⚠ **COVID-19 alerts from Missouri courts:**

⚠ Please read court-specific notices. To determine the status of a particular proceeding, please check the case's docket entries in Case.net, ask your attorney or contact the local clerk's office.

Order dated March 16, 2020, re: Response to the Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) Pandemic

Supreme Court of Missouri
en banc

March 16, 2020
Effective March 16, 2020

In re: Response to the Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) Pandemic

ORDER

On March 13, 2020, national and state emergencies were declared following the classification of COVID-19 as a pandemic. In response, the Supreme Court of Missouri announces the implementation of the following precautionary measures to combat the spread of the disease to the public and the employees of the Missouri judiciary.

The courts of the State of Missouri shall remain open. Nevertheless, pursuant to this Court's constitutional authority to supervise the administration of the state judicial system, see Mo. Const. art. V, §§ 4.1, 8, the Supreme Court of Missouri hereby suspends all in-person proceedings in all appellate and circuit courts – including all associate, family, juvenile, municipal, and probate divisions. The suspension will last from Tuesday, March 17, 2020, through Friday, April 3, 2020, and may be extended by order of this Court as circumstances may warrant.

The suspension of in-person proceedings is subject to the following exceptions:

- Proceedings necessary to protect the constitutional rights of criminal defendants and juveniles;
- Proceedings in which civil or criminal jury trials are already in progress as of March 16, 2020;
- Proceedings pursuant to chapter 455 pertaining to orders of protection;
- Proceedings related to emergency child custody orders;

- Proceedings related to petitions for temporary restraining orders or other forms of temporary injunctive relief;
- Proceedings related to emergency mental health orders;
- Proceedings pursuant to Chapter 475 for emergency guardianship or conservatorship;
- Proceedings directly related to the COVID-19 public health emergency;
- Oral arguments regarding time-sensitive matters; and
- Other exceptions approved by the Chief Justice of this Court.

The presiding judge of each circuit court and the chief judges of each appellate court are authorized to determine the manner in which the listed in-person exceptions are to be conducted. Any proceedings conducted in-person shall be limited to the attorneys, parties, witnesses, security officers, and other individuals necessary to the proceedings as determined by the judge presiding over the proceedings. The judge presiding over such proceedings has the discretion to exercise his or her discretion in excusing jurors or other individuals that cannot or should not appear as a result of risks associated with COVID-19.

All judges and court clerks are encouraged to utilize all available technologies – including e-mail, teleconferencing, and video conferencing – to further limit in-person courtroom appearances. Any local, criminal, or civil rules that would impede a court clerk or judge's ability to utilize such technologies are hereby suspended until April 3, 2020, and may be extended by order of this Court as circumstances may warrant.

This order does not affect a court's ability to consider or rule on any matter that does not require an in-person court proceeding. Likewise, this order does not affect any required filing deadlines through Missouri's e-filing system. During the suspension, each circuit and appellate court should consider adopting measures for ensuring timely filing by pro se litigants that lack access to Missouri's e-filing system.

Despite the suspension of in-person court proceedings, Missouri courts still must continue to carry out the core, constitutional functions of the Missouri judiciary as prescribed by law and continue to uphold the constitutional rights of litigants seeking redress in any Missouri court. Each courthouse should work with local law enforcement and county agencies to ensure that, to the extent possible, courthouses remain accessible to carry out essential constitutional functions and time-sensitive proceedings.

If it becomes necessary to close any courthouse during the suspension period, the courthouse shall develop procedures for ensuring the court remains accessible by telephone and e-mail to the extent possible during regular business hours. The Supreme Court of Missouri should be notified immediately of the closing of any courthouse, and notice of such closings should be disseminated to the local media and posted on the courthouse doors.

Furthermore, for the health and safety of its employees, each court is instructed to post an order to the courthouse doors prohibiting access to the premises for individuals that have been exposed to or are exhibiting symptoms of COVID-19. The posting should list necessary contact information for individuals not

authorized to enter the premises to have remote access to the administration of justice. Attached to this order is a recommended order for posting at each court. The order should contain the same substantive information but should be modified to include local contact information.

Additionally, any non-essential travel by judicial employees for work-related functions is hereby suspended. This includes travel for purposes of participating in Supreme Court committee meetings. If possible, such meetings should be conducted by teleconferencing or rescheduled to a later date.

This order is intended to be interpreted broadly for protection of the public from the risks associated with COVID-19.

Day - to - Day

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GEORGE W. DRAPER III
Chief Justice