



STATE OF FLORIDA
TWELFTH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT
KIMBERLY CARLTON BONNER
CHIEF JUDGE

From: Kimberly C. Bonner, Chief Judge *KB*

To: All Sarasota and DeSoto County Judges
Kim Miller, Trial Court Administrator
Major Brian Meinberg, Sarasota County Sheriff's Office
William Martin, Sarasota County Facilities Manager
Karen Rushing, Sarasota Clerk of Court
Ed Brodsky, State Attorney
Laurence Eger, Public Defender
Holly Lipps, Executive Director, Sarasota County Bar Association
Aaron Getty, President, Sarasota Chapter of FACDL
Virginia Donovan, Chief Probation Officer, Department of Juvenile Justice
David Silverstein, Managing Attorney, Children's Legal Services, DCF

Subject: Weekend and Holiday First Appearance Proceedings

Date: February 11, 2021

In response to the Coronavirus pandemic, in March 2020, I directed all first appearance hearings in Sarasota County to be conducted from the Judge Lynn N. Silvertooth Judicial Center, with the judge, attorneys and court staff, including courtroom clerks, establishing a remote connection to the Sarasota County Jail. Operating out of the Judicial Center rather than the jail allowed the court to ensure proper health and safety protocols were performed when judges, attorneys and court staff were required to be physically present to participate in the proceedings. However, this also required Court Administration, the Sheriff's Office and Sarasota County's Facilities Department to have staff on site to screen attorneys and the public, protect the judge and secure the building, and sanitize the courtroom and public areas of the building each day.

Over the last several months, we have had many discussions with the Sheriff's Office to develop a plan for resuming weekend and holiday first appearances at the Sarasota County Jail. The Sheriff's Office has made modifications to the jail courtroom – including the installation of a protective divider between the defendant and attorneys – and developed protocols relating to the entrance and social distancing of judges, attorneys, court staff and victims. After a recent

walkthrough of the facility and review of their protocols, I am now confident that we can safely conduct first appearances from the Sarasota County Jail, just as we have been doing in the Judicial Center since March.

Effective Saturday, February 20, 2021, weekend and holiday first appearances will return to the Sarasota County Jail, with the judge, attorneys and court staff appearing in-person from the jail facility. Due to the limited space available for social distancing, Sarasota shelter & detention hearings will continue to be conducted telephonically from the Sarasota County Jail, as will DeSoto County first appearances.

I thank the Sheriff's Office for supporting our weekend and holiday operations at the Judicial Center for nearly a year, I appreciate their efforts to resume our traditional operations at the jail and welcome your input regarding any potential improvements to the process. Below are the protocols that will be in place at the jail and the health screening questions that will be asked of each individual entering the facility.