

March 20, 2020

To the Members of the Bar Associations:

I hope this message finds you and your families well and that you have all been creative in your ways of working and living in the new state of reality. We at Norfolk Probate and Family Court appreciate your patience and understanding in these trying times.

We have all been working together and with Chief Casey and Linda Medonis, who have been working tirelessly to author and seek approval of plans/orders to address this unprecedented situation. As I am sure you are all aware, since Friday March 13, 2020, when the SJC issued OE144, and March 214, 2020 when the Probate and Family Court issued Standing Order 1-20 (and then SO 2-20), the operations of our Court have been dramatically altered. Our staff has been working tirelessly to adapt with the Standing Orders and keep themselves and the public as safe as possible.

Register McDermott, Assistant Register Barbadoro, Judges, Chief Court Officer Conley and members of his staff, JCM LaDue and Chief Probation Officer Plante met with me on Sunday to establish a plan to address this crisis head on. Many of you may have received emails or phone calls on Sunday to schedule your matters for phone conferences or to obtain continuance dates. After several hours of working on that the plan changed as the Courts were then closed for Monday and Tuesday. Needless to say this has continued to be an ever changing situation.

On Wednesday when staff arrived we held meetings to determine how best to meet the needs of the public and at the same time keep our staff safe and away from harm. As you now know, our Courthouse is **CLOSED TO THE PUBLIC** until further notice. We have scheduled employees to work on a staggered schedule. We have a team in place to accept calls and emails if you believe you have an emergency that *needs* to be addressed (see contact information below). The calls are being triaged by JCM LaDue, the AJCMs and First Assistant Barbadoro to determine if it is a real emergency that requires immediate attention. If the case is deemed to constitute an emergency we are scheduling phone conference. If orders are entered they will be emailed to the Parties and/or counsel. Thus far, we have had very few people present at the door and very few emergencies presented.

You may hear that other Divisions are doing things differently and that may very well be true. Each Division has separate and distinct resources and needs. We are all making the best judgment calls we can under extraordinary circumstances.

This current plan may continue to change depending on the future course of this virus and how it affects our community. We will try to update our information in a timely manner.

We would like to not only thank you, your staff and your clients for their patience and understanding but would also like to thank our staff who have stepped up to meet this challenge, many coming in last Sunday and coming in on days they were scheduled to be off or on vacation to address our and your needs. We sincerely hope that this situation is short lived and that we all come through it with no ill effects.

Patricia A. Gorman, First Justice

Emergency Contacts:

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