not final until the claim for attorney fees had been resolved. An appeal filed before a claim for attorney fees had been resolved was premature and would be dismissed. Under the 2016 amendments, the time to appeal runs from the order disposing of a timely motion for attorney fees, just as it does timely motions under Rules 50, 52 and 59. The 2016 amendments to appellate Rule 4(b) also add a motion under Rule 60(b), but only if the motion is filed within 28 days after the judgment.

If a notice of appeal is filed before the order resolving the timely motion, the appeal is not dismissed; it is treated as filed on the day the order ultimately is entered, although the party must file an amended notice of appeal to appeal from the order disposing of the motion.

Although this change overturns *ProMax* and *Meadowbrook*, it is not the same as the federal rule. Under Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 58(e):

> Ordinarily, the entry of judgment may not be delayed, nor the time for appeal extended, in order to tax costs or award fees. But if a timely motion for attorney's fees is made under Rule 54(d)(2), the court may act before a notice of appeal has been filed and become effective to order that the motion have the same effect under Federal Rule of Appellate Procedure 4 (a)(4) as a timely motion under Rule 59.

In other words, a motion for attorney fees extends the time to appeal, but only if the trial court judge rules that it does. In the 2016 amendment of the state rules, a timely motion for attorney fees automatically has that effect.

Although the 2016 amendments change a policy of long standing in the Utah state courts, the amendments will help to protect the appellate rights of parties and avoid the cost of premature appeals.