

The Supreme Court of Ohio

65 SOUTH FRONT STREET, COLUMBUS, OH 43215-3431

CHIEF JUSTICE
MAUREEN O'CONNOR

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JUSTICES
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PATRICK F. FISCHER
R. PATRICK DEWINE
MICHAEL P. DONNELLY
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December 10, 2020

Governor Mike DeWine
77 South High Street
30th Floor
Columbus, Ohio 43215

Dear Governor DeWine:

I am writing today to urge you to include state court judges, court staff and clerk of court staff in the list of individuals slated to receive the COVID-19 vaccination during Phase 1 of the distribution. As you may know, the United States Department of Homeland Security has identified “workers supporting the operations of the judicial system, including judges, lawyers, and others providing legal assistance” as essential critical infrastructure workers.

Courthouses are both among the busiest government offices and among the hardest to enforce social distancing. Space is limited, particularly in some of our historic courthouses. Additionally, conducting essential business remotely can be a challenge in rural areas due to lack of reliable internet/wi-fi access. A number of hearings warrant in-person appearances such as those for protection orders, bail, plea, and sentencing hearings, child abuse and neglect cases, and guardianship cases, to name a few. As such, there is a high probability for interaction between court employees and unvaccinated individuals in courthouse facilities.

Ohio has already had one municipal court that was required, by the local health department, to shut its doors due to a number of staff who tested positive for COVID-19. These outbreaks among judges and court employees could easily disable Ohio’s courts and have a significant impact on public safety, our nation, and its economy. Recognizing the importance of essential justice system workers, these individuals should be given the same priority in vaccine availability as other essential workers.

Without the vaccination of judges and other essential justice system workers we run the very real risk of devastating a system where thousands of court cases have already been delayed or postponed creating a growing backlog... In the coming months, the state

courts will face a deluge of cases due to various moratoria expiring, including the CDC's moratorium on foreclosures and evictions. The consequences of a less than robust court system will negatively impact not only individuals but also our business community and state actions. The impact of the virus on Ohio's specialty court dockets and the increase in overdoses are unquestionably related. Vaccinations of the courts' treatment teams will help stem the tide.

I hope you will include judges, court staff, clerks' of courts staff to the list of individuals who will receive the COVID-19 vaccination during phase one.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Maureen O'Connor". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "M" and "O".

Maureen O'Connor
Chief Justice of Ohio

cc: Laurel Pressler Dawson, Chief of Staff
Ohio Judiciary
Ohio Association of Municipal / County Court Clerks
Ohio Clerk of Courts Association