

IN THE THIRD JUDICIAL CIRCUIT OF FLORIDA
ADMINISTRATIVE ORDER NO.: 2025-005
(Supersedes Administrative Order No.: 2018-022)

**ADMINISTRATIVE ORDER ESTABLISHING COURT FACILITY SECURITY
PROCEDURES WITHIN THE THIRD JUDICIAL CIRCUIT**

WHEREAS, pursuant to Article V, Section 2(d) of the Florida Constitution, the Chief Judge is responsible for the administrative supervision of the courts in their circuit;

WHEREAS, pursuant to Rule 2.215, Florida Rules of General Practice and Judicial Administration, and Section 43.26, Florida Statutes, along with the inherent power of the Court to do all things reasonable and necessary for the administration of justice, the Court finds that it is necessary and reasonable to enact this policy;

WHEREAS, on September 25, 2025, the Florida Supreme Court, via memorandum, affirmed that chief judges continue to have the authority to prohibit weapons (including firearms) in courthouses and courtrooms and that the exercise of that authority is consistent with the public policy embodied in Florida's gun laws and is grounded in the power granted to chief judges by article V, section 2 of the Florida Constitution, by the Florida Statutes, and by the Rules of General Practice and Judicial Administration;

WHEREAS, pursuant to Florida Rule of General Practice and Judicial Administration 2.215(b)(7), the Chief Judge "must regulate the use of all court facilities" and the Chief Judge recognizes that the security of court facilities is a daily concern due in part to the emotional nature of many court proceedings. Further, the Chief Judge recognizes the need to ensure the health, safety, and welfare of those who work within the court facilities or who litigate or otherwise conduct business within the facilities and to ensure that justice is administered without the potential for intimidation. Moreover, the Chief Judge recognizes the need to protect the public interest in providing for orderly and safe passage for the transaction of court business throughout the various court facilities;

WHEREAS, a court has the inherent authority to designate its own facilities, including the reasonably necessary boundaries thereof and entry points to ensure an appropriate level of security and to ensure the efficient operation of judicial proceedings and court business;

WHEREAS, pursuant to section 26.49, Florida Statutes, the Sheriffs of the Circuit are the Executive Officers of the circuit court, required by section 30.15(1)(c), Florida Statutes, in person or by deputy to attend all terms of the circuit and county courts held within their respective counties;

WHEREAS, section 790.06 (12), Florida Statutes, states that a license to carry a concealed weapon or firearm does not authorize any person to openly carry a handgun or carry a concealed weapon or concealed firearm into a courthouse or courtroom, but that a judge is not precluded from carrying a concealed weapon or firearm or from determining who will carry a concealed weapon or concealed firearm in his or her courtroom;

WHEREAS, it is necessary and proper to regulate the possession of firearms, weapons, and other destructive devices, as well as chemicals and other explosive materials, within court facilities in the Third Judicial Circuit to protect members of the public, jurors, judges, other court officers, and staff to ensure a secure environment for the orderly and safe administration of justice.

IT IS THEREFORE ORDERED:

I. “COURT FACILITIES” DEFINED:

Pursuant to section 29.008(1)(a), Florida Statutes:

“Facility” means reasonable and necessary buildings and office space and appurtenant equipment and furnishings, structures, real estate, easements, and related interests in real estate, including, but not limited to, those for the purpose of housing legal materials for use by the general public and personnel, equipment, or functions of the circuit or county courts, public defenders’ offices, state attorneys’ offices, and court-related functions of the office of the clerks of the circuit and county courts and all storage. [...] The term also includes access to parking¹ for such facilities in connection with such court-related functions that may be available free or from a private provider or a local government for a fee.

Court facilities are facilities in which the court conducts its official business including the areas inside and around the premises of a courthouse, courthouse annex, judicial center, justice center, historic courthouse, or other building where court functions are performed by the court or on behalf of the court for the furtherance of court operations and cases. The Chief Judge determines that pursuant to section 29.008(1)(a), “court facilities” in the Third Judicial Circuit are the following:

- A. Columbia County Courthouse - 173 NE Hernando Avenue, Lake City.
- B. Lake City Annex (Court Administration) - 4424 NW American Lane, Lake City.
- C. Dixie County Courthouse - 214 NE Hwy 351, Cross City.
- D. Hamilton County Courthouse - 207 NE 1st Street, Jasper.
- E. Lafayette County Courthouse - 120 W Main Street, Mayo.
- F. Madison County Courthouse - 125 SW Range Avenue, Madison.
- G. Madison County Courthouse Annex - 229 SW Pinckney St, Madison.
- H. Suwannee County Courthouse - 200 S Ohio Avenue, Live Oak.
- I. Suwannee County Judicial Annex - 218 Parshley St SW, Live Oak.
- J. Taylor County Courthouse - 108 N Jefferson Street, Perry.
- K. Facilities ancillary to the courthouses accessed by the public for the purpose of conducting the necessary business of the courts as required by the constitution, statutes, or court rules; and,
- L. Any other facilities subsequently designated for court or court related functions to include temporary designations if necessary.

¹ This order does not affect the rights enumerated in Florida Statute 790.251 under the “Preservation and Protection of the Right to Keep and Bear Arms in Motor Vehicles Act of 2008.”

II. DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF SHERIFFS

The safety and security of court facilities have historically been entrusted to the Sheriff of each county to operate as they deem appropriate and with consultation and cooperation with the judiciary. The Sheriffs of the Third Judicial Circuit shall provide security for the court facilities of the circuit and county courts, their personnel, clerks' staff (acting as an arm of the judicial court in furtherance of court business), jurors, attorneys and the public who access court facilities. For purposes of this Administrative Order, a "bailiff" is defined as a law enforcement officer appointed by the Sheriff and certified under chapter 943 of the Florida Statutes, who is assigned by a Sheriff to provide security to court facilities on a full time or part-time basis.

III. SECURITY GUIDELINES FOR ENTERING COURT FACILITIES

Except as set forth below, all persons entering court facilities through public access portals shall be subject to identification verification and search. Searches may be conducted at all points of public ingress under procedures established by the Sheriffs using personnel and equipment approved by them. Searches shall include protocols, techniques, and equipment most likely to detect contraband, weapons, firearms, flammable, hazardous or toxic materials, bombs, biological and chemical agents. Sheriffs are authorized by applicable Florida law to confiscate prohibited objects seized from persons entering the court facility. Items which have been confiscated but are lawful to possess outside of the court facility may be returned when the owner departs the courthouse premises.

All visitors in attendance at circuit or county court events in courtrooms, hearing rooms, or chambers may be screened by a bailiff prior to entering. Screening shall be sufficient to ensure that no firearms, weapons, or destructive devices shall enter the courtroom, hearing room, or chambers. Minimum screening requirements shall include a bailiff to conduct the screening, use of a metal detector, a barrier to limit free ingress, and a search of personal articles of sufficient size to hide a weapon. An x-ray machine may be used in lieu of a personal search.

Persons refusing to be searched shall be denied access to court facilities. Persons found to be in possession of contraband or illegal weapons, illegal firearms or hazardous materials shall be, in the discretion of courthouse security officers, arrested or referred for investigation to the appropriate law enforcement agency.

Any person engaged in activities observed by judges or courthouse security to be a threat to the safety of persons or property in a court facility, or who disrupts official business in the courts or in its ancillary facilities, or who violates state, county, or municipal laws, shall, in the discretion of court facility security officers, be subject to arrest and/or ejection from the facility upon order of a judge or duly authorized law enforcement officer.

No food or drinks will be permitted within the courthouse. An exception shall be made for attorneys and necessary staff who will be in the courthouse for extended periods of time. They may bring in sealed bottles of water or an empty reusable bottle of water.

IV. PERSONS EXEMPT FROM SEARCH

With the consent of the Chief Judge and in coordination with courthouse security and elected Clerks of Court, the Trial Court Administrator may issue, control, and revoke Third Circuit identification documents regulating secured access to court facilities. The following persons shall be exempt from search when entering or departing court facilities:

- A.** Judges and magistrates of the Third Circuit, and the Trial Court Administrator;
- B.** Persons displaying a current Third Circuit identification document issued or approved by the Trial Court Administrator authorized to enter through nonpublic or designated employee entrances;
- C.** Upon proof of proper identification, federal, state, county, and municipal law enforcement officers when on official business;
- D.** The elected Third Circuit State Attorney, Public Defender, Sheriffs, and Clerks of Court.

V. FIREARMS AND WEAPONS CONTROL

A. General Prohibition

Except as authorized by this Administrative Order or any applicable statutory law, no person is permitted to carry into court facilities any contraband, weapons, firearms, ammunition, non-lethal personal protection devices, flammable, hazardous or toxic materials, bombs, or biological or chemical agents.

B. Exemption: Clerks and Evidence Custodians

The elected Clerks of Court are permitted to possess a firearm in their personal offices but are not permitted to carry firearms or weapons in other areas of court facilities or in courtrooms, unless otherwise provided herein.

Items which are intended to be introduced in court as evidence, or which are in the custody of the clerk as evidence, shall be admitted into court facilities provided they are maintained in secure containers and in safe condition and made available for inspection while on court facility premises and grounds.

C. Exemption: Judges and Circuit Employees

Judges are permitted to carry firearms in court facilities. Judicial assistants are authorized to carry non-lethal protection devices including, but not limited to, tasers, mace and pepper spray. The Trial Court Administrator is permitted to carry firearms in court facilities with permission from the Chief Judge.

D. Exemption: Marshals and Judges from Florida Supreme Court and District Courts of Appeal

When in a Third Judicial Circuit court facility on official business, the justices, judges and Marshals of the Florida Supreme Court and District Courts of Appeal are permitted to carry firearms in court facilities.

E. Exemption: Deputy Sheriffs Assigned to Court Facility Security

Deputy Sheriffs assigned as bailiffs or court facility security are permitted to carry firearms in court facilities as authorized by applicable statute.

All bailiffs or court facility security who are authorized to carry firearms as part of their official duties are prohibited from carrying a firearm into any court facility in this circuit when the law enforcement officer is a party to the proceeding or is not appearing in an official capacity.

F. Exemption: Certain Law Enforcement Officers²

1. The following law enforcement officers who meet the requirements listed in this section are also permitted to carry firearms or weapons in court facilities while performing their official duties:
 - a. County Sheriffs and Deputy Sheriffs of the Third Judicial Circuit;
 - b. Law enforcement officers employed by a local police department and holding active certification from the Criminal Justice Standards and Training Commission pursuant to F.S. 943.1395, whose agency is headquartered within the Third Judicial Circuit;
 - c. Investigators employed by the State Attorney who are authorized by the State Attorney to carry firearms; and,
 - d. Law enforcement officers from federal law enforcement agencies.
2. The excepted law enforcement officers listed above may enter or occupy a court facility with a firearm or weapon provided that the officer meets all of the following requirements:
 - a. is in a recognized law enforcement uniform or wearing visible identification that identifies them as law enforcement; and,
 - b. provides appropriate identification with a photograph (a badge alone is not sufficient);
 - c. is in the court facility on official business; and,
 - d. has any firearm in his or her possession in a secure holster, and has any other weapon similarly secured on the officer.
3. Each judge retains the discretion to prohibit the exempted law enforcement

² Law enforcement officers mean individuals meeting the definition set forth in Florida Statute 943.10(1). It does not include probation officers, process servers or bail bondsmen.

officers from carrying weapons in proceedings before him/her. The judge or presiding officer may exercise such a prohibition overall or on a case-by-case basis.

4. All exempted law enforcement officers who are authorized to carry firearms as part of their official duties are prohibited from carrying a firearm into any court facility in this circuit when the law enforcement officer is a party to the proceeding or is not appearing in an official capacity.
5. In limited instances where heightened security may be required, upon advance notice to the Chief Judge or Trial Court Administrator and with the consent of the assigned judge, Sheriffs may request a waiver of the requirement of wearing a uniform or visible identification in order to permit undercover officers to possess firearms or weapons in court facilities.

G. Exemption: Third Judicial Circuit State Attorney and Assistant State Attorneys

The Third Judicial Circuit State Attorney and assistant state attorneys who are authorized by the elected State Attorney to carry firearms as part of their official duties are permitted to carry firearms into and out of court facilities where their offices are located in the same court facility. Under no circumstances are they permitted to carry firearms into a judge's chambers, court administration offices, courtrooms or hearing rooms housed in the same building as their office.

The State Attorney and all assistant state attorneys who are authorized by the elected State Attorney to carry firearms as part of their official duties are prohibited from carrying a firearm into any court facility in this circuit when they are not representing the interests of the State of Florida or appearing in an official capacity. Additionally, if the State Attorney or an assistant state attorney is present in a court facility for a personal matter, s/he is expressly prohibited from carrying a firearm into the court facility.

H. Exceptional or Emergency Circumstances

At their discretion, any Third Judicial Circuit Sheriff may temporarily prohibit any persons authorized by this administrative order from carrying weapons into a court facility. The Sheriffs may also temporarily authorize representatives of law enforcement agencies to carry weapons into a court facility when needed for assistance with the Sheriff's response to an exceptional, emergency or exigent circumstance.

VI. COURTROOM ASSIGNMENTS, OFFICE HOURS, INGRESS AND EGRESS

In consultation with court facility security and the Clerks, the Chief Judge shall regulate the use of courtrooms, establish the dockets, determine the hours for the public's use of the court facilities and the office hours for occupants of court facilities, designate which entrances and exits shall be public and private and accessible by court staff or the public, establish rules for after-hours access by authorized personnel, location of bailiff stations, and procedures for controlled access to secure and non-secure areas. The Chief Judge may designate areas of court


facilities that are to be secured and accessible only by authorized personnel. Access to secure areas shall be monitored by court security to prevent intrusion.

VII. PUBLIC DEMONSTRATIONS AND PROTECTIONS OF JURORS AND COURT PERSONNEL

It is crucial to the administration of justice that movement of persons into and out of court facilities be unimpeded, and that judges, attorneys, litigants, and jurors be allowed to perform their duty on the premises without undue interference and without being improperly approached or influenced.

Court facility security officers shall prohibit any activity which is perceived to be a threat to the safety of persons or property within court facilities or on court facilities grounds, or which disrupts the official business conducted within such facilities, or which may reasonably be construed as an attempt to influence or intimidate jurors, litigants or judges, or which constitutes a violation of Florida Statute, county ordinance, or administrative order of this Court.

ORDERED this 1st day of October, in Chambers, Lake City, Columbia County, Florida, and effective immediately.



Melissa Gates Olin
Chief Judge

cc:

Third Judicial Circuit Judges
Third Judicial Circuit Judicial Assistants
Third Judicial Circuit Sheriffs
Third Judicial Circuit Clerks of Court
Third Judicial Circuit Office of the Public Defender
Third Judicial Circuit Office of the State Attorney
Third Judicial Circuit Court Administration
Office of Criminal Conflict and Civil Regional Counsel, First Region
Third Judicial Circuit Bar Association President