

IN THE CIRCUIT COURT OF THE FIFTH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT  
OF THE STATE OF FLORIDA

ADMINISTRATIVE ORDER A-2020-21-B

2nd

AMENDED ADMINISTRATIVE ORDER REGARDING EMERGENCY TEMPORARY  
STANDING ORDER REGARDING PARENTING IN DOMESTIC RELATIONS CASES

**WHEREAS**, the World Health Organization has declared the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) a pandemic, the Governor of Florida has declared a state of emergency exists, and the Surgeon General and State Health Officer have declared a public health emergency exists, and the Florida State Courts must take steps to mitigate the effects of the COVID-19 on legal proceedings and participants in those legal proceedings; and

**WHEREAS**, since March 17, 2020, the Florida Supreme Court has issued various Emergency Administrative Orders, which may be found at [www.floridasupremecourt.org/Emergency](http://www.floridasupremecourt.org/Emergency), which include ordering the cancellation or postponement of all non-essential in-person hearings; and

**WHEREAS**, the Governor of Florida has announced that all schools will be closed to students until at least May 1, 2020, and that distance learning will begin on Monday, March 30, 2020, for all students; and

**WHEREAS**, the Governor of Florida entered Executive Order 20-91 on April 1, 2020 (effective April 3, 2020 at 12:01 a.m.), which provides "all persons shall limit their movements and personal interactions outside of the home to only those necessary to obtain or provide essential services or conduct essential activities" as being "safer at home;" and

**WHEREAS**, prior to the Governor entering Executive Order 20-91, the Fifth Circuit's Administrative Order A-2020-21 and A-2020-21A used the language "shelter in place," versus "safer at home" or "limitation of movements outside the home," creating a question for some as to the intent of the Fifth Circuit's Administrative Order; and

**WHEREAS**, as a result of the entry of Executive Order 20-91, Section II.D. of this Administrative Order is now in effect; and

**WHEREAS**, to reduce the number of "emergency" filings and hearings until non-essential in-person hearings resume; and

**WHEREAS**, it is in the best interests of the parties and child(ren) that parents may continue to perform their duties and responsibilities of co-parenting, share the additional responsibilities of parenting through this time, and that the parties comply with all orders and Court rules;

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**IT IS HEREBY ORDERED** that:

**I. APPLICATION AND TERM OF THIS ORDER.**

A The Standing Family Law Court Order (Actions Involving Parenting Issues) entered in all domestic relations cases in Marion, Hernando, Sumter, and Citrus Counties shall remain in effect and all parties are to abide by said Standing Family Law Court Orders. To any extent the Standing Family Law Court Orders conflict with the instant Order, the instant Order shall control only for so long as the instant Order is in effect.

**B. Notwithstanding, in all Counties in the Fifth Judicial Circuit this Order shall not supersede or modify any existing domestic violence injunction or criminal "no contact" order which is in conflict with these provisions.**

C. This Order does not preclude a Judge from modifying or amending this Order in individual cases where the Judge deems necessary. Any part of this Order not changed by a subsequent order shall remain in effect.

**II. CONTACT WITH BOTH PARENTS; SHARED PARENTING.**

A. All parties are expected to follow all current Final Judgments, Temporary Orders, Settlement Agreements, or other orders of the court awarding parental responsibility or time-sharing. That means that if the court order defines timesharing pursuant to a school calendar, the parties must follow the calendar as published and not any adjustments to the calendar because of the COVID-19 pandemic. The parties shall follow the court order that currently exists.

B. Unless otherwise prohibited by an existing court order, each parent is prohibited from unreasonably restricting access of the child(ren) to the other parent. The parties shall follow the court order that currently exists.

C. Exchanges that were to take place at a child(ren)'s school or daycare that is not currently open should be arranged between the parents in writing by email, text, or parenting app. In the event the parents cannot agree on an alternate arrangement, the exchanges shall take place at the police station or sheriff's office that is located closest to the school or daycare. The closest police station or sheriff's office shall be determined by the distance shown on Google Maps, Apple Maps, or some other similar mapping program or website. Motions filed related to this subject will likely be ruled upon without hearing.

D. As the Governor of Florida has issued an order that requires parties to shelter-in-place and/or be "safer at home," and which limits their movements outside their home, the parties are to discuss where the child(ren) are in the best position to meet the requirements of their school, remain with siblings if possible, and be safe. If the parties cannot agree, the parent with the majority timesharing (183+ overnights) shall keep the child(ren) until the shelter-in-place/safer at home/limitations of movement order is lifted. The Court will have jurisdiction to consider all appropriate remedial measures, including make-up timesharing, once Emergency Orders and Procedures are lifted and the Courts return to normal operations. Parties are to resume time sharing

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as outlined in paragraph "C" above once the shelter-in-place/safer at home/limitations of movements order is lifted. This shall continue until the parties are able to secure hearing time with the Court to address possible make up timesharing.

E. Video-conferencing and phone contact shall be honored as set forth in the parties' Parenting Plan. Unless previously ordered, video and phone contact should not be monitored or interrupted by the co-parent or any other third party, unless there are specific Court Orders in place as to those issues.

### **III. CONTEMPT AND WRITS OF BODILY ATTACHMENT.**

Law enforcement agencies, criminal justice authorities, and the courts instituted substantial measures to reduce the number of people incarcerated. During this health crisis, judges are directed not to issue writs of bodily attachment for contempt hearings related to non-payment of child support or alimony. Nothing in this Order prohibits a judge from ordering other measures to obtain compliance with a court order.

### **IV. EMERGENCY MOTIONS AND EXPEDITED HEARINGS.**

A. Parents are strongly cautioned that unreasonable, hurtful, or destructive behavior may be severely and harshly sanctioned by the court, and the non-offending parent may be awarded significant make up time, including summer and consecutive major holidays and as permitted by Chapter 61, Florida Statutes. The Court may award attorney's fees and costs and/or sanctions for a party's unreasonable behavior. Such actions may also impact the Court's long-term decision for timesharing pursuant to the Chapter 61, Florida Statutes, factors to determine a Parenting Plan in the best interest of the child(ren).

B. Any party may file a motion to address adherence to Orders of the Court. Motions filed as "emergency" motions must be served on the other parent pursuant to the rules of procedure and caselaw. A true emergency is "where, for example, a child is threatened with physical harm or is about to be improperly removed from the state...." [See: Gielchinsky v. Gielchinsky, 662 So.2d 732, 733 (Fla. 4<sup>th</sup> DCA 1995).] The Court may require a written response from the other party prior to a hearing be set, and the motion may be ruled upon without any hearing. The party should also send a proposed order in Word format for the Court's consideration.

C. The Court may set a hearing at which the parties will be required to appear remotely. If a notary is not present, the party shall be prepared to provide adequate identification to conduct the hearing. That should include filing a copy of his/her driver's license with the Clerk of Court. This applies to witnesses as well. A parent participating in such a hearing shall do so outside the presence and awareness of the child(ren).

D. The Court expects all parties and attorneys to cooperate in the scheduling of telephonic or electronic hearings, and, when possible also depositions, mediations, and other out of court interactions.

V. This administrative order is effective immediately, and in effect until further order of the Chief Judge.

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VI. This administrative order supersedes all inconsistent provisions of any prior directive or administrative order.

DONE and ORDERED in chambers in Brooksville, Hernando County, Florida and Ocala, Marion County, Florida, respectively, this 6<sup>th</sup> day of April, 2020.



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Daniel B. Merritt, Jr.  
Chief Judge  
Fifth Judicial Circuit



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Ann Melinda Craggs  
Family Law Administrative Judge  
Fifth Judicial Circuit