April 2, 2020

To the attorneys and staff of our Civil bar:

Thank you for your patience over the last two weeks as we have acquired the necessary licenses, bandwidth, and equipment to set up our Virtual Courtrooms in the Circuit Civil Division on the Zoom platform. We have begun training our judges and staff, and while there will be bumps in the road as we deploy on such short notice, these bumps are a result of our commitment to reopen as quickly as possible instead of waiting for ideal circumstances. The deployment of this new remote appearance technology, the Zoom platform, is essential to protect public health while continuing to deliver justice to the fullest extent possible.

There are rumors of confusion, however, as to the original "non-essential" hearing language used by Florida Supreme Court Chief Justice Canady and Chief Judge Soto in the administrative orders. I have been given to understand that lawyers may be arguing about what hearings are essential or non-essential in the Civil Division. For clarification, the essential-non-essential analysis no longer applies. The original language was intended to assist the Circuit in executing those mission critical tasks that were not constitutionally required but were deemed critical, such as domestic violence. In the meantime, our civil bench has continued to work on the CourtMAP platform handling orders and matters submitted. However, other than emergencies over the past two weeks, there are no essential/non-essential hearings in civil. There are just hearings, which we are gradually ramping up to hold in our Zoom Virtual Courtrooms. You will receive notice for Zoom meetings as we move all of our work to the remote platform upon which our Virtual Courtrooms are built. If you have what you believe to be an emergency, follow your presiding judge's instructions on their webpage for emergencies. The current information about the judge's procedures will be on their webpage.

Some seem to be further confused that "essential" hearings will be granted live appearance. Please understand that for the safety of our community, there will be no live hearings with in-person attendance in the Circuit Civil Division of the Eleventh Judicial Circuit for the foreseeable future until we are on the other side of this pandemic. The only live hearings being held anywhere circuit-wide are those that are impossible to hold remotely due to technology limitations and we are working to acquire those abilities for those matters. Jury trials have been cancelled under Chief Justice Canady's current Administrative Order. We do not know when jury trials will resume.

The judges of our circuit, and particularly your Civil Circuit Division judges, have worked very hard very quickly to become familiar with the Zoom platform and to be able to offer you hearings, as have all of our staff and administrative office personnel. We are still on the learning curve. Please be courteous and patient as we work on our reopening. We understand that these circumstances are painful for those who work in our courts and the clients they represent. It is no less painful to our Circuit, which is

committed to delivering justice to those we serve. We understand that these constrained operations affect lives and our legal service economy. However, the danger from COVID-19 is real, and we are equally committed to protecting the health of Miami-Dade's citizens.

We therefore encourage everyone to take full advantage of the many tutorials offered on the Zoom platform. If you cannot participate by video conference, you can participate by phone, and we are committed to the same procedural fairness and opportunity to be heard no matter how you appear. We are taking every step to make sure that all receive the Zoom meeting information. You can help us by encouraging all self-represented litigants to register for service through the e-Filing Portal so we can ensure communication most effectively.

We expect, now more than ever, that Miami-Dade's lawyers will conduct themselves with courtesy and professionalism. If this gets worse, lawyers will need to help one another with professional courtesies. Failure to do so in face of the current crisis is likely to be frowned upon. In other words, be kind and thoughtful to each other, and respect what each person may be going through. Be decent to one another. If you cannot conduct yourself with grace because it is the right thing to do, then do it for self-interest—because the CDC statistics are suggesting that you or your family could be next.

We are living through a historic moment. Americans are strong, resilient, and hopefully sensible enough to stay safe at home until the coronavirus risk abates. We will persevere. Please take care and stay safe.

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