



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 18, 2020

To: Judges, Court Staff, Law Enforcement, Media, Third Circuit Bar, Clerks of Court
From: Mark E. Feagle, Chief Judge, Third Judicial Circuit 
Re: Essential Court Proceedings in the Third Judicial Circuit

On March 17, 2020, the Florida Supreme Court issued Administrative Order SC20-15. This Order is an updated response to the threat of COVID-19. It instructed all circuit and county courts to "continue to perform essential court proceedings." However, if a matter is deemed "non-essential," the Third Judicial Circuit courts, not the courthouses, are effectively closed. To promote clarity and transparency, here is a non-exhaustive list of essential court proceedings:

- a. First Appearances;
- b. Bond Hearings;
- c. Criminal Arraignments; as necessary;
- d. Juvenile Detention Hearings;
- e. Juvenile Shelter Hearings;
- f. Domestic Violence, repeat violence, sexual violence, dating violence and stalking injunctions, as well as all chapter 39 injunctions;
- g. Risk Protection orders;
- h. Baker and Marchman Acts;
- i. Family law (including juvenile) cases where the imminent safety of children is an issue;
- j. Vulnerable adult injunctions;
- k. Emergency incapacity petitions and appointment of guardians;
- l. Proceedings involving requests for "do not resuscitate" orders;
- m. Adult Protective Service Act proceedings;
- n. Requests for search warrants and arrest warrants;
- o. Extraordinary writs;
- p. Any other "emergency" proceedings or hearings authorized by the Chief Judge, which includes jail pleas and admissions by incarcerated defendants via electronic communication.

In addition to these essential court proceedings, Administrative Order SC20-15 also requires the Third Judicial Circuit to perform “critical proceedings related to the state of the emergency (i.e., violation of quarantine or isolation, violation of orders to limit travel, enforcement of curfew orders, etc.).

Moreover, court in the Third Judicial Circuit will still function to the extent that the proceedings can be held remotely using telephonic or electronic means. Currently, our judges and staff are working diligently to implement various means of remote access to address as many matters as possible during this time. Everyone’s continued patience and cooperation are greatly appreciated.

Additionally, the seven courthouses within the Third Judicial Circuit house more than just county and circuit court. Many also include the Clerk of the Court, the State Attorney’s Office, the Tax Collector’s Office, etc. The normal functions of these agencies (recording documents, filing pleadings, accepting payment, initiating lawsuits, etc.) are not impacted or governed by Administrative Order SC20-15.

Administrative Order SC20-15 requires these measures remain in effect until March 27, 2020; however, they may be extended beyond that date. As soon as that decision has been made, I will convey it.

Our goal is to provide access to the courts while following the Administrative Orders entered by Chief Justice Canady and to follow the protocols set forth by our health officials in order to ensure the health and safety of the public.