

IN THE CIRCUIT COURT OF THE FIFTEENTH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT  
IN AND FOR PALM BEACH COUNTY, FLORIDA

ADMINISTRATIVE ORDER NO.: 12.515-06/2021

IN RE: COVID-19 HEALTH AND SAFETY PROTOCOLS AND  
OPERATIONAL MEASURES

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In response to the public health emergency caused by the outbreak of the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19), the Florida Supreme Court and the Fifteenth Judicial Circuit took significant initial measures to limit and modify court operations so as to ensure the safe administration of justice.<sup>1</sup> For the first six months of the pandemic, the Circuit remained in what the Florida Supreme Court defined as Phase 1 of court operations. During Phase 1, essential proceedings were held remotely or in-person, non-essential court proceedings were either held remotely or were suspended, and jury and grand jury proceedings were suspended.

On September 9, 2020, the Circuit transitioned into Phase 2 of the Florida Supreme Court's operational phases. While in Phase 2, the Court heard the majority of non-essential proceedings through remote technology. However, limited types of non-essential proceedings, including grand jury proceedings and jury trials, were conducted in-person on a limited basis and subject to certain safety measures. The provisions governing Phases 1 and 2 were outlined in Administrative Order 12.510 as amended numerous times.

On June 4, 2021, the Florida Supreme Court entered an Administrative Order authorizing all courts to exit Phase 2 operations as warranted by the wide use and availability of an effective vaccine. Fla. Admin. Order No. AOSC21-17 (Fla. June 4, 2021). Based on this guidance, **effective 12:01 a.m. on June 21, 2021**, AO 12.510-05/2021.21 will terminate and the Circuit will no longer operate in Phase 2. Instead, the following protocols and measures will govern the Circuit's operations.

**NOW THEREFORE**, pursuant to the authority conferred by Florida Rule of General Practice and Judicial Administration 2.215 it is **ORDERED** as follows:

<sup>1</sup> See, Fla Admin. Order No. AOSC20-23, (Fla. May 4, 2020) (and as amended); Fla. Admin. Order No. AOSC20-17 (Fla. March 23, 2020) (and as amended) (all available at <https://www.floridasupremecourt.org/Emergency>).

## **I. CONDUCT OF COURT PROCEEDINGS:**

1. In-Person Proceedings: The following matters should proceed in-person to the maximum extent feasible.<sup>2</sup>

- a. First appearance hearings;
- b. Criminal arraignments, when necessary;
- c. Hearings on motions to set or modify monetary bail for individuals who are in custody;
- d. Pre-negotiated pleas in circuit and county criminal divisions;
- e. Hearings on Motions to Dismiss in criminal cases (e.g. C4, double jeopardy, or defect);
- f. Hearings on Motions to Suppress;
- g. Stand Your Ground hearings;
- h. Out of Custody Misdemeanor and Traffic Arraignments where the Defendant has not Waived his or her Appearance;
- i. Violation of Probation Hearings;
- j. *Richardson* Hearings;
- k. *Nelson* Hearings;
- l. *Faretta* Hearings;
- m. Sentencing Hearings;
- n. Juvenile plea conferences;
- o. Delinquency Trials, including Disposition Hearings;
- p. Termination of Parental Rights trials;
- q. Petitions for Judicial Waiver of Notice pursuant to section 390.01114(4), Florida Statutes;
- r. Ex parte injunctions for dating violence, domestic violence, repeat violence, sexual violence, or stalking injunctions;
- s. Final hearings on domestic violence, stalking, dating violence, repeat violence, sexual violence; or prevention of child abuse injunctions pursuant to Chapter 39, Florida Statutes;
- t. Contempt/enforcement motions in family cases;
- u. Hearings on petitions for Risk Protection Orders;
- v. Issuance of warrants or authorizations for wiretaps;
- w. Baker Act and Marchman Act proceedings;
- x. Extraordinary Writs;
- y. Small Claims Pre-Trials;
- z. Bench Trials;
- aa. Grand Jury Proceedings;
- bb. Jury Proceedings;
- cc. Civil traffic trials.

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<sup>2</sup> For example, if a matter contained on this list was previously noticed as a remote proceeding, it may not be logistically feasible or efficient to re-notice that proceeding for an in-person appearance. Additionally, there may be instances where a criminal or juvenile defendant resides out of county and all parties and the judge agree to the remote conduct of a plea conference. In such instances, the proceeding may still occur remotely.

2. Remote or In-Person Proceedings: Any proceeding not specifically addressed in the in-person proceeding list, above, may proceed either in-person or remotely, subject to: 1) the presiding judicial officer's discretion, 2) any limitations on remote conduct imposed by the United States or Florida Constitution, a statute, or rule of court, and 3) the participants' access to technological resources. Individual judicial officers are encouraged to enter standing orders delineating which type of proceedings heard by that judicial officer will presumptively proceed in-person and which types of proceedings will presumptively proceed remotely. All remote-proceedings must be conducted by the judicial officer from his or her courtroom or hearing room.

3. Priority of Jury Proceedings: Jury proceedings will continue to the maximum extent feasible. The priority order for jury trials will be as follows (from highest to lowest):

- a. Circuit and county criminal trials where speedy trial will run within twenty-days days
- b. Circuit and county criminal trials with an in-custody defendant
- c. Circuit and county criminal trials with an out of custody defendant
- d. Circuit civil jury trials
- e. County civil jury trials

4. Baker Act Involuntary Hearings: Pursuant to AOSC21-17, all Baker Act involuntary commitment hearings must be conducted in-person unless the individual respondent waives the right to physical presence at the hearing.

## **II. COURTHOUSE SAFETY**

In order to ensure the safety of those required to be at the courthouses, the following restrictions apply to all county and circuit courthouses located in Palm Beach County, Florida.

1. Temperature Screenings: Persons entering any of the courthouses may be subject to a temperature scan. Persons with a body temperature of 100°F or higher may be prohibited from entry.

2. Masks: Although masks are not required, participants and observers may choose to wear a mask during any in-person proceeding. Persons who wish to wear a mask and did not bring one will be provided with a mask upon request.

3. Security Lines: Only court staff and attorneys presenting identification (Court, Clerk, GAL, County, ASA, or APD issued IDs or a Florida Bar Card) may proceed through the employees/attorneys security lines. Persons who do not have the proper ID will be required to move to the public entrance line.

4. Social Distancing: Although social distancing is no longer required, all persons inside the courthouse are encouraged to social distance. As guidance, social distancing stickers have been placed on the floor throughout the courthouses. Participants in an in-court proceeding may request to be physically distanced. The presiding judge will address such requests as appropriate under the circumstances at the time of the request.

5. Scheduling:

- a. In-person hearing times must be sufficiently staggered so as to prevent crowding.
- b. For county court criminal cases, no more than fifty cases may be set in-person per division, per day and the hearing times for each case must be sufficiently staggered so as to prevent crowding outside of the courtroom. The maximum amount of combined in-person and remote cases that may be set in any county criminal division on any given day is 120 with the exception of Division DVTD, which may set up to 200 cases on Mondays. The Clerk and Comptroller shall “close” a county criminal division’s docket for a given day after receiving written notification from the judicial assistant or criminal case manager that the division has 120 cases scheduled for that day.

6. Previously Restricted Public Areas: Areas which were previously closed to the public due to the pandemic, such as the law library and deposition rooms, are open effective June 21, 2021.

**III. ACCESS TO REMOTE PROCEEDINGS**

Any person who wishes to access a proceeding being held remotely should contact the court’s Public Information Officer at least one day in advance of the proceeding. When a hearing is being conducted remotely, such persons shall be provided with a call in number or a website link.

**IV. NO TRANSPORTATION OF INFECTED OR QUARANTINED INMATES**

The Sheriff shall not transport any inmate at the Palm Beach County Jail who is either in pre-house quarantine or is being quarantined based on a confirmed or suspected COVID-19 diagnosis to the courthouses for attendance at a court proceeding. However, inmates who are in pre-house quarantine or who are being quarantined will be given the opportunity to attend court proceedings remotely while in pre-house quarantine or quarantine. The Sheriff shall notify the criminal judges and JAs via email of any inmate who is not being transported due to being in pre-house quarantine by no later than 8 A.M. on the day of the inmate’s scheduled event. The Sheriff shall provide the Court with a list of all inmates in quarantine on a bi-weekly basis and shall provide the Court with as much advance notice as possible in the event an inmate scheduled for an in-person court appearance will not be transported due to quarantine.

**DONE and ORDERED** in Chambers at West Palm Beach, Palm Beach County, Florida, this 8<sup>th</sup> day of June 2021.



THE JUDICIAL BRANCH  
OF FLORIDA  
ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE OF THE COURT

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Krista Marx, Chief Judge