

**IN THE COURT OF COMMON PLEAS
DOMESTIC RELATIONS AND JUVENILE BRANCH
FRANKLIN COUNTY, OHIO**

20JU-03-3181

**SIXTH AMENDED ADMINISTRATIVE ORDER (AO) IN RESPONSE
TO THE COVID-19 (CORONAVIRUS) PUBLIC HEALTH CRISIS**

The Administrative Judge of the Domestic Relations and Juvenile Branch of the Franklin County Court of Common Pleas, in consultation with the other Judges of this Bench, hereby makes the following Findings of Fact:

1. Since March 9, 2020 when Ohio Governor Mike DeWine initially issued Executive Order 2020-01D “Declaring a State of Emergency” in response to the growing COVID-19 public health crisis through May 1, 2020, this Court has issued a series of Administrative Orders setting forth COVID-19 protocols dictating Court operations.
2. Franklin County has reached a point that the Court once again desires to progress closer to resuming its pre-COVID operations, *i.e., transitional operations*. The following Order retains a number of measures first enacted in March of 2020 which the Court deems necessary to safeguard the well-being of its employees and customers against COVID-19, a highly contagious viral ailment.

Based upon these Findings of Fact, the Franklin County Domestic Relations and Juvenile Branch of the Court of Common Pleas **HEREBY ORDERS:**

1. The Court’s Order for *limited operations* shall expire close of business on Friday, May 28, 2021 in favor of a *gradual transition towards its pre-COVID operations* beginning Tuesday, June 1, 2021. The Court reserves the right to further modify and/or extend this Administrative Order should the existing public health emergency so dictate.

2. The Court remains open for business for electronic and in-person hearings. The Court will endeavor to conduct as many of its cases and interactions as practical via available technology; no person who is unwilling or unable to attend an in-person hearing due to a verified COVID-19 illness/complication will be required to physically appear in court. Whether to continue the matter or proceed with a ***hybrid hearing*** (i.e., a hearing wherein some individuals/parties participate in-person while others participate via electronic means) remains the sole discretion of the assigned Judge or Magistrate. Signed, timely motions for continuance may be filed by e-mail directly to the assigned courtroom; a list of those contact telephone numbers and email addresses is located on the DRJ Court website: <https://drj.fccourts.org>.
3. During its period of ***transitional operations***, the Court shall return to its normal business hours of **8am until 5pm, Monday through Friday**. The CPO/JPO Help Desk will remain open to the public from 8am until 2pm; the Help Desk will take its last petition promptly at 2pm. Court staff shall physically report to work unless otherwise approved by Human Resources.
4. Effective since March of 2020, ***the following protocols shall continue:***
 - a) appropriate masks/face coverings (covering both the nose and mouth) are ***required*** by all persons entering any Court-controlled area until otherwise advised;
 - b) customers and/or counsel displaying any symptom that *could be reasonably construed* as related to COVID-19 will be required to leave the courthouse immediately; their cases will be continued;
 - c) non-staff access to the DRJ Court lobby, back hallways, private offices and wait areas on the 3rd through 6th floors will remain limited to maintain the safety of the public and court employees in compliance with state, federal, and Ohio Supreme Court guidelines;
 - d) plexiglass barriers shall remain in use where practicable;
 - e) Court Navigators will assist in ensuring proper social distancing and occupancy restrictions in the Court's lobby and elevators; social distances of 3-feet will be strictly enforced, even in wait areas;

- f) failure to comply with Court Navigator directives shall constitute a public disruption, just cause for forcible removal from the building;
 - g) a maximum of 15 people (*including court staff and/or interpreters*) will be permitted in courtrooms; therefore, only persons essential for in-person hearings should be present in the courthouse – all others should remain outside the building until called;
 - h) videoconferencing technology will continue to be utilized for (1) some juvenile appearances in delinquency proceedings (***see the AO of September 9, 2020***); (2) visits and consults with juveniles held in detention, and (3) uncontested/agreed cases and status/pretrial conferences;
 - i) the current, staggered-docket scheduling shall remain in effect; **no more than 2 cases should be scheduled in any given time slot;**
 - j) seating in wait areas and courtrooms must ensure compliance with social distancing guidelines. Use of the wait areas is generally discouraged; parties should arrive shortly before their scheduled hearing times and, after check-in, should be seated outside the assigned courtroom until called inside by courtroom staff;
 - k) scheduled cases will begin and end at the scheduled time in order to preserve proper occupancy standards on DRJ Court floors; thus, tardy cases may be continued;
 - l) conference rooms will be available for public use; no more than 3 persons shall occupy a conference room at any given time; disinfecting wipes/products will be available in all courtrooms for occupants' use (court staff are *not responsible* for disinfecting conference rooms); failure of occupants to observe room capacity restrictions will result in the Court's return to the **locked** conference room policy.
5. The Self-Represented Resource Center will continue to utilize telephonic and other electronic methods to interact with their users/customers whenever practicable.
6. Intake, supervision, contact and testing via JCES and/or the Juvenile Intervention Center may be conducted by electronic means. In-person contact for drug testing, GPS monitoring, assessments and searches may be utilized where necessary; however, non-essential in-person contact should continue to be minimized.

7. This Amended Administrative Order in Response to the COVID-19 (Coronavirus) Public Health Crisis shall be communicated to the Franklin County Commissioners, other Franklin County Courts and local justice partners. This document, and any amendments thereto, shall be posted to the DRJ Court website: <https://drj.fccourts.org>.

8. ***COVID-19 protocols and/or policies previously effectuated by the Court pursuant to its prior Administrative Orders shall remain in full effect, unless specifically modified herein.***

IT IS SO ORDERED:



JUDGE KIM A. BROWNE
ADMINISTRATIVE JUDGE

ISSUE DATE: May 17, 2021