

OFFICE OF THE CHIEF JUDGE
ELEVENTH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT

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Counties of:
Ford, Livingston, Logan,
McLean, and Woodford

April 15, 2020

RE: Update--Covid-19 Court Operations

Members of the McLean County Bar Association:

I hope this letter finds you and your families safe and healthy. If you, a family member or friend contracted Covid-19, you are in our thoughts and prayers. Now that we are in an emergency/essential operations phase, I want to provide an update looking forward to the eventual re-opening of all dockets.

As you know, the 11th Judicial Circuit scaled back operations in mid-March and has been providing emergency/essential services since the Governor ordered the Shelter-in-Place. The 11th Circuit is monitoring all developments daily. I have been meeting with the McLean County Presiding Judges and the Resident Circuit Judges of Ford, Livingston, Woodford and Logan counties since mid-March several times a week to assess the situation as it impacts the entire 11th Circuit. I, and others, also attend twice-weekly statewide teleconferences hosted by the Administrative Office of the Illinois Courts that include members of the Illinois Supreme Court, Appellate Courts and Chief Judges that provide critical and crucial information for the 11th Circuit.

I want to explain the rationale as to the timeframes selected for our initial and subsequent pandemic Administrative Orders. I have taken a pragmatic approach with our Orders to allow us maximum flexibility to fully or partially re-open dockets as early as possible without knowing exactly how this will unfold. As you can imagine, it is a complicated process as we continue to adjust operations based on Illinois Supreme Court Orders that, in turn, are somewhat dependent on the Governor's actions.

I realize some Circuits have extended their dates out much further than ours, but no one knows for sure how they selected those dates and it is still unclear how the Supreme Court plans to address speedy trials and other time sensitive issues once the Governor lifts the Shelter-in-Place Order in some

fashion. As you know from your own personal and professional lives, this continues to be an ever-evolving situation with seemingly new daily information and guidelines.

We are sympathetic to your need to know information as soon as possible on when and how the Courts will fully re-open. As of the date of this letter, we are still in a “holding pattern”, but are hopeful we will get a little clarity in the coming days or week from the Governor and Illinois Supreme Court. We are prepared to adjust time frames as needed and once we have a better idea when court operations can return to something close to what we remember as “normal”, we will advise you as soon as possible. We are certainly not foolish to believe that Covid-19 will end on May 1, 2020 and are planning multiple contingencies depending on the myriad of possibilities that may occur if the Shelter-in-Place Order is modified in some fashion.

I know that some judges in the Circuit and across the State are conducting remote court hearings. As stated by another 11th Circuit Judge, “This is a whole new world for the judiciary not only in terms of the technology involved, but also in terms of balancing the need to move forward promptly on certain matters against the need to maintain the overall integrity of the court process, as well as ensuring that the benefits and safeguards inherent in in person hearings are preserved.” Some judges are doing more remote conferencing than others depending on their caseload and needs. You can discuss any individual case needs and/or remote hearing possibilities with the judge handling your case to see if your needs can be accommodated.

As always, feel free to contact me at any time with any questions or concerns. I want to thank each of you for your continued patience, courtesy and cooperation during this very difficult time for everyone.

With regards,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Mark A. Fellheimer". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the typed name and address.

Chief Judge Mark A. Fellheimer
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