

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

20JU-03-3181

**AMENDED ADMINISTRATIVE ORDER 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. On March 9, 2020, 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. On/about April 30, 2020, Governor DeWine (via Dr. Amy Acton) issued a “Stay Safe Ohio” Order through May 29, 2020.
2. On March 11, 2020 the World Health Organization officially declared COVID-19 to be a global “pandemic” requiring “urgent and aggressive action” to control the spread of the virus.
3. On March 18, 2020, the Court issued its first Administrative Order, which was amended on April 2, 2020, detailing a continuum of flexible responses designed to protect public health, to maintain essential court functions, to protect the safety and welfare of its staff and customers and to protect the rights of all individuals subject to the authority of the Court.
4. The existing public health emergency has not yet been abated to the point that the Court may fully resume its normal operations. Thus, the following plan is necessary as COVID-19 is a highly contagious viral ailment for which there is no direct treatment, nor any vaccination.

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 hereby acknowledges the relevant portions of Ohio HB197 and the written guidance of the Supreme Court of Ohio, both signed on Friday, March 27, 2020, effective retroactive to March 9, 2020.
2. The Court hereby continues its Order for **curtailed operations** through close of business on Friday, May 29, 2020. While the Court anticipates a gradual transition to limited operations on June 1, 2020, it reserves the right to further extend this Administrative Order should the existing public health emergency so dictate.
3. The Court remains open for business. In fact, some courtrooms, **with the consent of the parties involved**, have already commenced scheduling in-person, contested and/or evidentiary hearings. However, the Court is **not requiring litigants or attorneys to appear in person for hearings at this time**. Signed, timely filed Motions for Continuance will be granted.
4. Filings will continue to be accepted via e-filing (which is preferred) and in-person at the Clerk's Office. Motions for Continuance and/or Motions to Modify an *ex parte* Civil Protection Order (CPO) may also 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>.
5. **Effective June 1, 2020**, the Court will resume its normal business hours of 8am until 5pm. Court staff shall physically report unless authorized to work remotely by their supervisors.
6. Also effective June 1, 2020, the Court will begin to schedule in-person hearings. Again, the Court will endeavor to conduct as many of its cases and interactions via available technology as practical and **persons who are unwilling or unable to attend an in-person hearing due to COVID-19 concerns/complications may request a continuance. Reasonable continuance requests will be granted.**
7. During the Court's period of **limited operations** (beginning June 1, 2020), public access to the DRJ Court lobby, back hallways, private offices and wait areas on the 3rd through 6th floors will remain extremely limited to maintain the safety of the public and court employees in compliance with state, federal, and Ohio Supreme Court guidelines. In most instances, in-person interaction with court staff will be facilitated through clear, Plexiglass barriers installed around the desks of bailiffs,

court officers, stenographers, witness stands and walk-up windows to ensure proper social distancing.

8. After June 1, 2020, during limited operations, only persons essential to support in-person hearings shall be physically present on-site during the period of limited operations. Outside persons interacting with the Court shall continue to do so remotely.
9. 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. This schedule shall remain in place indefinitely.
10. **During limited operations**, the Court will prioritize: (1) hearing cases originally set in March and April 2020 and (2) utilizing videoconferencing technology for:
 - juvenile appearances in delinquency proceedings,
 - visits and consults with juveniles held in detention, and
 - uncontested/agreed cases and conferences.
11. Many courtrooms will employ “Tech Days”, i.e., the scheduling of an entire day’s docket exclusively via videoconference technology. Using the attached form, parties and/or their counsel may submit requests for videoconference hearings directly to assigned jurists. Additional information regarding videoconference hearings is located on the DRJ Court website at: <https://drj.fccourts.org/DRJ.aspx?PN=Forms.htm>.
12. To facilitate proper 6-foot social distancing and occupancy restrictions during limited operations, domestic cases assigned to the **3rd and 6th Floors** will be scheduled on staggered dockets at a rate of **no more than one case per 30-60 mins** per courtroom.
13. To facilitate proper 6-foot social distancing and occupancy restrictions during limited operations, juvenile cases assigned to the **5th and 6th Floors** will be scheduled on staggered dockets at a rate of **no more than one case per 60-90 mins** per courtroom.
14. Specific docketing questions should be addressed directly to the staffs of the assigned Magistrates and Judges; phones and email are being monitored remotely 8am until 5pm.

15. Additionally, to facilitate the above-noted docketing guidelines, the Court has adopted the following rules:

- The wearing of appropriate masks/face coverings is **required** by all persons entering the **DRJ Floors** pursuant to guidance from the Centers for Disease Control, the Columbus/Ohio Departments of Health and the Supreme Court of Ohio; court employees are also **required** to wear masks/face coverings. Litigants and/or counsel displaying any symptom that *could be construed* as COVID-19 related will be ordered to leave the courthouse; their cases will be continued;
- The Court will be deploying “Court Navigators” to assist the public in locating courtrooms, ensuring elevator car restrictions and enforcing proper social distancing standards. Social distances of 6-feet will be strictly enforced, even in wait areas. Failure to comply with Court Navigator directives shall constitute a public disruption and is just cause for removal from the building. BE ADVISED: Cases may be adjudicated in the absence of a person/party ejected from the building by a Navigator or an Officer of the Franklin County Sheriff’s Department;
- A maximum of 10 people (*including court staff and/or interpreters*) will be permitted in courtrooms; therefore, only persons essential for hearings should be present in the courthouse – all others should remain outside the building, at home or in their vehicles;
- Seating in wait areas and courtrooms may be rearranged, minimized or (in some cases) eliminated to ensure compliance with distancing guidelines. Use of the wait areas is generally discouraged; parties should arrive just before their scheduled hearing times and be prepared to take seats inside the courtrooms upon being so directed by courtroom staff. Carpet decals or other means will be employed to indicate appropriate spacing while awaiting service;
- In order to preserve proper occupancy standards on DRJ Court floors, scheduled cases will begin and end at the scheduled time; thus, tardy cases will be continued. All pre-hearing consultations and/or negotiations must occur *prior* to arrival in the courthouse and be concluded *before* the scheduled hearing time;

- Unsanitized conference rooms shall remain locked;
- Attorneys, litigants and/or members of the general public are prohibited from entering or being admitted to the private offices of court staff and/or the Court's secured hallways.
- Until further notice, business casual dress is appropriate for litigants, customers and counsel on the 3rd through 5th Floors; confirm 6th Floor dress code policy with the assigned courtroom.

16. Juvenile Community Enrichment Services (JCES), Mediation, the Reception Center, and other core court programs shall continue to utilize telephonic and other electronic services wherever possible. Individual changes in those programs may be necessary on a case-by-case basis during this period of limited operations.

17. Intake, supervision, contact and testing via JCES and/or the Juvenile Intervention Center should continue to be conducted by electronic means whenever possible. In-person contact for drug testing, GPS monitoring, assessments and searches may be utilized where necessary. All *non-essential* in-person contact shall be minimized in accordance with recommendations of the American Probation and Parole Association.

18. 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>.

19. Curtailed or limited operation provisions and/or policies previously effectuated by the Court pursuant to its March 18, 2020 and April 2, 2020 Orders shall remain in full effect, unless specifically modified herein.

IT IS SO ORDERED:



JUDGE KIM A. BROWNE
ADMINISTRATIVE JUDGE

EFFECTIVE DATE:
May 8, 2020