
ALLEGHENY CASUALTY
INTERNATIONAL FIDELITY
ASSOCIATED BOND

Date: March 16, 2020
From: AIA Team
RE: **Changes to In Person Court Hearings...**

Please see the below email that was forwarded from the Florida Bail Agents Association regarding various changes being made to Florida Courts in response to the COVID-19 breakout. If you have any questions please do not hesitate to contact our team at 800.935.2245 or via email at agentsupportteam@aiasurety.com



CORONAVIRUS HALTS FACE-TO-FACE COURT HEARINGS

March 13, 2020

Dara Kam

TALLAHASSEE --- Nearly all face-to-face state court proceedings will be suspended for at least two weeks, under an order issued Friday by Florida Supreme Court Chief Justice Charles Canady aimed at curbing the spread of the novel coronavirus, known as COVID-19.

The order, which goes into effect Monday, will temporarily suspend grand jury proceedings, jury selections and criminal and civil jury trials through March 27.

Proceedings already underway “may proceed to completion if the presiding judge, with approval of the chief judge, determines that completion of the proceeding without delay is required by the interests of justice,” Canady wrote in the four-page order.

Canady's decision "is the first time a limit on face-to-face proceedings has been ordered since Florida's state court system was unified by a constitutional amendment" in 1972, Supreme Court spokesman Craig Waters said in a news release.

The order also gives judges the authority to use remote means of conducting legal proceedings whenever possible.

Time periods involving speedy-trial procedures in criminal and juvenile court cases are suspended from the close of business Monday until the close of business March 30.

Canady noted in the order that "a public health emergency currently exists" in the courts system "that requires mitigation of its effects by adopting 'social distancing' measures meant to reduce the increase in person-to-person transmission of the virus that causes COVID-19."

Florida's 67 clerks of court "will work to immediately implement" Canady's order, Stacy Butterfield, Polk County clerk of court, said in a prepared statement.

Clerks "will continue to issue summonses" to avoid delay to future court processes once the suspension of jury trials is lifted, said Butterfield, who is president of the Florida Court Clerks & Comptrollers.

The chief justice's move to temporarily halt in-person hearings and other court proceedings follows announcements of temporary closures at state universities, theme parks and collegiate and professional sports facilities.

On Friday, the Archdiocese of Miami announced parochial schools and high schools will close on Tuesday until further notice "in an abundance of caution for the safety and well-being of our students, faculty, and staff." The archdiocese also suspended religious education programs and canceled or postponed retreats and other parish activities "in an effort to increase 'social distancing' in order to mitigate exposure," a news release said.

On Monday, Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis declared a state of emergency, giving his administration broader powers to respond to the rapidly spreading virus, which the World Health Organization has identified as a pandemic.

Updated numbers released Friday show 51 Florida-related cases, including two deaths.

Speaking to reporters Friday afternoon at a Department of Health warehouse in Tallahassee, the governor expressed empathy for Floridians faced with the changes COVID-19 has wrought.

"I know it is frustrating to see an event canceled or to see some of the inconveniences. But I think everyone up and down the state --- from the local officials I talk to, the medical professionals, the private businesses --- they want a healthy environment in Florida. We want to do our best to make sure this virus is not allowed to simply run unchecked throughout our society," DeSantis said.

Canady's order also suspends all rules of procedure, court orders and opinions "that limit or prohibit the use of communication equipment for the conducting of proceedings by remote electronic means."

And Canady authorized chief judges of Florida's 20 judicial circuits to establish temporary procedures "for the use, to the maximum extent feasible" of equipment necessary to conduct court proceedings remotely.

"Additional orders extending or modifying these measures will be issued as warranted by changing circumstances during the public health emergency," Canady wrote.

--- News Service of Florida Assignment Manager Tom Urban contributed to this report.

