

Circuit Court for Charles County
Case No: C-08-FM-24-001567

UNREPORTED*

IN THE APPELLATE COURT

OF MARYLAND

No. 14

September Term, 2025

LAWRENCE BRIAN STUKES

v.

JANIKA STUKES

Wells, C.J.
Arthur,
Beachley, Donald E.
(Senior Judge, Specially Assigned),

JJ.

Opinion by Wells, C.J.

Filed: April 15, 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).

The Circuit Court for Charles County granted appellant, Lawrence Stukes (“Husband”), and appellee, Janika Stukes (“Wife”), an absolute divorce. The court also awarded Wife sole legal and primary physical custody of the parties’ minor child as well as child support. On appeal, Husband filed an informal brief challenging the court’s order.¹ For the reasons discussed below, we affirm the judgment of the circuit court.

BACKGROUND

On October 16, 2024, Wife filed a complaint for absolute divorce, requesting legal and physical custody of the parties’ minor child and child support. The affidavit of service indicated Husband was served with the divorce complaint, in hand by private process server, at Wife’s residence on October 28, 2024.

On December 2, 2024, Wife requested an order of default, attesting that Husband was served with the complaint for absolute divorce on October 28, 2024, and that he failed to file a response. On December 6, 2024, the court issued an order of default.

A divorce and custody hearing was held before a family division magistrate on February 3, 2025. Wife was self-represented and Husband did not attend the hearing. The record indicates the notice of the hearing was sent to Husband’s address at 2509 Brandy Lane, Accokeek, Maryland 20607.

At the conclusion of the hearing, the magistrate recommended Wife be awarded sole legal custody and primary physical custody of the child. The magistrate also recommended Wife be awarded child support of \$1,213.00 per month and that Husband be assessed

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

arrears of \$4,852.00, payable in the amount of \$87.00 per month, effective March 1, 2025. The court mailed the magistrate’s report and recommendations to Husband’s address on record—2509 Brandy Lane, Accokeek, Maryland 20607. Husband did not file exceptions to the magistrate’s report and recommendations.

On February 21, 2025, the circuit court entered a judgment of absolute divorce and adopted the magistrate’s recommendations as to the issues of custody and support.

On March 5, 2025, Husband noted an appeal.

DISCUSSION

Husband filed an informal brief pursuant to this Court’s December 19, 2022, Administrative Order permitting informal briefing in family law cases for self-represented litigants. *See* Md. Rule 8-502(a)(9). In his brief, Husband asks this Court to reverse and vacate the judgment. In support of his requested relief, he states he “never received [notice of the] court date[,]” and therefore, he was not present to offer argument or show his finances. We note that Husband states in his brief his address is 2509 Brandy Lane, Accokeek, Maryland 20607—the same address where the court mailed the notice of the hearing and the magistrate’s report and recommendations.

Because service of process issues require factual determinations, this Court generally will not entertain process challenges raised for the first time on appeal. *See Wilson v. Maryland Dept. of Env’t*, 217 Md. App. 271, 286 (2014) (“The determination ‘whether a person has been served with process is essentially a question of fact.’”) (quoting *Harris v. Womack*, 75 Md. App. 580, 585 ((1988))). This Court “will not make factual

determinations properly left to the trial court.” *Gruss v. Gruss*, 123 Md. App. 311, 321 (1998) (remanding because the trial court failed to make a finding as to whether the party claiming an irregularity of process had “acted in good faith, with due diligence, and had a meritorious claim”).

Husband did not raise the issue of notice before the circuit court. He did not move to vacate the default judgment, nor did he seek to invoke the court’s revisory powers as to the final judgment under Maryland Rule 2-535.² Because Husband’s contention that the divorce judgment should be vacated due to lack of notice was not raised in or decided by the trial court, it is not preserved for our review and we will not consider it. *See* Md. Rule 8-131(a) (Ordinarily, except for certain jurisdictional issues, “an appellate court will not decide any other issue unless it plainly appears by the record to have been raised in or decided by the trial court[.]”). *See also Miles v. Stovall*, 132 Md. App. 71, 80 (2000) (holding that an argument raised for the first time on appeal that the trial court lacked personal jurisdiction was not preserved for review).

² Our ruling does not, however, preclude Husband from seeking to revise the judgment in the trial court or seeking future modification of the child custody and child support awards. *See Velasquez v. Fuentes*, 262 Md. App. 215, 236 (2024) (“[O]nce a final custody order is entered it cannot be altered or amended, absent court action based upon a request to do so under, for example, Rule 2-535 or Courts and Judicial Proceeding (CJP) Article of the Maryland Code Annotated § 6-408 or at the direction of an appellate court.”).

Husband’s appellate argument consists solely of his claim that he lacked notice. He does not challenge the merits of the judgment or identify any error made by the magistrate or the circuit court. Subsection (b)(2) of the Guidelines for Informal Briefs states:³

the 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 issues 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.

(emphasis added). *See also 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.”). Because Husband has failed to identify any error in the court’s order, he presents no argument on the merits of the judgment for our review. Accordingly, we affirm.

**JUDGMENT OF THE CIRCUIT COURT
FOR CHARLES COUNTY AFFIRMED.
COSTS TO BE PAID BY APPELLANT.**

³ See Guidelines for Informal Briefs, available at <https://www.mdcourts.gov/sites/default/files/import/cosappeals/pdfs/guidelinesinformalbriefs.pdf>.