



THE CIRCUIT COURT OF THE
FIFTEENTH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT
OF FLORIDA

CHAMBERS OF
KRISTA MARX
CHIEF JUDGE

PALM BEACH COUNTY COURTHOUSE
205 NORTH DIXIE HIGHWAY
WEST PALM BEACH, FLORIDA 33401
(561)355-7814

PRESS RELEASE

March 18, 2020

As Chief Judge of the Fifteenth Circuit, I feel responsible for the safety and well-being of those persons who enter the courthouses of Palm Beach County. I, along with the judges of this Circuit, wish to protect our court users, court staff, and court partners from unnecessary risk. I am very mindful of the COVID-19 public health emergency and the extraordinary, but necessary, social distancing measures required to ensure the safety of us all. At the same time, access to justice is critical for the protection of our society and that necessity does not wane in a time of emergency or crisis. Indeed, there is arguably no time when the need for access to justice is greater.

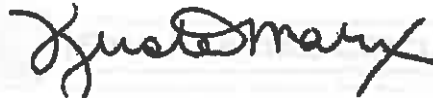
Last evening the Chief Justice entered an Administrative Order restricting face-to-face court hearings to essential court proceedings and proceedings critical to the state of emergency or the public health emergency as determined by the Chief Judge. Other proceedings, as determined by the chief judges of the state, may be heard remotely. Following the directive of the Chief Justice, the Court is committed to fulfilling its Constitutional duties and providing access to justice for the residents of Palm Beach County throughout the COVID-19 public health emergency. The Court will continue to conduct all essential court proceedings. I have defined what constitutes essential court proceedings in the attached Administrative Order, but generally, essential court proceedings are those that require the court's immediate action to protect an individual's safety or review a government action limiting an individual's personal liberties.

Whenever possible, the Court will conduct essential court proceedings remotely, but there may be instances when in-person proceedings are still necessary. In such cases, the Court will employ all available mitigating measures such as limiting the number of persons in the courtroom and ensuring the sanitation of all courtrooms and work areas of the court. The Court will suspend non-essential in-person court proceedings and will work diligently to resolve such matters via remote proceedings, when possible. This will take a degree of cooperation from the Bar and public and I ask for your patience as we work on implementing expanded remote measures.

The Court is also mindful that the cost of ensuring access to justice during a time of crisis comes at a high price to the public servants who staff the Court and its partners. Many staff members are required to be physically present at the Court to ensure that essential court operations can continue. Understandably, court staff are themselves concerned about potential exposure to COVID-19. Additionally, court staff and the staff of our court partners must handle childcare issues as the result of school closures. For these reasons, I have decided to suspend all court events at the branch courthouses on Fridays through May 1, 2020. All essential court functions will take place at the Criminal Justice Complex (Gun Club facility) on those Fridays. This will reduce the face-to-face time staff have with each other and any members of the public.

In closing, I would like to point out that the decisions regarding how the Court proceeds has been and will continue to be a collaborative effort between the court partners and myself. As public servants, we must balance many demands. Our most vital mission is to provide access to the courts. Please continue to follow the protocols as directed by our health officials to help speed the end of this pandemic.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Krista Marx". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above a faint, light-colored rectangular stamp or watermark.

Krista Marx, Chief Judge