

**IN THE CIRCUIT COURT OF THE FIFTH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT,
IN AND FOR HERNANDO COUNTY, FLORIDA**

ADMINISTRATIVE ORDER: H-2026-16

**ADMINISTRATIVE ORDER REGARDING SECURITY
OF THE HERNANDO COUNTY JUDICIAL CENTER**

AND

RESCINDING, SUPERSEDING, AND REPLACING H-2009-14-B

WHEREAS, the health, safety, and welfare of the citizens of Hernando County, Florida, are of paramount concern to the Court; and

WHEREAS, tragic incidents having taken place in court facilities in Florida and in the United States resulting in serious injuries and loss of life requiring a re-examination and revision to safety and security protocols; and

WHEREAS, public business takes place within the Hernando County Judicial Center, which includes areas occupied by the Hernando County Clerk and Comptroller and Hernando County Government, which are accessed through the Judicial Center; and

WHEREAS, proceedings, meetings, and other events occurring in the Judicial Center can be fraught with extreme emotion and potentially present danger to persons present at the events as they are taking place; and

WHEREAS, the Hernando County Board of County Commissioners has appropriated and continues to appropriate funds for the purpose of improving the safety and security of those persons who conduct business within the Hernando County Judicial Center, the Clerk's Office, and other areas controlled by Hernando County, including citizens and employees alike; and

WHEREAS, the Chief Judge, or other judge(s) that may be administratively designated, is responsible for the administration of the courts within the Fifth Judicial Circuit, as provided in Rules 2.215(a), Florida Rules of General Practice and Judicial Administration; and,

WHEREAS, the Hernando County Judicial Center is a court facility as defined by Florida Law, and the Chief Judge is required to regulate the use of all court facilities, pursuant to Rule 2.215(b)(7), Florida Rules of General Practice and Judicial Administration; and

WHEREAS, the undersigned has been designated Administrative Judge for Hernando County, pursuant to Rule 2.215 (b)(5), Florida Rules of General Practice and Judicial Administration,

IT IS THEREFORE,

ADMINISTRATIVELY ORDERED that security at the Hernando County Judicial Center shall be regulated as follows:

I. ACCESS TO COURTHOUSE:

The Hernando County Judicial Center (hereinafter referred to as "Judicial Center") is designated as a Secure Facility; as such, methods, policies, and procedures for access are ultimately within the sound discretion of the Hernando County Administrative Judge. In the exercise of his or her duties, responsibilities, and discretion the Hernando County Administrative Judge may consult with Hernando County Facilities Maintenance ("HCFM"), Security Personnel, and the Office of the Trial Court Administrator as/when appropriate to maintain the security of the Judicial Center.

1. Entrance:

a. Public:

The public shall enter the Judicial Center through the main entrances located either at the west entrance, at 20 N Main Street, Brooksville Florida 34601 or the Parking Level entrance.

b. Employees of the Court, Clerk, or Hernando County Government:

All Employees of the Court, Clerk, or Hernando County Government must use the main entrances located either at the west entrance, at 20 N Main Street, Brooksville Florida 34601 or the Parking Level entrance to enter and exit the building. Emergency exits may only be used in the event of an emergency or in circumstances where prior approval is obtained from the Hernando County Administrative Judge for temporary use of emergency exits for non-emergency purposes. The Hernando County Administrative Judge reserves the right to issue exemptions to this requirement to any court personnel for the purpose of executing their duties.

c. Law Enforcement:

All law enforcement must enter the Judicial Center through either the west entrance, at 20 N Main Street, Brooksville Florida 34601 or the Parking Level entrance. This limitation shall not extend to any law enforcement officer whose main workstation is located within the Judicial Center.

d. Vendors:

i. All vendors must use the main entrances located either at the west entrance, at 20 N Main Street, Brooksville Florida 34601 or the Parking Level entrance to enter and exit the building unless prior approval from the Hernando County Administrative Judge

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or his/her designee has been obtained who may consult with HCFM, Security Personnel, and the Office of the Trial Court Administrator as needed. Vendors must display proper identification while in or on Judicial Center.

ii. A security officer must be present during any vendor deliveries or removal of shredded material.

e. Mail and Package Deliveries

i. USPS, FedEx, UPS, DSL, and any similar company providing non-vendor delivery services to the Judicial Center are not permitted to leave unattended packages within the Judicial Center. This means that any package intended for delivery to a judge, Court Administration personnel, Clerk's Office personnel, the State Attorney's Office, the Office of the Public Defender, the Sheriff or any other government entity, may not be left unattended in front of courtrooms, the entry to Court Administrative Offices, the Clerk's Office, the State Attorney's Office, the Office of the Public Defender or any public area.

ii. Packages may not be left unattended outside any garage door.

iii. A package may not be left unattended outside the Judicial Center at any time, including after hours and/or weekends.

2. Screening/Prohibited Items:

With the exception of judges; other essential judicial branch personnel to be communicated to security by the Hernando County Administrative Judge and/or his/her designee and Court Administration; constitutional officers; the county administrator; and the Fifth Circuit Trial Court Administrator, ALL persons entering the main entrances of the Judicial Center shall be subject to security screening.

a. Public/Employees:

i. No firearms, ammunition, and/or firearm magazines or any other item determined to be a weapon by Courthouse Security, is allowed in the Judicial Center unless otherwise provided for herein. Persons not authorized under provisions of the order to be in possession of prohibited objects will be denied entry into the Judicial Center. However, all personal belongings which would constitute a non-firearm weapon may be surrendered or returned to the owner's vehicle.

ii. Any person found to be illegally in possession of any prohibited object or in possession of any illegal object or substance will be subject to arrest.

iii. Employees within the Judicial Center, vendors, delivery persons or other workers on official business and with a specific need for certain tools while working within the Judicial Center are permitted to possess those tools necessary to

complete their official business within the Judicial Center, with prior approval from the Hernando County Administrative Judge or his/her designee in consultation with HCFM. All tools and equipment shall remain monitored and/or securely stored when not in use.

b. Other Government Center Personnel

Hernando County Facility workers and Technology personnel known to security personnel and wearing proper identification may be in possession of items that would otherwise be prohibited, if these items are necessary to perform their duties. Special arrangements must be made with Court Security personnel for entry by other individuals employed to perform services within the Judicial Center requiring the possessions of prohibited items. This paragraph is in no way intended to include firearms.

c. Law Enforcement:

- i. As used in this section, “law enforcement officer” means all persons holding an active certification from the Criminal Justice Standards and Training Commission as a law enforcement officer or a correctional officer as defined in s. 943.10(1), (2), (6), (7), (8), or (9) and who are elected, employed, or appointed as full-time, part-time, or auxiliary/reserve law enforcement officer or correctional officer. This section will also apply to prosecutors and investigators, employed by the Office of the State Attorney,
- ii. All law enforcement officers who are authorized by law to carry firearms shall be entitled to remain armed while in the Judicial Center under the following conditions:
 - a.) they are on official business, and
 - b.) all non-concealed firearms shall be in a “retention-style” holster.
 - c.) Law enforcement Officers and Employees of the State Attorney’s Office, who are legally authorized to carry a weapon, must submit to screening but may at the conclusion of screening present valid identification and continue on with **official courthouse business**.
- iii. Courthouse Security personnel shall make inquiry of each officer as to whether the law enforcement officer is in the building on official, non-official, or personal business and may request information sufficient to ascertain the nature of the law enforcement officer’s business and, if applicable, whether the law enforcement officer is authorized by his/her superior officers to carry firearms while off-duty.

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- iv. A law enforcement officer who is not on official business, but who is authorized by his/her superior officers to carry firearms on or about his/her persons while off-duty pursuant to Florida Statute 790.052, shall **NOT** be entitled to remain armed while in the Judicial Center, the following procedure applies:
 - a.) The law enforcement officer shall be permitted to enter the Judicial Center with a firearm. However, prior to the law enforcement officer being permitted to pass through security, Courthouse Security shall notify the Sheriff's personnel. The Sheriff's personnel shall escort the law enforcement officer from the entrance to the bailiff's office, where the law enforcement officer shall be permitted to store his/her firearm while he/she conducts non-official or personal business, including but not limited to, appearing in court as a party. At the conclusion of his/her business in the Judicial Center, the law enforcement officer shall be permitted to retrieve his/her firearm from secure storage and shall thereafter immediately exit the Judicial Center through public entry/exit point.
- v. If the law enforcement officer has entered the Judicial Center for the purpose of non-official or personal business and has not been authorized by his/her superior officers to carry firearms on or about his/her person while off-duty pursuant to Florida Statute 790.052, he/she shall not be permitted to carry his/her firearm in the Judicial Center and instead must secure the weapon in his/her vehicle.
- vi. Any non-uniformed law enforcement officer or employee of the State Attorney's Office carrying a firearm, who appears in any courtroom, shall keep their firearm secure on their person at all times and shall promptly notify a bailiff and/or the presiding judge that he/she has a firearm on or about their person.
- vii. Nothing in this Administrative Order is intended to, nor shall it be construed to, abridge, abrogate, nullify, or otherwise impinge on any judge in the Fifth Judicial Circuit, or any judge from any other Circuit sitting in Hernando County, having the power to exclude weapons, at their sole discretion, in their courtroom.

d. The Judiciary.

Consistent with section 790.06(12)(a)5., Florida Statutes, members of the judiciary are authorized to carry a concealed weapon or concealed firearm. See also section 790.061, Florida Statutes. Pursuant to this Order, the general magistrates are also authorized to carry a concealed weapon or concealed firearm in the Judicial Center.

II. AFTER HOURS ACCESS TO COURTHOUSE:

1. After-Hours Meetings/Events:

With the exception of scheduled County Commission meetings and court proceedings, security operations must be notified of any meeting occurring outside of normal business hours. Additionally, a list of all attendees must be provided to Courthouse Security prior to close of business on the day scheduled for the meeting.

2. Hernando County employees with proper credentials and suggested approval from HCFM and/or Security Personnel, in consultation with and at the ultimate discretion of the Hernando County Administrative Judge or his/her designee, may be allowed to access the courthouse through any service entrance door as needed to perform their work function.

III. COURTHOUSE DECORUM:

All persons entering the Judicial Center shall be appropriately attired. Each individual Judge shall make a determination as to any dress code applicable to his or her individual courtroom and shall so advise the Courthouse Security staff as to those limitations.

IV. SMOKING:

The Judicial Center is designated non-smoking and smoking shall not be permitted within Judicial Center facilities. This includes the use of E-Cigarettes, Vaping and/or other smoking accessories.

V. SOLICITATION, LEAFLETING AND DEMONSTRATIONS:

Commercial, political, charitable and/or private solicitation and/or leafleting is not permitted within the public areas of the Judicial Center. No one shall parade, stand, move in procession, and/or display a flag, banner, or device inside the Judicial Center with the intent to bring public notice to any party, organization, or movement.

VI. MEDIA COVERAGE OF JUDICIAL PROCEEDING:

Media access, for the technological coverage of judicial proceedings, shall be subject to the limitations of Rule 2.450, Florida Rules of General Practice and Judicial Administration, and at all times subject to the authority of the presiding judge.

VII. USE OF ELECTRONIC DEVICES INCLUDING CELL PHONES:

The use of Electronic Devices in the Judicial Center is limited pursuant to Rule 2.451, Florida Rules of General Practice and Judicial Administration. Within the Judicial Center NO person shall text, photograph, record or transmit live, any video or audio without seeking the prior approval of the presiding Judge, General Counsel, or Court Operations Manager.

VIII. AUTHORITY TO VARY:

There should be few, if any, exceptions to this order. If special circumstances arise, which parties aggrieved by this order believe warrant an exception to this order, they must consult first with the head of Sheriff's court security, or his designee. The Administrative Judge or his designee shall be conferred with in exceptional cases. Under no circumstances should personnel assigned to security checkpoints grant an exception to this order, except under the procedures mandated herein.

IX. ENFORCEMENT:

The Hernando County Sheriff's Office, while acting as Officers of the Court, are directed to enforce this order and any other specifically promulgated rule(s) at all times.

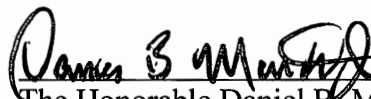
X. PRIOR ORDERS:

Administrative Order H-2009-14-B is hereby rescinded, superseded and replaced. Amendment, supersession, rescission, or vacation of any Administrative Order does not act to reestablish any provision of any previously amended, superseded, rescinded or vacated administrative order.

XI. COMPLIANCE WITH FUTURE AMENDMENTS:

This Order is intended to comport with any amendment to statutes or rules which may, from time to time, renumber the statute(s) or rule(s) cited herein (chapter, number, section, etc.). This order shall be deemed to comply with such changes to chapter, number, section, etc.

DONE AND ORDERED in chambers in Brooksville, Hernando County, Florida this 20th day of April 2026.


The Honorable Daniel B. Merritt, Jr.
Chief Judge, Fifth Circuit
Administrative Judge, Hernando County