NOTICE TO THE BAR

FAMILY DIVISION – COVID-19 – (1) CONDUCTING MATRIMONIAL EARLY SETTLEMENT PANELS (MESP) BY TELEPHONE OR VIDEO; (2) TEMPORARY SUSPENSION OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE ECONOMIC MEDIATION (DVEM) PROGRAM

In response to the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic, the New Jersey Judiciary is implementing all possible measures to apply social distancing in current court operations, consistent with the recommendations of the New Jersey Department of Health and the Centers for Disease Control.

(1) Matrimonial Early Settlement Panels (MESPs)

In accordance with the March 27, 2020 Supreme Court Omnibus Order continuing the postponement of all MESP sessions scheduled through April 26, 2020, counties beginning the week of April 27, 2020 will be prepared to have MESP panels handle dissolution (FM) cases remotely. This notice provides instruction and guidance on how to conduct remote Matrimonial Early Settlement Panel (MESP) events either by video or telephonically. The following steps should be taken, to the extent possible, to ensure that the MESP sessions are scheduled and conducted remotely:

1. Vicinage Family Division staff should continue with the MESP dates that have been scheduled through the case management conferences for April 27 and beyond. Please note that although court notices may continue to indicate that MESP will be held at the courthouse, all MESP sessions in fact will be conducted by video or telephone until further notice.

2. Vicinage Family Division staff should provide the MESP panelists with a calendar of cases and an email address and phone number where the panelists can contact court staff. The panelists must be provided with the phone numbers of the attorneys and any self-represented litigants. Email addresses of the litigants and attorneys should also be provided to the panelists where possible.

3. MESP panelists can determine, after consulting with the attorneys and/or self-represented litigants, whether each remote MESP session will be conducted by video or by telephone.

4. MESP panelists will be required to complete the MESP Case Information form (CN 12588) at either the conclusion of the event or when the event is adjourned. The completed form

should be sent via email to the Vicinage Family staff contact person.

5. If the MESP is unsuccessful, the case should be referred to Post-MESP Mediation (Economic Mediation) in accordance with R. 5:5-6. In that situation, the litigants should select a mediator, who should be contacted for an initial appointment. If the mediator cannot be reached, the "Referral Order for Post-MESP Mediation Program" (CN 10936) should reflect that the mediator selection and the date of initial appointment are tentative. The order of referral and the MESP Case Information form should be completed and sent via email to the Vicinage Family Division staff contact person.

(2) Domestic Violence Economic Mediation (DVEM) Program

Directive #06-20 promulgated operational guidelines for statewide expansion of the Domestic Violence Economic Mediation (DVEM) program as of April 15, 2020. However, because of the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic and the need to apply social distancing principles, that implementation date for the DVEM program has been postponed until further notice. Additionally, those six counties that have been functioning under the DVEM pilot program are suspending those events until further notice.

Questions about this notice may be directed the Family Practice Division at 609-815-2900 ext. 55350.

Hon. Glenn A. Grant, J.A.D.
Acting Administrative Director of the Courts

Dated: March 31, 2020