

**Press Release for immediate distribution**

**Judicial Emergency Extended until May 31, 2020 for the 39<sup>th</sup> Judicial District, Franklin and Fulton Counties & cancellation of jury selection for the months of May and June 2020**

APRIL 27, 2020

President Judge Shawn Meyers has issued an order extending the judicial emergency for the 39<sup>th</sup> Judicial District until May 31, 2020. As part of the order, jury selection for May and June 2020 are cancelled. A copy of the entire order can be viewed at the court's website at <http://franklincountypa.gov>, the Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts website at <http://www.pacourts.us/ujs-coronavirus-information> or the Franklin County Bar Association website at <https://www.franklinbar.org>.

In reviewing all the available data, President Judge Meyers has concluded that in order to continue to protect the public health, and the health of court employees, attorneys and litigants against the spread of the COVID-19 virus, efforts must be made to limit access to the courts by large groups of people. The Governor of Pennsylvania has kept the stay at home order in place through May 8, 2020 and will be lifting the limits on business operations based upon the density of COVID-19 infections on a regional or county basis. Franklin County continues to experience a significant number of positive tests, while Fulton County has fewer positive tests, but as part of the judicial system has the same concerns for employee and public health. Current CDC guidelines recommend limiting groups of persons to no more than 10 at a time. With the asymptomatic nature of the virus, caution requires not compelling large groups to gather at the courthouses or other court facilities in either Franklin or Fulton Counties for the foreseeable future. For those reasons, the court will be implementing strategies to afford attorneys and litigants the opportunity to appear for hearings via videoconferencing and audio on a case by case basis. After May 11, 2020, in addition to conducting hearings via videoconferencing, some matters will be scheduled to include in-person court appearances, but will be limited in scope and numbers to comply with CDC recommendations for social distancing.

Here is a list of the key items set forth in President Judge Shawn Meyers' April 27, 2020 order of court:

- A. The Judicial emergency in the 39<sup>th</sup> Judicial District is extended through May 31, 2020. Jury selection for May and June 2020 is cancelled.
- B. Until May 11, 2020, unless the matter has been deemed essential to be heard before the court in person, any and all court proceedings of any type or on any docket may be heard by the court, Magisterial District Judge or a hearing master/officer using video or audio technology.
- C. Beginning on May 11, 2020, any judge, Magisterial District Judge or hearing master/officer may proceed to hear any matter via an in-person hearing, provided that there shall never be more than a total of 10 persons in any courtroom or hearing

- room. Videoconferencing and/or audio participation will be the preferred method of hearing.
- D. Attorneys may file pleadings, motions, petitions or briefs which contain the attorney's signature using a stamp or facsimile of the attorney's signature, provided that the individual who affixes the attorney's signature shall write their name and a statement that they are affixing the attorney's signature with the knowledge and approval of the attorney.
  - E. All prior restrictions on activities set forth in prior orders will remain in place, subject to the modifications in President Judge Meyers' April 27, 2020 order.
  - F. Attorneys and litigants will abide by the court's directives regarding social distancing and maximum number of participants on a daily basis.

The court is continuing to work with major stakeholders, row officers, members of the Franklin County Bar Association and Franklin County leadership to act responsibly during the judicial emergency and beyond, while still affording the citizens of the 39<sup>th</sup> Judicial District access to justice.