



OFFICE OF THE CIRCUIT COURT
THIRD JUDICIAL CIRCUIT OF FLORIDA

Columbia, Dixie, Hamilton, Lafayette, Madison, Suwannee, and Taylor Counties

MARK E. FEAGLE
Chief Judge

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To: Third Judicial Circuit Communities
From: Mark E. Feagle, Chief Judge, Third Judicial Circuit
Date: March 23, 2020
Re: Court Operations

On behalf of the Third Judicial Circuit, I want to advise the public of how the current Coronavirus pandemic is affecting court operations and our commitment to ensuring access to justice.

First and foremost, I hope you and your families are staying safe and healthy during these difficult days. This is a time of anxiety and disruption in our personal and professional lives, but it's important that we remain positive and we focus on what we can do to keep our families safe, how we can support each other in our communities, and be ready for a return to normalcy once the coronavirus threat has passed.

As you know, our courts are critical to the functioning of our society. Whether we face a man-made disaster, a natural disaster, or a health crisis, the court will continue to operate. Currently, our circuit and county courts are operating, but now with limitations as mandated by the Florida Supreme Court.

Our goal is to ensure access to justice. Concurrently, we want to protect the health and well-being of the public who use the court system and those who work in it. The steps we have taken to carry out this dual responsibility are in line with the latest information and recommendations issued by the Florida Supreme Court and our public health officials.

By modifying how we handle non-essential court proceedings, we have dramatically reduced the number of people in our courthouses and sought to eliminate the person-to-person contact by which this virus spreads. In order to conduct our

essential business in ways that limit personal contact we have employed video and teleconferencing whenever possible.

We certainly appreciate the unequivocal support and cooperation we have received from lawyers in the public and private sectors, and from the stakeholder agencies who appear in our courts every day. I want to assure all of you that we have an excellent team working around the clock. Our Judges, Judicial Assistants and staff are working tirelessly to keep the courts open, to the extent permitted, while mitigating the impact of the virus on court users.

The Trial Court Administrator and I are in touch with and monitoring all communications from public health leaders and our counterpart officials in state and local government and we will keep you informed of all relevant developments. Please continue to check our website for daily news and updates.

To our attorneys:

If you are an attorney involved in an essential court proceeding as defined by AOSC20-15 and TJCAO20-02, please be sure to maintain contact with the presiding judge's office regarding their specific procedures. When possible, even essential matters will be handled via electronic means, including PolyCom and Microsoft Teams videoconferencing. Obviously, there is not complete uniformity with these proceedings throughout the circuit as our internet capabilities vary within the jails and more rural areas.

All judges will continue to keep as many non-essential hearings scheduled as possible, and I encourage you to continue to set hearings with the specific judge assigned to your case. While the attorneys and parties are required to appear remotely for these proceedings, Microsoft Teams has proven to be very user friendly and effective, thereby allowing the court to continue with hearings for you and your client's benefit.

Please be sure to familiarize yourself with the Administrative Orders recently enacted due to the virus outbreak. I have attached these AOs for your quick and easy reference and they are also found on the Third Circuit (thirdcircuitfl.org) and Florida Supreme Court (www.floridasupremecourt.org) websites.

I want to thank you for your continued patience and cooperation during this unprecedented time as we face and conquer these new challenges for the wellbeing of our communities and justice.

Mark E. Feagle



Chief Judge, Third Judicial Circuit