



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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March 15, 2020

Re: Courthouse Operations in the Third Judicial Circuit

From: Mark E. Feagle, Chief Judge, Third Judicial Circuit

As a result of the ever-evolving Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19), we are forced to make adjustments in order to protect the wellbeing of the public and everyone working within the court system, and we are committed to taking the necessary precautions for the safety of our citizens and those who visit the Third Judicial Circuit. As you are aware, Chief Justice Canady has issued an Administrative Order (AOSC20-13), which, among other directives, has suspended “all grand jury proceedings, jury selection proceedings, and criminal and civil jury trials through March 27, 2020,” with exceptions stated therein. Chief Justice Canady has also ordered chief judges to continue ongoing efforts to mitigate the effects of COVID-19 on the courts and court participants and to implement necessary plans in order to address the public health emergency. In an effort to achieve our goals, Chief Justice Canady temporarily suspended “all rules of procedure, court orders, and opinions applicable to court proceedings that limit or prohibit the use of communication equipment for the conducting of proceedings by remote electronic means.”

As such, the following guidelines shall be strictly adhered to beginning Monday, March 16, 2020, through Friday, March 27, 2020.

1. Courthouse security shall limit persons from entering the courthouses unless said persons are there for a legitimate reason. For example, parties to the case, persons who have been summoned or subpoenaed and the case is still at issue, persons seeking relief via injunctions, and the like. In some counties, one or more constitutional offices are located within the courthouse. Persons renewing a tag or license or recording deeds are further examples of legitimate business that I am not attempting to restrict. When completed with their business, they shall immediately exit the courthouse. Security is given broad discretion in making these decisions but shall reach out to the Chief Judge or their local Judge for additional advice or directions as needed.
2. For all large dockets in circuit and county court, such as arraignments, pre-trials, and VOP dockets, defense counsel (to the best of their abilities) shall advise their clients that the defendant’s appearance is waived from March 16, 2020, through March 27, 2020, unless

the defendant is prepared to enter a plea or other disposition has been agreed to with the State. Attorneys shall appear on their client's behalf and will be responsible for informing their client of the next court date.

3. All court appearances for those in-custody shall be conducted by videoconferencing where available. If videoconferencing is unavailable, or otherwise unreasonable, in-custody court appearances shall take place after non-custody defendants' cases have been resolved.

Thank you for your understanding and your assistance in helping to implement these temporary changes in order to help protect our Third Judicial Circuit.

Please feel free to forward this to anyone you deem appropriate.