

Dear Colleagues,

Several judges have asked if there is additional guidance from the Supreme Court in light of the spiking numbers of Covid-19 cases and the hospital admissions.

The guidance remains the same. Your first consideration as a judge is the health and safety of your employees and the public who enter the courthouse. Everyone correctly wearing masks, taking temperatures, sanitizing, and socially distancing are mandatory practices to keep people safe.

When the Covid-19 numbers were headed downward, many courts reinstated in-person jury trials and did so with much attention to safety and social distancing. Now that the numbers are on an upward trajectory, several courts have announced the cessation of jury trials for the time being. I regard that as a smart move given the current situation.

It seemed that we were making great progress ‘reinventing’ during the pandemic. And we were. Now, things have changed and the increase in cases is just as dangerous as it was when the numbers were at their peak in late spring. It may become more dangerous as people head indoors for the winter. We may also be more at risk because the sensible precautions taken by most in the early stages seem to now be disregarded by so many.

The question is whether reversing course when it comes to in-person presence for hearings, etc. is the best path forward. I think that it is.

The courts have beefed up technology to be able to hold remote hearings for most matters that come to the court: prisoner arraignments, civil filings, tele-pretrials, Zoom hearings and oral arguments, conferencing, tele-treatment... the list goes on.

It is expected that judges will continue to take full advantage of this technology. It is hoped that judges will not order in-person appearances. If they cannot be avoided, judges must ensure that scrupulous safety practices are followed. Please recognize the danger that ordering a defendant to jail may cause and utilize alternatives such as electronic monitors, call-in reporting, etc. Tele-treatment for those who suffer from the disease of drug addiction is also an excellent option.

We’ve had judges who have experienced the virus and recovered. They will tell you that it is nothing to be taken lightly. We’ve had judges who contracted the virus and are not here to tell you how deadly it is.

Please review the previous guidance you’ve received from the Supreme Court. It can be readily accessed on our website: <http://sc.ohio.gov/coronavirus/default.aspx>, and please consider how you can keep those who work with you, those who have cases in your courthouse, and the public safe. It is your responsibility and your staff will look to you for leadership.

Thank you for all that you do for your communities.

Please stay safe.

God Bless.



Maureen O’Connor  
Chief Justice