

Circuit Court for Baltimore County
Case No.: C-03-FM-24-003114

UNREPORTED*

IN THE APPELLATE COURT

OF MARYLAND

No. 1298

September Term, 2025

NATRESA STUCKEY

v.

DAVID BRANDFORD

Graeff,
Tang,
Eyler, James R.,
(Senior Judge, Specially Assigned),

JJ.

Opinion by Tang, J.

Filed: January 8, 2026

*This is an unreported opinion. This opinion may not be cited as precedent within the rule of stare decisis. It may be cited for persuasive value only if the citation conforms to Rule 1-104(a)(2)(B).

Natresa Stuckey (“Mother”) appeals an order of the Circuit Court for Baltimore County that adopted the findings and recommendations made by a family division magistrate. The court awarded David Brandford (“Father”) sole legal and primary physical custody of the parties’ three children. The order also established a visitation schedule for Mother and terminated Father’s ongoing child support payments. For the reasons set forth below, we affirm the judgment of the circuit court.

BACKGROUND

Father filed a complaint for custody of the parties’ three minor children. Mother filed an answer, requesting joint custody and asserting that she had filed a complaint for child support in a separate proceeding.

A custody hearing was held before a family division magistrate on April 8, 2025. Father was self-represented. He requested sole legal and primary physical custody of the children. He also requested that the court provide the parties with a visitation schedule.

Mother failed to appear at the hearing. The notice of the hearing date sent to her last known address was returned as undeliverable and unable to be forwarded.

The magistrate heard testimony from Father and his mother (the children’s paternal grandmother). After reviewing the required factors set forth in *Taylor v. Taylor*, 306 Md. 290, 304–11 (1986) and *Montgomery County Department of Social Services v. Sanders*, 38 Md. App. 406, 420 (1977), the magistrate recommended that Father be awarded sole legal custody and primary physical custody of the children. The magistrate recommended that Mother have access to the children every other Saturday from 10:00 a.m. until 8:00 p.m., with pickup and drop off of the children at Father’s home.

Based on the magistrate’s recommendation that the children reside solely with Father, the magistrate found that it would be unconscionable to require Father to pay child support. Accordingly, the magistrate recommended that Father’s ongoing monthly child support payments of \$325 be terminated in the child support case. However, the magistrate recommended that he pay any arrears accrued from September 1, 2024, to April 1, 2025, in the sum of \$100.00 per month until all arrears are paid.

Mother filed exceptions to the magistrate’s report and recommendations on May 7, 2025 and filed amended exceptions the following day, which the court accepted. In her exceptions, Mother did not specify any errors made by the magistrate, as required by Maryland Rule 9-208(f) (“Exceptions shall be in writing and set forth the asserted error with particularity.”). Instead, she requested shared custody, stating that both parents should have an equal number of days with the children throughout the year. In addition, she explained that she left Father due to the abusive nature of their relationship.

With respect to child support, she requested that Father pay \$325 in ongoing child support. She stated that Father’s complete financial records “were not sent in” and asked the court “look into” these records. In addition, she explained that due to a lack of support, she had to “give [her] place up.” Although she was “starting over[,]” she managed to secure a “stable place” for herself and the children.

There is no indication in the record that Mother ordered a transcript of the hearing before the magistrate. *See* Md. Rule 9-208(g)(1) (requiring the excepting party to order a transcript of so much of the testimony as is necessary to rule on the exceptions, as one option to provide the exceptions court with the record of the proceedings before the

magistrate). In the exceptions, Mother indicated that she was submitting an agreed statement of facts instead of a transcript of the hearing, which is allowed under the Rule. *See* Md. Rule 9-208(g)(3). However, Mother did not include an agreed statement of facts with her exceptions.

The court issued a notice indicating that exceptions to the magistrate’s report would be decided without oral argument. On July 22, 2025, the court entered a memorandum opinion and order dismissing Mother’s exceptions. The court explained that Mother failed to assert any error by the magistrate; even if she had, she failed to provide either a transcript or an agreed statement of facts, making it impossible for the court to determine whether an error occurred. On July 25, 2025, the court entered a separate order adopting the magistrate’s recommendations.

Mother noted this appeal timely.

DISCUSSION

Mother requests that this Court reverse the circuit court’s order awarding Father sole legal and primary physical custody and terminating his ongoing child support. She further requests that the case be remanded to the circuit court for it to award shared custody.

Mother filed an informal brief pursuant to this Court’s Administrative Order permitting informal briefing in family law cases for self-represented litigants.¹ *See* Md. Rule 8-502(a)(9). The Court-approved form for informal briefs instructs appellants to “refer to the Guidelines for Informal Briefs provided with this form for instructions on how

¹ Father did not file a brief or participate in this appeal.

to fill out this form.” *Informal Brief of the Appellant Form.*² The form directs the appellant to “identify your argument in support of the resolution of those issues.” *Id.* “When referencing facts, identify where the facts can be located in the record (in other words, exhibits, transcripts, pleadings, orders, decisions, etc.). You may cite case law, statutes, or other authorities, but you are not required to do so. You may attach any relevant documents *from the record.*” *Id.* (emphasis added).

Subsection (b)(2) of the Guidelines for Informal Briefs states that:³

[T]he appellant must identify issues that *explain why the trial court erred or made a mistake in deciding the case* and why the decision should be reversed or modified. The issue presented in the informal brief should be stated concisely with a description of the facts surrounding the issue *and an argument supporting the resolution of the issue.*

(emphases added).

In her informal brief, Mother does not identify any error made by the magistrate or court in deciding the case. Nor does she offer any argument in support of such contention. Instead, she explains her reasons for leaving Father, her mental health condition, and other personal circumstances. She attached various documents to the informal brief, but these are not part of the record and cannot be considered. *See Forward v. McNeily*, 148 Md. App.

² *Informal Brief of the Appellant Form*, <https://www.mdcourts.gov/sites/default/files/import/cosappeals/pdfs/informalbriefappellantcivil.pdf> [<https://perma.cc/6UPB-ZT8Q>]. Likewise, the accompanying Guidelines expressly require appellants to identify both issues and supporting arguments. *Guidelines for Informal Briefs*, <https://www.courts.state.md.us/sites/default/files/import/cosappeals/pdfs/guidelinesinformalbriefs.pdf> [<https://perma.cc/5T36-32CN>].

³ See *Guidelines for Informal Briefs*, *supra* n.2.

290, 309 (2002) (stating that documents not included in the circuit court record ordinarily cannot be considered on appeal). Since Mother does not raise any error or argument in support thereof, we are unable to address her claim that the court’s judgment should be reversed. *See Guidelines for Informal Briefs, supra* n.2 at (b)(3) (“Any issue not raised specifically in an informal brief may not be considered by the Court.”); *see also DiPino v. Davis*, 354 Md. 18, 56 (1999) (“[I]f a point germane to the appeal is not adequately raised in a party’s brief, the court may, and ordinarily should, decline to address it.”); *Klauenberg v. State*, 355 Md. 528, 552 (1999) (“[A]rguments not presented in a brief or not presented with particularity will not be considered on appeal”).

To the extent that Mother contends that the court erred in dismissing her exceptions and adopting the magistrate’s recommendations, we discern no error. A party seeking to challenge the magistrate’s findings or recommendations must file exceptions with the circuit court. *See* Md. Rule 9-208(f). “Exceptions shall be in writing and shall set forth the asserted error with particularity. Any matter not specifically set forth in the exceptions is waived unless the court finds that justice requires otherwise.” *Id.*

As mentioned, Maryland Rule 9-208(g)(1) specifies that a party filing exceptions must order a transcript of the testimony needed to rule on the exceptions. Instead of ordering a transcript, a party may file an agreed statement of facts. Md. Rule 9-208(g)(3). “The court may dismiss the exceptions of a party who has not complied with this section.” Md. Rule 9-208(g).

The circuit court properly concluded that Mother did not identify any errors in the magistrate’s ruling. Her exceptions primarily requested equal time with the children,

ongoing child support, and an investigation into Father’s financial records. Furthermore, the court properly dismissed the exceptions because, even if Mother had asserted a particular error, her failure to order a transcript of the hearing or attach an agreed statement of facts prevented the court from reviewing any alleged error.

**JUDGMENT OF THE CIRCUIT COURT
FOR BALTIMORE COUNTY AFFIRMED.
APPELLANT TO PAY COSTS.**