

IN THE SUPREME COURT OF MISSISSIPPI

No. 89-R-99001-SCT

COURT ORDER 13

Dated May 29, 2003. Effective May 29, 2003

This matter has come before the Court en banc for consideration of technological changes in recent years in the area of data generation, storage and retrieval. Having considered the matter, the Court finds that the amendment of Rule 26 of the Mississippi Rules of Civil Procedure as set forth in Exhibit "A" hereto will promote the fair and efficient administration of justice.

IT IS THEREFORE ORDERED that Rule 26 of the Mississippi Rules of Civil Procedure and its Comment are amended as set forth in Exhibit "A" hereto.

IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that the Clerk of this Court shall spread this order upon the minutes of the Court and shall forthwith forward a true certified copy hereof to West Publishing Company for publication as soon as practical in the advance sheets of Southern Reporter, Second Series (Mississippi Edition) and in the next edition of Mississippi Rules of Court.

SO ORDERED, this the 29th day of May, 2003.

/s/ William L. Waller, Jr.
WILLIAM L. WALLER, JR., JUSTICE
FOR THE COURT

McRAE, P.J. DISSENTS.

EXHIBIT "A" TO ORDER

RULE 26. GENERAL PROVISIONS GOVERNING DISCOVERY

(a) Discovery Methods. Parties may obtain discovery by one or more of the following methods: depositions upon oral examination or written questions; written interrogatories; production of documents or things or permission to enter upon land or other property, for inspection and other purposes; and requests for admission. Unless the court orders otherwise under subdivisions (c) or (d) of this rule, the frequency of use of these methods is not limited.

(b) Scope of Discovery. Unless otherwise limited by order of the court in accordance with these rules, the scope of discovery is as follows:

(1) In General. Parties may obtain discovery regarding any matter, not privileged, which is relevant to the issues raised by the claims or defenses of any party. The discovery may include the existence, description, nature, custody, condition and location of any books, documents, electronic or magnetic data, or other tangible things; and the identity and location of persons (i) having knowledge of any discoverable matter or (ii) who may be called as witnesses at the trial. It is not ground for objection that the information sought will be inadmissible at the trial if the information sought appears reasonably calculated to lead to the discovery of admissible evidence.

(2) Insurance Agreements. A party may obtain discovery of the existence and contents of any insurance agreement under which any person carrying on an insurance business may be liable to satisfy part or all of a judgment which may be entered in the action or to indemnify or reimburse for payments made to satisfy the judgment. Information concerning the insurance agreement is not by reason of disclosure admissible in evidence at trial. For purposes of this paragraph, an application for insurance shall not be treated as part of an insurance agreement.

(3) Trial Preparation: Materials. Subject to the provisions of subdivision (b)(4) of this rule, a party may obtain discovery of documents and tangible things otherwise discoverable under subdivision (b)(1) of this rule and prepared in anticipation of litigation or for trial by or for another party or by or for that other party's representative (including that party's attorney, consultant, surety, indemnitor, insurer, or agent) only upon a showing that the party seeking discovery has substantial need of the materials in the preparation of that party's case and that the party is unable without undue hardship to obtain the substantial equivalent of the materials by other means. In ordering discovery of such materials when the required showing has been made, the court shall protect against disclosure of the mental impressions, conclusions, opinions, or legal theories of an attorney or other representative of a party concerning the litigation.

A party may obtain without the required showing a statement concerning the action or its subject matter previously made by that party. Upon request, a person not a party may obtain without the required showing a statement concerning the action or its subject matter previously made by that person. If the request is refused, the person may move for a court order. Rule 37(a)(4) applies to the award of expenses incurred in relation to the motion. For purposes of this paragraph, a statement previously made is: (A) a written statement signed or otherwise adopted or approved by the person making it, or (B) a stenographic, mechanical, electrical, or other recording, or a transcription thereof, which is a substantially verbatim recital of an oral statement by the person making it and contemporaneously recorded.

(4) Trial Preparations: Experts. Discovery of facts known and opinions held by experts, otherwise discoverable under subsection (b)(1) of this rule and acquired

or developed in anticipation of litigation or for trial, may be obtained only as follows:

(A)(i) A party may through interrogatories require any other party to identify each person whom the other party expects to call as an expert witness at trial, to state the subject matter on which the expert is expected to testify, and to state the substance of the facts and opinions to which the expert is expected to testify and a summary of the grounds for each opinion.

(ii) Upon motion, the court may order further discovery by other means, subject to such restrictions as to scope and such provisions, pursuant to subsection (b)(4)(C) of this rule, concerning fees and expenses, as the court may deem appropriate.

(B) A party may discover facts known or opinions held by an expert who has been retained or specially employed by another party in anticipation of litigation or preparation for trial and who is not expected to be called as a witness at trial only upon a showing of exceptional circumstances under which it is impracticable for the party seeking discovery to obtain facts or opinions on the same subject by other means.

(C) Unless manifest injustice would result, (i) the court shall require that the party seeking discovery pay the expert a reasonable fee for time spent in responding to discovery under subsections (b)(4)(A)(ii) and (b)(4)(B) of this rule, and (ii) with respect to discovery obtained under subsection (b)(4)(A)(ii) of this rule, the court may require, and with respect to discovery obtained under subsection (b)(4)(B) of this rule, the court shall require, the party seeking discovery to pay the other party a fair portion of the fees and expenses reasonably incurred by the latter party in obtaining facts and opinions from the expert.

(5) Electronic Data. To obtain discovery of data or information that exists in electronic or magnetic form, the requesting party must specifically request production of electronic or magnetic data and specify the form in which the requesting party wants it produced. The responding party must produce the electronic or magnetic data that is responsive to the request and is reasonably available to the responding party in its ordinary course of business. If the responding party cannot-through reasonable efforts-retrieve the data or information requested or produce it in the form requested, the responding party must state an objection complying with these rules. If the court orders the responding party to comply with the request, the court may also order that the requesting party pay the reasonable expenses of any extraordinary steps required to retrieve and produce the information.

(c) Discovery Conference. At any time after the commencement of the action, the court may hold a conference on the subject of discovery, and shall do so if requested by any party. The request for discovery conference shall certify that counsel has conferred, or made reasonable effort to confer, with opposing counsel concerning the matters set forth in the request, and shall include:

1. a statement of the issues to be tried;
2. a plan and schedule of discovery;
3. limitations to be placed on discovery, if any; and
4. other proposed orders with respect to discovery.

Any objections or additions to the items contained in the request shall be served and filed no later than ten days after service of the request.

Following the discovery conference, the court shall enter an order fixing the issues; establishing a plan and schedule of discovery; setting limitations upon discovery, if any; and determining such other matters, including the allocation of expenses, as are necessary for the proper management of discovery in the case.

Subject to the right of a party who properly moves for a discovery conference to prompt convening of the conference, the court may combine the discovery conference with a pretrial conference authorized by Rule 16.

The court may impose sanctions for the failure of a party or counsel without good cause to have cooperated in the framing of an appropriate discovery plan by agreement. Upon a showing of good cause, any order entered pursuant to this subdivision may be altered or amended.

(d) Protective Orders. Upon motion by a party or by the person from whom discovery is sought, and for good cause shown, the court in which the action is pending, or in the case of a deposition the court that issued a subpoena therefor, may make any order which justice requires to protect a party or person from annoyance, embarrassment, oppression, or undue burden or expense, including one or more of the following:

- (1) that the discovery not be had;
- (2) that the discovery may be had only on specified terms and conditions, including a designation of the time or place;
- (3) that the discovery may be had only by a method of discovery other than that selected by the party seeking discovery;
- (4) that certain matters not be inquired into, or that the scope of the discovery be limited to certain matters;
- (5) that discovery be conducted with no one present except persons designated by the court;
- (6) that a deposition after being sealed to be opened only by order of the court;

- (7) that a trade secret or other confidential research, development, or commercial information not be disclosed or be disclosed only in a designated way;
- (8) that the parties simultaneously file specified documents or information enclosed in sealed envelopes to be opened as directed by the court;
- (9) the court may make any other order which justice requires to protect the party or witness from annoyance, embarrassment, oppression or undue burden or expense, including provision for payment of expenses attendant upon such deposition or other discovery device by the party seeking same.

If the motion for a protective order is denied in whole or in part, the court may, on such terms and conditions as are just, order that any party or person provide or permit discovery. Rule 37(a)(4) applies to the award of expenses incurred in relation to the motion.

(e) Sequence and Timing of Discovery. Unless the court upon motion, for the convenience of parties and witnesses and in the interests of justice, orders otherwise, methods of discovery may be used in any sequence and the fact that a party is conducting discovery, whether by deposition or otherwise, shall not operate to delay any other party's discovery.

(f) Supplementation of Responses. A party who has responded to a request for discovery with a response that was complete when made is under no duty to supplement the response to include information thereafter acquired, except as follows:

(1) A party is under a duty seasonably to supplement that party's response with respect to any question directly addressed to (A) the identity and location of persons (i) having knowledge of discoverable matters, or (ii) who may be called as witnesses at the trial, and (B) the identity of each person expected to be called as an expert witness at trial, the subject matter on which the person is expected to testify, and the substance of the testimony.

(2) A party is under a duty seasonably to amend a prior response if that party obtains information upon the basis of which (A) the party knows that the response was incorrect when made, or (B) the party knows that the response, though correct when made, is no longer true and the circumstances are such that a failure to amend the response is in substance a knowing concealment.

(3) A duty to supplement responses may be imposed by order of the court, agreement of the parties, or at any time prior to trial through new requests for supplementation of prior responses.

[Amended effective March 1, 1989; March 13, 1991; April 13, 2000. Amended effective May 29, 2003 to add Rule 26(5) addressing discovery of electronic data.]

Advisory Committee Historical Note

[Advisory Committee Historical Notes are not changed by this order]

Comment

With two important exceptions MRCP 26 is identical to Miss. Code Ann. § 13-1-266 (1972); subdivision 26(b)(1) narrows the scope of permissible discovery, although it does permit the discovery of the identity and location of persons who may be called as witnesses at the trial; a new subdivision (c) is added and the original subdivisions are renumbered accordingly.

Sweeping and abusive discovery is encouraged by permitting discovery confined only by the "subject matter" of a case -- the language of Miss. Code Ann. § 13-1-226(b) (1972) -- rather than limiting it to the issues presented. Discovery should be limited to the specific practices or acts that are in issue. Determining when discovery spills beyond "issues" and into "subject matter" will not always be easy, but M.R.C.P. 26(b)(1) is intended to favor limitations, rather than expansions, on permissible discovery. Accordingly, "admissible evidence" referred to in the last sentence of 26(b)(1) must be limited by the new relevancy which emerges from the term "issues," rather than from the more sweeping term "subject matter."

Rule 26(b) was amended effective May 29, 2003, adding subsection (5) to make specific provision for discovery of data and information existing in electronic and magnetic form. Recognizing that special problems may exist in the retrieval of such data, the rule limits the duty to that of production of electronic and magnetic data to that which is reasonably available to the responding party in its ordinary course of business. Further, if extraordinary steps are required to retrieve and produce the information, the court may require the requesting party to pay the expense of those steps, in addition to costs which may be assessed under Rule 26(d)(9). The production of data compilations which are subject to production under Rule 34 is also subject to the limitations of Rule 26(b)(5). Rule 26(c) establishes a discovery conference convened on the court's own motion or at the request of any party. This conference is a corollary to the limitation on the scope of discovery dictated by Rule 26(b)(1). Whether the conference is convened on the court's own motion or upon a litigant's certified request, the court has control over the time of its convening and the scope of its reach.

Rule 26(c) provides the procedure for early judicial control but continues to impose principal responsibility upon the litigating bar for the preparation of a case. In the great majority of cases, opposing counsel should be able, without judicial intervention, to formulate an appropriate plan and schedule of discovery in relation to issues readily defined by agreement. In those instances, however, where it would facilitate the discovery process, the court may hold a discovery conference on its own motion or upon the request of either party.

The discovery conference will produce an order defining: (a) a "plan" in which the types and subjects of discovery are set forth, e. g., oral depositions of A, B and C; production of contracts and any letters, correspondence or memoranda explaining or modifying them, etc.; (b) a "schedule" for discovery which specifies the time and place for discovery events, e. g., the dates and places for the taking of depositions of A, B and C, or the time within which documents are to be produced, and (c) such "limitations" as might otherwise be employed in protective orders, e. g., the documents of C shall be disclosed only to B's lawyers.

The rule also provides for "allocation of expenses." This provision would permit courts, as justice dictates, to reassign the usual financial burdens of discovery. For example, a court might condition discovery demanded by party A upon the payment by A of all or part of party B's expenses, including attorneys' fees.

An early accord or order on discovery may require later modification. Rule 26(c) allows such amendments freely. Again, cooperation among counsel should be the rule rather than the exception.

[Comment amended effective March 1, 1989; April 13, 2000. Comment amended effective May 29, 2003.]