



April 17, 2020

Re: *New Court Procedures for May*

Beginning Monday May 4, 2020 we are going to reinstate our docket but with some procedural modifications to assure a safe and clean environment for the litigants, attorneys and court staff. I realize this may cause some inconvenience but I believe it will be worth it so people can get this part of their lives off hold and begin moving on.

The temperature of all persons who enter the building will be measured at the first floor security. As has been policy, anyone with a fever in excess of 99.9 degrees will not be given access to the facilities. The decision of the court staff will be final on that issue.

All litigants and witnesses and other non-attorneys will not be permitted to enter the building without a face mask or scarf that covers both the mouth and the nose which shall remain in place for the duration of the time they are in the court facilities. We are not likely to have extra face masks and so you will need to remind your clients and your witnesses of this requirement as they will not be permitted entrance otherwise.

Hearings are being spaced to provide a minimum of 15 minutes between them in order the court room can be disinfected prior to the next hearing. As much as this pains me, you should not arrive at the court until very close to the time of your hearing. We are eliminating all seating in the court area both in the hallway and the waiting areas and all conference rooms will be locked. Therefore, it is imperative that you have all of your documents signed and in order before you come to the court as there will be no place for you to meet with your clients to accomplish that. Any litigants or witnesses who arrive early will be required to remain outside or in their vehicle until it is time for their hearing.

In most cases, witnesses will not be permitted into the court until they are called to testify. You should therefore get phone numbers for any witnesses you intend to call and the security staff will call them for you. This procedure will slow down the hearing so please review hearing notices for the time that has been allotted to be certain even with this delay you will have adequate time to present your case. Under these circumstances, we cannot permit hearings to go long and carryover dates may be far in the future if they are not set until the day of the hearing.

Please be aware that Pretrial notices may have some new requirements, or time deadlines so you should review them very carefully.

Most of the pretrial and final settlement conferences will be conducted by phone if there are attorneys on both sides. Although your clients need not be present with you they should be available to you by phone in case there are questions that arise during these conferences. Since your clients will not be immediately available to you it is all the more imperative that the pretrial orders be complied with so that all your appraisals are completed, your marital balance sheets are up to date and accurate and you have full authority to discuss settlements at the final settlement conferences. Failures in this regard could result in the matter being continued. If you wish your clients to participate telephonically in the settlement conference, that can be done.

These procedures will be in place for all cases in the Domestic Relations Court. If you have questions or concerns please feel free to discuss matters further.

Sincerely,

Jeffrey A. Hooper
Judge

Thomas J. Tompkins
Magistrate