

**From:** [Chief Justice Maureen O'Connor](#)  
**Subject:** COVID-19 Pandemic - Updated Guidance  
**Date:** Tuesday, April 28, 2020 6:00:44 PM

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April 28, 2020

VIA E-MAIL

RE: Updated Guidance for the Courts of Ohio

Dear Judge,

On April 27, 2020, Governor Mike DeWine announced some changes to Ohio's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The changes are not what some had hoped for but they are a beginning and are all directed towards protecting the health of employees, customers, and their families, supporting community efforts to control the spread of COVID-19, and responsibly getting Ohio back to work. Further information about the Responsible RestartOhio initiative can be found at <https://coronavirus.ohio.gov/wps/portal/gov/covid-19/responsible-restart-ohio>.

I spoke with Governor DeWine and Dr. Acton this morning regarding the guidance I am providing to you. They expressed gratitude for what the judges have done thus far and for what we will continue to do. We agree that what hasn't changed for the courts of Ohio is the need to operate within the directives of the Governor and the Director of Health that have been in place since March 14, 2020. These directives will continue to allow Ohio's courts to operate safely.

The Supreme Court's *Guidance to Local Courts COVID-19 Public Health Emergency* document shared with you on March 30, 2020, remains valid going forward. The Governor has not lifted the Emergency Order and the mandate that people should work from home when possible remains in effect. Again, I urge you to review the information on the Responsible RestartOhio for both mandatory practices and recommended best practices.

As of this date, I have authorized over \$5.3 million in grants to 263 courts in 86 counties across Ohio with the stated purpose of ensuring access to the courts while also minimizing the risk of COVID-19 transmission to the public, litigants, the Bar, and court staff. Judges have told me that the equipment has changed the way they can do business not just during this COVID-19 crisis but going forward when we return to 'normal.'

As you consult with colleagues and staff and the local bar about appropriate orders and practices in your individual jurisdictions please consider the following:

1. Use data from the state and local health departments to determine trends for the state and for your county; consider the number of cases among your staff, their families, and the legal community. Monitor this data on a weekly basis to determine if the orders you have put in place are appropriate.
2. Allow teleworking for all employees who can do so, especially for employees who have risk factors for themselves or their household members.

3. Limit access to the building and monitor all who come into the court building to assess their health. Social distancing, masks, cleaning, etc. as outlined in the Responsible RestartOhio General Office Environments document must be in place for everyone. This includes employees, contractors, litigants, attorneys, etc. Also no one exhibiting signs of illness, including a temperature of 100.4 degrees, should be admitted or allowed to stay.
4. Continue jury trials. If a jury trial must take place, social distancing, and all other precautions as stated above must be observed at all times for everyone. If a person called for jury duty fails to appear because of the fear of COVID-19 please treat that as a legitimate excuse. A person should not have to risk their health to comply with a jury summons.

Only time will tell how long it will be necessary for the precautions and practices we have implemented to remain in place. What we do know is that the vast majority of Ohioans are concerned about the economic impact of the stay at home orders. But we also know that they are not in favor of a quick return to 'business as usual.' They are willing to give the process time and engage in precautions so that they are assured the danger is minimized.

I know that you and your staff have faced unexpected challenges during the last two months. I also know that most judges have followed the guidance of this Court and the Health Department and their primary concern is the health and safety of all Ohioans.

I am thankful for all that you do and will continue to do in your role as an Ohio judge.

God Bless.

Sincerely,

Maureen O'Connor  
Chief Justice