

AMENDED  
EIGHTEENTH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT PHASE 2 OPERATIONAL PLAN

Based upon the current situation with COVID-19 and pursuant to the current Supreme Court's Administrative Order AOSC20-23 along with its second amendment issued on May 21, 2020, AOSC20-32, and the Supreme Court's May 21, 2020 Memoranda, procedures need to be implemented to mitigate the effects of the pandemic upon the judicial branch and its participants. The Supreme Court has provided guidance regarding transitioning between Phase 1, where in-person contact is inadvisable, court facilities are effectively closed to the public, and in-person proceedings are rare, and Phase 2, where limited in-person contact is permitted.

The Eighteenth Circuit has determined that it has met the five benchmark criteria to transition into Phase 2.

The Eighteenth Circuit has collaborated with other building occupants, facilities management and law enforcement to ensure that health, safety, cleaning, and disinfecting is taking place in the courthouses. The Court has reconfigured and marked the interior and exterior of the courthouses to accommodate social distancing. The maximum capacity for each courtroom or hearing room has been determined on an individual courtroom basis. Judges shall regulate the number and location of persons in their courtrooms so as to facilitate the protection of individuals from COVID-19. Court security will manage traffic flowing into and out of courtrooms using queue areas and social distancing.

HEALTH & WELFARE:

1. Judges should use their discretion in excusing anyone who is supposed to attend a hearing in-person who is fearful of entering the Courthouse due to the pandemic and allowing that person to appear telephonically and/or remotely.
2. All persons entering 18th Circuit Courthouses must appear with valid photo ID, such as a driver's license.
3. All pro se litigants shall register their email or make use of the portal: <https://www.myflcourtaccess.com/default.aspx>
4. Each individual shall follow CDC protocols to the maximum extent possible.
5. Elevator capacity is limited to 4 individuals in each Courthouse.
6. Masks must be worn by all those in the Courthouse.

7. HEALTH SCREENERS at each Courthouse will take temperatures of each member of the public entering the Courthouse. The health screener will take note of any health concerns pertaining to the person attempting to enter the Courthouse.

a. The screening shall include the following questions:

i. Question 1: Do you have any of the following symptoms (excluding those due to a known medical reason other than COVID-19):

1. Cough
2. Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
3. Fever or chills
4. Fatigue
5. Muscle or body aches
6. Headache
7. Sore throat
8. New loss of taste or smell
9. Congestion or runny nose
10. Nausea or vomiting
11. Diarrhea

ii. Question 2: Are you currently awaiting the results of a test to determine if you have had COVID-19 based upon symptoms or suspected exposure?

ii. Question 3: Are you under instructions to self-isolate or quarantine due to COVID-19?

iii. Question 4: Within the past 14 days, have you had close contact with someone with a COVID-19 diagnosis or who is awaiting test results for COVID-19 based on symptoms or suspected exposure? (Note: close contact is defined as contact that is less than 6 feet for 15 minutes or more, irrespective of whether a cloth face covering or respiratory PPE was worn).

b. In Brevard County:

- i. If the health screener determines that an individual has a temperature of over 100.4 degrees or other health concerns, the health screener will notify the Deputy at the front entrance.
  - ii. Upon notification, the Deputy will identify the individual by his/her driver's license or other identification. The Deputy at the front entrance will inform the Clerk of the Court and/or deputy assigned to the Courtroom in which the individual was to appear that the individual will not be appearing, although he/she had intended to appear for their Court appearance. The Clerk and/or deputy will notify the court.
  - iii. The Clerk of the Court will provide the individual with his/her new Court date before the individual leaves the Courthouse. The Clerk shall also give the individual excused from his/her Court appearance the phone number and email address of the Judicial Assistant for the Judge presiding over the rescheduled proceeding.
- c. In Seminole County:
- i. If the health screener determines that an individual has a temperature of over 100.4 degrees or other health concerns, the health screener shall electronically notify the Judge presiding over the individual's case as well as the Court Clerk.
  - ii. If the individual is appearing for a criminal matter, the individual should contact the Clerk of Court for information regarding a new court date. The individual may also monitor his or her case on the Clerk of Court's website.
  - iii. If the individual is appearing for a non-criminal matter, the individual will receive information regarding a future court date via U.S. mail or email from the Clerk of Court.

8. Inmates and detainees shall be screened pursuant to the Sheriff's protocol prior to entering the courthouse and shall wear a mask while in the courthouse.
9. If a client's appearance is required, Attorneys shall contact their client prior to court dates to determine if there are health risks involved with the client's appearance in the Courthouse. The attorney should contact the Judge's Judicial Assistant to notify him/her of the need to continue the matter. The attorney is responsible for notifying his/her client of the new court date and time.
10. Hallways and all seating will be marked in six-foot intervals. Individuals shall comply with the CDC recommended social distancing guidelines and remain 6 feet apart.
11. Visible signage shall be posted in the courthouses reminding individuals of hygiene protocols. Hand sanitization stations shall be implemented at several locations throughout all courthouses where feasible, and persons entering and traversing a courthouse will be encouraged to use them.
12. Face masks or shields are required for everyone entering the courthouse building, with no exceptions. Face masks or shields shall be worn at all times throughout the public areas of the courthouse building, including inside the courtroom if two or more individuals are in the courtroom. If visitors do not have a face mask, one shall be provided to them at no cost.

The following exclusions apply to wearing face masks or shields in a courthouse:

- a) Judges and court staff do not have to wear a mask in their private chambers or office as long as social distancing is possible. If they do not have a private office, and ample social distancing is not observed, a mask or shield should be worn while at their desk.
- b) Present medical advice advocates that adequate face masks offer the best protection. However, the chief judge has adopted a

policy allowing the use of a face shields as set forth in Administrative Order 20-35.

13. Members of the public who refuse to comply with the health and safety requirements and guidelines in the courthouse shall be required to leave the courthouse. The Sheriff's office in each county is permitted to use the necessary means to enforce the operational plan, prohibit an individual from entering the courthouse or assist a person in exiting the courthouse based upon his or her noncompliance
14. The County will disinfect all high touch areas of the Courthouse twice daily. The County will also provide two trigger spray bottles of disinfectant in each Courtroom for users to perform disinfection of their areas as needed.
15. The witness stand shall be sanitized between each witness.
16. Judges and employees shall self-check for symptoms. If they present symptoms, they must remain home and should consult their doctor or other medical professional.

#### REMOTE AND IN PERSON PROCEEDINGS:

To the extent possible consistent with Supreme Court administrative orders or similar guidance, all proceedings shall occur remotely (such as by teleconferencing, videoconferencing, or other means) unless litigants or other court participants are unable to successfully participate in a remote hearing for reasons beyond the Court's control. Procedures for specific court proceedings are addressed more fully within this operational plan.

Until further order of this Court, all notices of court hearings issued by counsel or the court shall contain statements requiring bringing and wearing masks in the courthouse, bringing valid photo ID such as a driver's license, and a request to call 321-351-6255 to receive relevant information regarding entering a courthouse.

Vulnerable persons may attend proceedings using remote technology.

Judges are encouraged to stagger any in person proceedings based upon the courtroom capacity in order to maintain appropriate social distancing in the courtroom and hallways. The physical handling of documents is to be avoided.

CRIMINAL COURT (Felony and Misdemeanor):

Each Criminal Division Judge may decide whether a hearing is amenable to being held remotely. In the discretion of the criminal judge a matter that is not conducive to being heard remotely may be held in person.

Because of risks associated with virus transmission among inmates, judges are strongly discouraged from ordering the transport of inmates to court. However, if deemed necessary for a court proceeding, judges may bring inmates to the courtroom from the county jails. Also, if a Defendant is accepting a plea of jail or prison time, it is encouraged to have it conducted remotely from the courtroom at the jail to avoid contamination of holding cells.

CIVIL COURT CIRCUIT AND COUNTY:

1. All civil matters should be accomplished remotely. However, civil judges in their discretion may hold in person hearings if a matter is not conducive to being heard remotely.
2. Pre-trial conferences should be set by the Civil Division Judges' Judicial Assistants. At the pre-trial conference, trial dates should be given by the Judicial Assistants.

PIP CASES:

PIP Cases: The Clerk of Court shall cancel the Small Claims pre-trial conference in PIP cases when:

- a. The Plaintiff is represented by counsel; and
- b. The Defendant-insurance carrier/company is a named Defendant.
- c. The Clerk of Court shall then remove the case from the Small Claims docket with the progress docket reflecting that the Pre-Trial Conference has been cancelled.

- d. In the event both sides are represented by counsel, the Florida Rules of Civil Procedures shall be invoked with the case to be noticed for trial by either party once ready.
- e. If the Defendant/insurance carrier/company is not represented by counsel prior to the actual pre-trial conference date it shall retain counsel no later than twenty days (20) calendar days after the scheduled pre-trial conference, otherwise, the Clerk of the Court shall enter a Clerk's default upon motion.

#### INJUNCTIONS:

Injunctions are essential proceedings. Each Judge may decide at his/her discretion whether he/she will hold injunction hearings in person or remotely. Senior Judges will be utilized to undertake the daily influx of injunction cases. Each Family Division Judge and Judges Silverman, Garagozlo, and Baker will work off the backlog of injunction cases in their division.

#### CIVIL TRAFFIC INFRACTIONS:

Civil traffic infractions hearing scheduled at the Moore Justice Center will be heard from 5:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. in person on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays. Otherwise, civil traffic infraction hearings will continue to be heard on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Fridays remotely by videoconferencing in Courtroom 1A at the Criminal Justice Center, unless the hearing officer or judge determines that it cannot be fairly heard remotely and then it may be heard in-person.

#### FAMILY COURT:

All cases governed by Florida Family Law Rules of Procedure (except as pertains to injunctions) shall be heard remotely unless the Judge assigned to a case determines that it cannot be fairly heard remotely and then the Judge may set the matter to a date and time to be heard in-person.

#### BAKER ACTS & MARCHMAN ACTS:

1. Baker Acts will be heard remotely until facilities where Baker Acts are heard permit in person hearings.
2. Marchman Acts are essential proceedings and will be heard in person.

#### JUVENILE DEPENDENCY HEARINGS:



Shelter hearings, arraignments, advisory hearings, dependency trials and termination of parental rights trials are essential proceedings. For shelters, arraignments and advisory hearings, parents and attorneys may attend in person; all other participants will attend remotely. Dependency and termination of parental rights trials may be held in person or remotely at the discretion of the Dependency Judge.

JUVENILE DELINQUENCY HEARINGS:

Juvenile delinquency hearings/proceedings, including Detention hearings, will be heard in Person or remotely at the discretion of the Juvenile Delinquency Judge.

RISK PROTECTION ORDERS:

Will be heard in person or remotely at the discretion of the assigned Judge.

ALTERNATIVE DISPUTE RESOLUTION PROCEEDINGS:

Must be conducted remotely.

GUARDIANSHIP:

All Guardianship matters shall be heard remotely. However, a judge may hold guardianship matters in person if the hearing is not conducive to being held remotely.

EXTRAORDINARY WRITS:

Shall be heard remotely or in person as determined by the assigned Judge.

REMOTE HEARINGS:

Will be conducted by Microsoft TEAMS or telephone as appropriate except Baker Act hearings (the mental health facilities set up the Baker Act hearings using a special version of Zoom that is HIPAA compliant).

SENIOR JUDGE DAYS:

Judges, after conferring with the Chief Judge, may utilize Senior Judges to help with the backlog of cases.

RESCHEDULING CASES:

Except for those cases involving individuals who are excused from their Court proceedings due to health concerns as set forth in Health and Welfare, section 7 above, and are rescheduled by the Clerk of the Court, all cases that are rescheduled shall be re-noticed by the Judicial Assistant whose Judge is



assigned to the case. The notice should contain information about whether the case will be heard remotely or in person. The re-noticed hearing shall contain instructions as to how to participate telephonically or remotely.

Judicial Assistants shall notify the Clerk's Office regarding hearings that will be heard in person in order that the Clerk's Office can ensure that a court clerk will be present at the proceeding.

#### HUMAN RESOURCES:

All employees are permitted to work remotely to the extent their work can be done remotely throughout Phases 1-3.

The Information Technology Department has made training and equipment available to all judges and court staff so that they may perform their duties by remote electronic means.

Human Resources has developed a set of reopening protocols consistent with CDC guidelines and includes behavioral modifications/requests, facilities maintenance considerations, and a teleworking policy.

Court Administration HR Procedures:

Judge/Employee presenting symptoms (fever, cough, or shortness of breath, etc.,) at work should **immediately** Contact Human Resources:

HR will instruct symptomatic judge/employee the following:

- Immediate requirement to wear both mask and gloves
- Exit Courthouse
- If applicable, provide judge/employee enough time to collect items for teleworking.

HR will timely notify individuals who have had direct contact with symptomatic judge/employee while maintaining confidentiality consistent with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), HIPAA, and other applicable federal and state privacy laws.

HR will timely disseminate an e-mail to the 18th Circuit Judges and Court Staff within the impacted county.

HR will timely notify county facilities for the need to disinfect a particular area(s) of courthouse.

Secure area(s) utilized by the symptomatic judge/employee until after county facilities clean and disinfect.

Inform those who have had close contact to individual diagnosed with COVID-19 to stay home and self-monitor for symptoms, and to follow current CDC guidelines, if symptoms develop. If symptoms develop, individual is to notify HR (*Brevard County: Human Resources Manager I, April Copp and Seminole County: Chief Deputy Court Administrator, Yvan Llanes.*) immediately. If individual does not present symptoms, follow current CDC guidance for home isolation.

Symptomatic judge/employee should not return to work until they have met current CDC's criteria to discontinue home isolation.

Designated staff responsible for responding to COVID-19 concerns are Brevard County: Human Resources Manager I, April Copp and Seminole County: Chief Deputy Court Administrator, Yvan Llanes.

DATED this 1st day of October, 2020.



Lisa Davidson  
Lisa Davidson  
Chief Judge  
Eighteenth Judicial Circuit