

**IN THE COURT OF COMMON PLEAS  
DOMESTIC RELATIONS AND JUVENILE BRANCH  
FRANKLIN COUNTY, OHIO**

**20JU-03-3181**

**FIFTH AMENDED ADMINISTRATIVE ORDER (AO) IN RESPONSE  
TO THE COVID-19 (CORONAVIRUS) PUBLIC HEALTH CRISIS**

The Administrative Judge of the Domestic Relations and Juvenile Branch of the Franklin County Court of Common Pleas, in consultation with the other Judges of this Bench, hereby makes the following Findings of Fact:

1. Since March 9, 2020 when Ohio Governor Mike DeWine initially issued Executive Order 2020-01D “Declaring a State of Emergency” in response to the growing COVID-19 public health crisis through May 1, 2020, this Court has issued a series of Administrative Orders setting forth COVID-19 protocols dictating Court operations.
2. While the existing public health emergency has not yet been totally abated, Franklin County has reached a point that the Court may resume a degree of its normal operations, i.e., ***limited operations***. The following Order retains a number of measures enacted in March of 2020 which the Court deems necessary to safeguard the well-being of its employees and customers against COVID-19, a highly contagious viral ailment.

Based upon these Findings of Fact, the Franklin County Domestic Relations and Juvenile Branch of the Court of Common Pleas **HEREBY ORDERS:**

1. The Court’s Order for ***curtailed operations*** shall expire close of business on Friday, January 29, 2021 in favor of a gradual transition to ***limited operations*** beginning Monday, February 1, 2021. The Court reserves the right to further modify and/or extend this Administrative Order should the existing public health emergency so dictate.

2. The Court remains open for business for electronic and in-person hearings. The Court will endeavor to conduct as many of its cases and interactions as practical via available technology; **no person who is unwilling or unable to attend an in-person hearings due to COVID-19 concerns/illnesses/complications will be forced to attend in person.** Whether to continue the matter or proceed with a **hybrid hearing** (i.e., a hearing wherein some individuals/parties participate in-person while others participate via electronic means) remains the sole discretion of the assigned Judge. Signed, timely motions for continuance may be filed by e-mail directly to the assigned courtroom; a list of those contact telephone numbers and email addresses is located on the DRJ Court website: <https://drj.fccourts.org>.
3. During its period of **limited operations**, the Court shall maintain its current business hours of **8am until 3pm, except the Court will be open for in-person business Monday through Friday.** The CPO/JPO Help Desk will remain open to the public from 8am until 2pm; the Help Desk will take its last petition promptly at 2pm. Court staff shall physically report to work unless authorized to work remotely by their supervisors.
4. Effective since March of 2020, ***the following protocols shall continue:***
  - a) appropriate masks/face coverings (covering both the nose and mouth) are ***required*** by all persons entering any Court-controlled area;
  - b) customers and/or counsel displaying any symptom that *could be construed* as COVID-19 related will be required to leave the courthouse immediately; their cases will be continued;
  - c) non-staff access to the DRJ Court lobby, back hallways, private offices and wait areas on the 3<sup>rd</sup> through 6<sup>th</sup> floors will remain extremely limited to maintain the safety of the public and court employees in compliance with state, federal, and Ohio Supreme Court guidelines;
  - d) plexiglass barriers shall remain in use where practicable;
  - e) Court Navigators will assist in ensuring proper social distancing and occupancy restrictions in court elevators, in courtrooms and on the Court's floors; social distances of 6-feet will be strictly enforced, even in wait areas; failure to comply with Court Navigator directives shall constitute a public disruption and is just cause for forcible removal from the building;

- f) a maximum of 10 people (*including court staff and/or interpreters*) will be permitted in courtrooms; therefore, only persons essential for in-person hearings should be present in the courthouse – all others should remain outside the building until called or at home;
  - g) videoconferencing technology will be utilized for (1) some juvenile appearances in delinquency proceedings (***see the AO of September 9, 2020***); (2) visits and consults with juveniles held in detention, and (3) uncontested/agreed cases and status/pretrial conferences;
  - h) the current, staggered-docket scheduling shall remain in effect, ***except*** CSEA and CPO cases may be assigned 2 cases per 30-minute period in applicable courtrooms;
  - i) seating in wait areas and courtrooms must ensure compliance with social distancing guidelines. Use of the wait areas is generally discouraged; parties should arrive just before their scheduled hearing times and, after checking in, take seats outside the courtroom until called inside by courtroom staff. Carpet decals or other means will be employed to indicate appropriate spacing while awaiting service;
  - j) scheduled cases will begin and end at the scheduled time in order to preserve proper occupancy standards on DRJ Court floors; thus, tardy cases will be continued;
  - k) conference rooms are unavailable for public use and shall remain locked at all times;
  - l) business casual dress is appropriate for litigants, customers and counsel on floors 3 through 5; confirm 6<sup>th</sup> Floor dress code policy with the assigned courtroom.
5. Juvenile Community Enrichment Services (JCES), the Mediation Department, the Reception Center, the Self-Represented Resource Center and other core court services will continue to utilize telephonic and other electronic methods to interact with their users/customers whenever practicable.

6. Intake, supervision, contact and testing via JCES and/or the Juvenile Intervention Center should continue to be conducted by electronic means whenever practicable. In-person contact for drug testing, GPS monitoring, assessments and searches may be utilized where necessary. All *non-essential* in-person contact shall be minimized in accordance with recommendations of the American Probation and Parole Association.
7. This Amended Administrative Order in Response to the COVID-19 (Coronavirus) Public Health Crisis shall be communicated to the Franklin County Commissioners, other Franklin County Courts and local justice partners. This document, and any amendments thereto, shall be posted to the DRJ Court website: <https://drj.fccourts.org>.
8. ***Curtailed or limited operation provisions and/or policies previously effectuated by the Court pursuant to its prior Administrative Orders shall remain in full effect, unless specifically modified herein.***

IT IS SO ORDERED:



---

JUDGE KIM A. BROWNE  
ADMINISTRATIVE JUDGE

ISSUE DATE:  
JANUARY 27, 2021