

**IN THE COURTS OF THE FIRST JUDICIAL CIRCUIT OF
THE STATE OF FLORIDA**

ADMINISTRATIVE ORDER NO. 2020-09

**RE: COVID-19 PANDEMIC – EMERGENCY PROCEDURES FOR VISITATION IN
DEPENDENCY CASES IN THE FIRST JUDICIAL CIRCUIT**

WHEREAS, the Florida State Courts System continues to monitor and proactively address the effects on court operations of the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19), a severe acute respiratory transmission with high level of contagion; and

WHEREAS, the World Health Organization (WHO) has declared COVID-19 a pandemic, the Governor of Florida has declared a state emergency exists, the Surgeon General and State Health Officer has declared a public health emergency exists, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the Florida Department of Health, and the Florida Department of Management Services have published recommendations regarding prevention of the transmission of COVID-19; and

WHEREAS, the health, safety, and well-being of courthouse visitors, court employees, judicial officers, dependent and sheltered children, involved families, caregivers and foster families, child welfare case management employees, child protective investigators, attorneys, and other persons involved in our Dependency system are high priority for the Florida State Courts System; and

WHEREAS, AOSC20-13 authorizes all chief judges of the circuit and district courts to continue ongoing efforts to mitigate the effects of COVID-19 on the courts and court participants and to prepare to activate and implement continuity of operations (COOP) plans to address the public health emergency; and

WHEREAS, AOSC20-13 authorizes the chief judge of each judicial circuit to establish temporary procedures for the use, to the maximum extent feasible, of communication equipment for the conducting of all proceedings by remote electronic means, as are necessary, in their respective circuits due to the public health emergency; and

WHEREAS, the Florida State Court System recognizes the significant and regularly occurring contact and risk of transmission of COVID-19 through the day to day ordered and otherwise required interactions between dependent and sheltered children, involved families, caregivers and foster families, child welfare case management employees, child protective investigators, attorneys, and other persons involved in our Dependency system which could likewise be minimized by limiting contact where possible to electronic means; and

WHEREAS, the Florida State Court System must, in an abundance of caution, take steps to mitigate the effects and potentially devastating impacts of COVID-19, a highly contagious virus, on those involved in our Dependency system, including on dependent and sheltered children, their families, caregivers and foster families, child welfare case management employees, child protective investigators, dependency attorneys, and other persons who are exposed through in-person contact, in order to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

NOW, THEREFORE, IT IS ORDERED until **April 20, 2020**, or further order:

The Department of Children and Families (DCF), and Families First Network (FFN) are not obligated to transport children and/or parents for court ordered visitation, whether supervised or unsupervised, should they determine that it is not safe or prudent for them to do so. DCF and FFN shall make good faith efforts to conduct court ordered visitation electronically to occur through video conference services, phone calls, and/or other electronic means so as to prevent in person contact and possible transmission of COVID-19. Judges assigned to a dependency division in the First Circuit may request updates from DCF and FFN as to their good faith efforts to conduct court ordered visitation electronically. In person supervised visitation without the assistance of DCF/FFN may be conducted if the caregivers and approved supervisors agree, so long as it is safe and prudent, and said supervised visitation is in accordance with the court orders. In person unsupervised visitation without the assistance of DCF/FFN may be conducted if the caregivers agree, so long as it is safe and prudent and is in accordance with the court orders. No in person visitation may be conducted if any child, caregiver, approved supervisor, or parent, is exhibiting symptoms consistent with COVID-19, or who has been in contact with another person who has tested positive for COVID-19.

DONE AND ORDERED in Pensacola, Escambia County, Florida, this 20th day of March, 2020.



JOHN L. MILLER
CHIEF JUDGE

Copies furnished to:

All Judges, First Judicial Circuit

Robin Wright, Trial Court Administrator

William Eddins, State Attorney, First Judicial Circuit

Bruce Miller, Public Defender, First Judicial Circuit

Pam Childers, Clerk of Courts

Elizabeth Miller, Child Welfare Legal Services/Department of Children and Families

Mark Jones, Families First Network

Bryan Carter, Guardian Ad Litem Program

Candice Brower, Office of Criminal Conflict and Civil Regional Counsel

Justice Administration Commission

For Broadcast by: Escambia-Santa Rosa Bar Association

For Broadcast by: Okaloosa Bar Association

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