

The Supreme Court of Ohio

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CHIEF JUSTICE
MAUREEN O'CONNOR

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JUSTICES
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March 13, 2020

VIA E-MAIL

Dear Judges:

I waited until after the meeting of the Ohio Judicial Conference Executive Committee, which occurred today, to send this letter. I wanted to hear from judges regarding their concerns and ideas in response to the COVID-19 virus. COVID-19 has disrupted our lives, our workplace, our scheduling, and our children's education. To complicate things further, there is no end in sight. So, as members of the judiciary we must formulate plans to respond and respond in a manner that allows courts to meet both our purpose and essential functions. Closing the courthouse and disrupting services is not a plan. The Supreme Court of Ohio is open and will continue to be. Some modifications have been put in place but we will continue to conduct the Court's business.

Going forward, first and foremost is the need for collaboration and consideration. Each court is expected to engage all stakeholders when devising its response. This is not and cannot be a task for the administrative judge alone. Every judge in every court must be at the table to fashion your response. Any modifications planned should have the buy-in of all judges. Clerks and law-enforcement of each county are also part of the team when fashioning the response. A bit of good news is that you don't have to 'reinvent the wheel' as there exist examples of Emergency Plans, created and shared by your colleagues. Please look to the Ohio Judicial Conference website (ohiojudges.org) for those plans.

Please read the **Critical Event Preparation and Response for Local Courts** document for guidance. It is attached and, on our website, (sc.ohio.gov). I draw your attention to the Teleworking Notice document if you plan on implementing teleworking for your staff. We are doing so at the Supreme Court. The pay to our Staff will continue uninterrupted.

When creating your response please take into consideration some of the following:

Prioritize cases and use continuances to reduce the need for jury pools when possible; maximize the use of technology to do the work of the court, especially telephone

conferences; consider staffing levels and allow those employees who can work from home to do so; consider bond review with an eye toward lowering it and the use of summons rather than arrests to assist in minimizing the jail population; consider modifying orders that require in-person reporting and mandatory attendance such as AA meetings. I'm sure that more suggestions will be thought of when the judges convene.

Some have asked if there will be an order from the Supreme Court waiving speedy trial requirements and other tollings. I do not find that to be necessary at this time. Please read The Stark County Temporary Order in Response to the COVID-19 Public Health Crisis item #5: *The public health emergency maybe considered to be a finding of good cause for continuances deemed necessary by assigned Judges on a case-by-case basis.* I offer this as a good example of how to deal with the issue on a case-by-case basis.

Please keep in mind as we tackle this problem and fashion our responses that it will not last forever. However, we may very well find that some of the solutions are an improvement and should be retained post COVID-19.

The Supreme Court of Ohio stands ready to assist in any way that we can. Please contact me with any questions or suggestions. The Ohio Judicial Conference and the judicial associations have been very helpful and in the coming weeks we will continue to communicate and work together for all of our benefit.

God Bless you all.

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