

From: [Chief Justice Maureen O'Connor](#)
Subject: Updated Guidance for the Courts of Ohio
Date: Thursday, May 7, 2020 4:45:13 PM
Attachments: [Responsible RestartOhio Court Access.pdf](#)

Dear Judge,

It seems that every day I am learning of new and innovative ways you have leveraged technology to create a new normal. I am grateful for your leadership and I know there is more we can do to ensure justice while protecting the health of the public and our employees.

I'm sure you know that the Supreme Court is hearing oral arguments via Zoom, and most of our staff are working remotely (which will continue through June 15th). I continue to push our staff to look at how we do business and leverage technology to the highest extent possible.

In addition, I recently approved 6 million dollars in grants to local courts to enhance their ability to provide tele-justice. Two hundred and seventy-seven courts in 87 counties took advantage of this grant program. These new capacities should enable courts to remain open yet safe.

The Supreme Court has also suspended timelines for the handling of cases due to the pandemic. It is a given that courts' dockets will show the effects for the foreseeable future.

It is my hope that once the urgency of the pandemic subsides, we will all build on the lessons learned and continue to use technology for its convenience, efficiency, and flexibility, whenever feasible, while also protecting the rights of the public we serve.

In the meantime, I ask that you stay the course. Please remember, courts are not like the stores, restaurants, or salons. When people come into our courthouses, they most often are not doing so by choice but instead, they are appearing because they have been summoned to appear either as a party to a case, as a witness, or as a juror. As such, we must be cautious in who we require to appear – even now, as restrictions begin to be relaxed – and we should require an in-person appearance only in cases with immediate need. In all other cases, we should look for ways to move forward using technology. People summoned into court should not have to choose between compliance with a court order and the risk to their health or that of their families.

In the event you do have members of the public in your courthouse for essential proceedings, please consider how you can conduct business consistent with Governor DeWine's and the Director of Public Health's orders. Safety means requiring staff and the public alike to wear face coverings, making hand sanitizer readily available in multiple locations, following social distancing guidance (groups no larger than 10 and spacing 6 feet apart), and granting continuances for jury trials.

Should you need assistance in obtaining either face masks or hand sanitizer, please contact your local Emergency Management Agency (EMA). Courts are considered "first responders" and as such, are eligible for assistance from the local EMA. They should be able to order supplies for you, although the availability and timing of delivery may vary from county to county.

As you update your court orders regarding building access and case processing, please send those revised orders to LocalCourts@sc.ohio.gov. All of the orders we receive will be housed on our webpage at <http://www.sc.ohio.gov/coronavirus/courts/default.aspx>.

Also attached to this email, you'll find a document, *Responsible RestartOhio – Court Access*. This document is intended to provide additional guidance to you as you develop policies and procedures for the path forward.

The restrictions we face now won't last forever, but as we have been warned time and time again, normal as it once was may never be again. We are all anxious to move about freely and conduct our business without restriction, but it is not quite time for that yet. As I've said before, now is the time to show intelligence, compassion, respect and to truly live up to the title 'public servant.'

God Bless.

Sincerely,

Maureen O'Connor
Chief Justice