

Revisions to Twentieth Judicial Circuit Operations Plan and Resumption of Trials

Chief Judge Michael T. McHugh has signed off on an amendment to the Twentieth Judicial Circuit's Operational Plan. Changes to the Operational Plan were made in accordance to two new Administrative Orders from the Florida Supreme Court amending the guidelines for the four-phased timeline and standards for pandemic operations.

The three major changes to local A.O. 2.39 (*Mitigating Measures in Response to COVID-19 & Operational Plan for Resumption of Court Proceedings and Services*) are as follows:

1. Provides updated health screening criteria for entry into a courthouse.
2. Provides updated criteria for the transition to different phases, updated guidance for monitoring local conditions and public health data when expanding in-person proceedings, and a methodology to determine deteriorating local health conditions that would require an amendment to the local operational plan or a return to an earlier phase.
3. Provides a human resources policy to address potential COVID-19 exposure of court employees and judges.

More precise details are outlined in the Operational Plan.

Remote technology is strongly encouraged and will still be used as an alternative to in-person proceedings to limit and minimize person-to-person contact.

For in-person hearings, the only persons allowed in the courtrooms are parties, attorneys, victims, witnesses, court reporter, court interpreter, court/clerk/sheriff personnel whose presence is essential (including case managers, deputy clerks and bailiffs) and the media, subject to the approval of the presiding judge and subject to all available "social distancing" methods.

At this time, the only people (other than employees) allowed entry into the courthouse itself or court facility, for in-person hearings or otherwise, are parties, attorneys, victims, witnesses, court reporter, court interpreter, court/clerk/sheriff personnel whose presence is essential (including case managers, deputy clerks and bailiffs), the media, and persons with official court business.

However, in Collier County no inmates will be transported from the Collier County Jail to the Courthouse for any reason. Inmates can appear via polycom with the exception of those in quarantine. This is in effect until further notice.

Anyone entering the 20th Judicial Circuit courthouses are required to wear face masks or appropriate face coverings at all times throughout the buildings, including courtrooms. There are no exceptions. Anyone without a face mask will be provided with one at no cost. We also ask that people please maintain six feet of distance from others (with the exception of persons with children or within a single family unit) while inside our courthouses and courtrooms.

Twentieth Judicial Circuit Administrative Office of the Courts
COVID-19 Advisory #12
08/24/2020

At this time, the Courts of the 20th Judicial Circuit are planning for the resumption of criminal jury trials in September 2020. Trials will be limited in number to ensure the safety and health of all jurors performing their civic duties. This target date may be modified based upon the status of local health conditions in each of the circuit's five (5) counties.

There is also a Phase Three in the Florida Supreme Court Chief Justice's plan where in-person contact is more broadly authorized and protective measures are relaxed and a Phase Four, which would be a complete return to normalcy. Chief Judge McHugh and AOC management staff continue to consult with our Administrative Judges, justice partners and local health department officials in all five counties to provide for a safe, gradual, phased-in approach for the resumption of court proceedings that ensures everyone's safety and welfare.

This Administrative Order supersedes all other Administrative Orders and directives and is effective immediately.

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