



## *First Judicial Circuit*

*Court Administration*

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### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – March 16, 2020** **First Judicial Circuit Response to COVID-19**

The First Judicial Circuit is closely monitoring developments in our community, state, and nation as it pertains to the COVID-19 pandemic.

In compliance with the March 13 administrative order of the Supreme Court of Florida, all jury trials in the First Judicial Circuit (with the exception of those which have already commenced) are suspended. While essential court functions must continue, the First Judicial Circuit will comply with the recommendations of the Centers for Disease Control, which has stated that gatherings of more than 50 people should be discontinued at the present time.

In order to minimize the risk to those who must attend court proceedings in person, and to comply with CDC guidance, access to the courthouse and to courtroom proceedings will be limited effective immediately. Only those persons with business before the court, or with agencies housed within the courthouse facilities (such as the Escambia County Clerk of Court, Office of the State Attorney, or Office of the Public Defender) should attempt to enter courthouse facilities. Furthermore, only necessary participants will be allowed into any court hearing, to include witnesses, attorneys, and parties, as well as essential court staff. Criminal proceedings for which more than 50 people are scheduled to be heard will take place at staggered intervals, in order to limit the number of people gathered in one area. Those persons who have no official business to conduct and are not necessary participants will not be allowed in the facility, according to Chief Judge John Miller. “Our goal is to provide services to the fullest extent possible while protecting the public health and safety. We cannot over-emphasize the importance of cooperation from the public in keeping our judicial system functioning,” said Judge Miller. “Courts administer justice so that we can live in a civil and peaceful manner. Courts help us live as a free and orderly community. While we fully intend to comply with our constitutionally mandated, mission-critical functions, it is necessary that we have only those persons who absolutely need to be present in

our facilities at this time.” To the extent possible, the Circuit will also hold proceedings by employing video and telephonic appearances.

Until further notice, the Chief Judge has also determined that each person entering court facilities will be allowed to bring one small (no larger than two ounces) bottle of hand sanitizer for their personal use. Where supplies are available, each facility will also provide hand sanitizer for public use. Those individuals with known symptoms or exposures to COVID-19 should make the presiding judges aware prior to any scheduled appearance, and appropriate measures will be taken. Furthermore, any attorney, litigant, or any member of the public having a specific need to be excused from proceedings or any other request should make the presiding judge aware of his or her circumstances. The First Judicial Circuit Court judges are well aware of the concern within the community, and will certainly give fair and careful consideration to any legitimate requests.

For further updates, please follow the First Circuit at <https://twitter.com/1stCircuitFL> or @1stCircuitFL. Information is also available on our website at [www.firstjudicialcircuit.org](http://www.firstjudicialcircuit.org).