

**IN THE CIRCUIT COURT, SIXTH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT
IN AND FOR PASCO AND PINELLAS COUNTIES, FLORIDA**

ADMINISTRATIVE ORDER NO. 2025-002 PA/PI-CIR

RE: COURT OPERATIONS IN EMERGENCIES

It is necessary to update the policies and procedures for court operations in emergencies to ensure continued operations in the Sixth Judicial Circuit during all emergencies. The State Attorney, the Public Defender, the Clerks of the Circuit Court (Clerks), the Sheriffs, and the Pasco County Chief Correctional Officer each play an important role in court operations in an emergency and the cooperation of each is important to ensure continued operations of the Court.

Pasco County and Pinellas County are required to provide facilities for the trial courts. *See* Art. V, section 14, Fla. Const.; § 29.008, Fla. Stat. The County Administrators have the power to supervise the care and custody of county property. *See* § 125.74, Fla. Stat. The Sheriffs are required to provide security for the Court. *See* § 30.15, Fla. Stat. Pasco County and Pinellas County are required to have emergency operations plans and “establish, as necessary, a primary and one or more secondary emergency operating centers to provide continuity of government” during emergencies. *See* § 252.38(3), Fla. Stat.

In accordance with Article V, Section 2, Florida Constitution, Florida Rule of General Practice and Judicial Administration 2.215, and section 43.26, Florida Statutes,

IT IS ORDERED:

1. When an emergency or threat of emergency arises that requires closure of the courts, this Administrative Order must be activated by order of the Chief Judge and regular court operations will cease within the affected county or counties within the Sixth Judicial Circuit. An emergency or threat of emergency may arise from any weapon (e.g., biological, germ, explosive device, technological, or any similar weapon), natural disaster (e.g., fire, flood, hurricane, tornado, thunderstorms, or other natural disasters), or other emergencies (e.g., civil unrest or nuclear or hazardous conditions). When this Administrative Order is activated, it will take precedence over all other administrative orders in conflict with it.

2. When regular court operations cease, the following must occur:

- A. All court dockets, hearings, trials, and proceedings of any kind, including foreclosure sales, are cancelled except for crucial functions, as defined in paragraph 3 below.
- B. All court files will either be returned to the Clerks or secured in a room without windows.
- C. The Chief Judge will request that the Chief Justice suspend deadlines under Florida Rule of General Practice and Judicial Administration 2.205.

3. When regular court operations cease, crucial functions must continue as specified below. Crucial functions must continue to the extent possible except that no judge, court personnel,

or other persons necessary to conduct these crucial functions will be endangered in order to continue crucial functions. Crucial functions include the following:

- A. First appearance hearings under Florida Rule of Criminal Procedure 3.130.
- B. Detention hearings under § 985.255, Fla. Stat.
- C. Shelter and arraignment hearings under §§ 39.402 and 39.506, Fla. Stat.
- D. Ex parte injunctions for dating violence, domestic violence, repeat violence, sexual violence, or stalking under §§ 26.20, 741.30, 784.046, and 784.0485, Fla. Stat.
- E. Initial hearings for risk protection orders under § 790.401, Fla. Stat.
- F. Issuance of warrants or authorization for wiretaps.
- G. Any other emergency matter such as involuntary examination orders under § 394.463, Fla. Stat., involuntary assessment and stabilization orders under § 397.6818, Fla. Stat., emergency medical treatment under Florida Probate Rule 5.900, or other emergencies requiring immediate action by the Court to prevent harm to persons or property. Emergency matters are not subject to easy definition. As such, the judge must determine if the law or totality of the circumstances require immediate action. In the event the judge decides the matter is not an emergency, they will require the matter to be set before the assigned section judge on the regular calendar after regular court operations resume.
- H. Other time sensitive matters as determined by the judge.

4. Hearing time for crucial functions will be scheduled at a time and place established by the Chief Judge and to the extent possible will be scheduled at the regular time for advisories. In addition to the scheduled time, ex parte relief for crucial functions may be requested from the Chief Judge. When an emergency condition is anticipated, the Chief Judge may determine that hearings for crucial functions may be conducted prior to the regularly scheduled time for advisories.

A. In Pasco County, crucial functions may be scheduled at the following locations:

- 1. West Pasco Judicial Center at 7530 Little Rd., New Port Richey,
- 2. Robert D. Sumner Judicial Center at 38053 Live Oak Ave., Dade City, or
- 3. Pasco County Jail at 20101 Central Blvd., Land O'Lakes,

in that order of preference with the specific location to be determined by the Pasco Administrative Judge in consultation with the Chief Judge based upon conditions at the time.

B. In Pinellas County, crucial functions may be scheduled at the following locations:

- 1. Pinellas County Justice Center at 14250 49th St. North, Clearwater,
- 2. Pinellas County Jail at 14400 49th St. North, Clearwater,
- 3. Clearwater Courthouse at 315 Court St., Clearwater, or
- 4. St. Petersburg Judicial Building at 545 1st Ave. North, St. Petersburg,

in that order of preference with the specific location to be determined by the Chief Judge based upon conditions at the time.

In the event none of these facilities are available or cannot be reasonably accessed to conduct crucial functions, the Chief Judge may suspend crucial functions, or after consultation with the County Administrator or their designee, may designate any other county-owned or county-leased facility that can be accessed for the purpose of conducting crucial functions, or may determine that crucial functions in Pasco County should be conducted in Pinellas County or that crucial functions in Pinellas County should be conducted in Pasco County.

5. The Chief Judge may activate Emergency Response Teams as necessary depending upon the circumstances. When activated, the following individuals must lead the Emergency Response Teams:

A. East Pasco County Emergency Response Team

- i. Chief Judge
- ii. Pasco Administrative Judge
- iii. Trial Courts Administrator
- iv. Deputy Trial Courts Administrator
- v. Court Counsel
- vi. Court Technology Officer, or their designee
- vii. Court Director of Community Relations
- viii. Court Emergency Operations Coordinator
- ix. Pasco Sheriff, or their designee
- x. Pasco Chief Correctional Officer, or their designee
- xi. Sixth Judicial Circuit State Attorney, or their designee
- xii. Sixth Judicial Circuit Public Defender, or their designee
- xiii. Pasco Clerk, or their designee
- xiv. Pasco County Administrator, or their designee

B. West Pasco County Emergency Response Team

- i. Chief Judge
- ii. Pasco Administrative Judge
- iii. Trial Courts Administrator
- iv. Deputy Trial Courts Administrator
- v. Court Counsel
- vi. Court Technology Officer, or their designee
- vii. Court Director of Community Relations
- viii. Court Emergency Operations Coordinator
- ix. Pasco Sheriff, or their designee
- x. Pasco Chief Correctional Officer, or their designee
- xi. Sixth Judicial Circuit State Attorney, or their designee
- xii. Sixth Judicial Circuit Public Defender, or their designee
- xiii. Pasco Clerk, or their designee
- xiv. Pasco County Administrator, or their designee

C. Pinellas County Emergency Response Team

- i. Chief Judge

- ii. Pinellas Criminal Administrative Judge
- iii. Trial Courts Administrator
- iv. Deputy Trial Courts Administrator
- v. Court Counsel
- vi. Court Technology Officer, or their designee
- vii. Court Director of Community Relations
- viii. Court Emergency Operations Coordinator
- ix. Pinellas Sheriff, or their designee
- x. Sixth Judicial Circuit State Attorney, or their designee
- xi. Sixth Judicial Circuit Public Defender, or their designee
- xii. Pinellas Clerk, or their designee
- xiii. Pinellas County Administrator, or their designee

Attachment A hereto provides the then-current names of the individuals filling the roles for each Emergency Response Team. Attachment A will be reviewed on a periodic basis, primarily in advance of each annual hurricane season. Each person on the Emergency Response Teams has an obligation to notify Court Administration when an update to Attachment A is necessary.

6. Once this Administrative Order is activated, the Trial Courts Administrator must, to the extent possible under emergency conditions:

- A. Notify all judges and court personnel that this Administrative Order has been activated, identifying the emergency.
- B. Notify the following entities, through their designated contact person, by email or other appropriate methods that this Administrative Order has been activated: the Clerks, State Attorney, Public Defender, Sheriffs, the Pasco Chief Correctional Officer, the Department of Juvenile Justice, the Department of Children and Families, the Emergency Management Director for Pasco County, the Emergency Management Director for Pinellas County, and the Director of Justice Coordination in Pinellas County. Each entity must provide the Trial Courts Administrator with the name and email address of the person to receive notification that this Administrative Order has been activated.
- C. Establish a voice mail system at the main line for the Administrative Office of the Courts (727-464-4470) advising the public of the state of emergency and the suspension of regular court proceedings and advising lawyers and litigants how to have crucial matters heard.
- D. Issue a press release to media outlets and post notice on the Circuit's website and social media platforms advising the public of the state of emergency and the suspension of regular court proceedings.
- E. Notify judges, judicial assistants, and court staff as to the impact of the emergency conditions if necessary under the circumstances.

7. Once this Administrative Order is activated, judges, judicial assistants, and court staff should call the voice mail system at the Administrative Office of the Courts at 727-464-4470 or an alternate number provided, or check the Circuit's website at www.jud6.org to obtain information about the status of court operations. In the event the Trial Courts Administrator is

aware that the voice mail system is inaccessible but phone service is still available, the notification system will be activated. The notification system will ensure that:

- A. The Chief Judge will notify the administrative judges, who in turn notify the judges in their division. All judges notify their judicial assistant.
- B. The Trial Courts Administrator will notify senior court staff, who in turn notify supervisors, who in turn notify all employees.

If a judge, judicial assistant, or court staff has not been able to access the voice mail system and has not been contacted about the status of court operations, the reverse of the notification system should be used. Administrative judges are to contact the Chief Judge, judges are to contact their administrative judge, judicial assistants are to contact their judge, and court staff are to contact their supervisor to obtain information. In the event that phone service is disrupted or the website cannot be accessed, media reports should be reviewed to obtain information about the status of court operations. Contracted court providers will be notified by court administration to the extent possible, but contracted court providers must check the Circuit's website or media reports to obtain information about the status of court operations.

In addition, court reporters, court technology staff, and other court staff may be required to perform functions prior to, during, and after an emergency.

8. Once this Administrative Order is activated, the Clerks, State Attorney, Public Defender, Sheriffs, Pasco Chief Correctional Officer, the Department of Juvenile Justice, and the Department of Children and Families must call the voice mail system at the Administrative Office of the Courts at 727-464-4470 or an alternate number provided to each entity to obtain information about the status of court operations. In the event the voice mail system is inaccessible, the above entities are to contact the Chief Judge or Trial Courts Administrator through phone or radio service to obtain information about the status of court operations. In the event that phone service and radio service is disrupted, media reports should be reviewed to obtain information about the status of court operations. Other entities such as the Department of Corrections, domestic violence shelters, the Emergency Management Director for Pasco County, the Emergency Management Director for Pinellas County, and the Manager of Justice Coordination in Pinellas County are encouraged to call the voice mail system to obtain information about the status of court operations.

9. The State Attorney and Public Defender will additionally:

- A. Designate staff to be available so that crucial functions can be performed.
- B. Communicate with the Chief Judge regarding any issues affecting the ability of their office to perform crucial functions during an emergency.

10. The Clerks of the Circuit Court will additionally:

- A. Provide sufficient staff to maintain regular services to the Court until regular court operations cease.
- B. Designate deputy clerks necessary to document court proceedings.
- C. Communicate with the Chief Judge regarding any issues affecting the ability of the Clerks to perform crucial functions during an emergency.

When regular court operations cease, the Clerks are also encouraged to cease regular court operations. If the Clerks continue regular operations when regular court operations have ceased, the Clerks must bring all emergency matters that are filed to the attention of the Chief Judge.

11. The Sheriffs will:

- A. Designate bailiffs to provide security for any necessary court proceedings.
- B. Provide transportation for the Clerks, Public Defender, State Attorney, judge, court reporter, and others determined necessary by the Chief Judge to the facility designated for crucial functions upon request of the Chief Judge if conditions require such transportation in order to conduct crucial functions.

12. Pasco and Pinellas Counties will:

- A. Provide and maintain the facilities designated for crucial functions in the county by maintaining electricity, sewer, water, telephone, computer networks, computer mainframe, and other essential services to the building during an emergency to the extent it is safe to do so and within the control of the county.
- B. Provide communication equipment for the Chief Judge, Pasco Administrative Judge, Pasco County Court Administrative Judge, Pinellas Criminal Administrative Judge, the Trial Courts Administrator, and additional court personnel designated by the Chief Judge. Such communications equipment must function between counties and be designed to function during an emergency.
- C. Assist the Chief Judge in identifying alternative county properties where court functions may be conducted during or after an emergency if the designated courthouses are not available.
- D. After an emergency condition has ceased, quickly inspect court facilities. The inspection must be done in conjunction with court staff and a joint report provided to the Chief Judge regarding the status of court facilities.
- E. In the event the Chief Judge determines, after consultation with the County Administrator or their designee, that the condition of a facility prevents regular court operations from resuming, immediately identify an alternative facility where regular court operations can resume.

13. When this Administrative Order is activated, local law enforcement agencies must issue a notice to appear for all local ordinance violations and all first or second-degree misdemeanors unless otherwise required by law to arrest a person.

14. When this Administrative Order is activated, the bond schedule must be modified so that all persons charged with a local ordinance violation or persons charged with a misdemeanor must be released on the defendant's own recognizance (ROR) except as follows:

- A. The bond schedule is not modified for those defendants charged with failure to appear in violation of § 843.15, Fla. Stat., stalking in violation of § 784.048, Fla. Stat., or any domestic violence offense as defined in § 741.28, Fla. Stat.
- B. Those defendants charged with a non-felony DUI in violation of § 316.193, Fla. Stat., or a non-felony BUI in violation of § 327.35, Fla. Stat. must be detained until

the statutory criteria are met. Once the criteria are met, the defendants must be released on ROR.

15. In the event of the death of the Chief Judge or any other emergency that prevents the Chief Judge from carrying out their duties or from appointing an Acting Chief Judge, the powers and duties of the Chief Judge must be discharged by the following Acting Chief Judge in the order of succession specified:

- A. The Pinellas Criminal Administrative Judge
- B. The Pasco Administrative Judge.

The Acting Chief Judge must serve until the Chief Judge is able to carry out their duties. If the event permanently deprives the Chief Judge of the ability to carry out the duties of Chief Judge, the Acting Chief Judge will hold that position until the Chief Justice or the Chief Justice's designee appoints a successor Chief Judge or the Judges of the Circuit elect a successor, whichever comes first.

16. In the event a catastrophic event prevents activation of this Administrative Order and communications are disrupted, the appropriate Emergency Response Team will meet in Pasco County at the West Pasco Judicial Center, 7530 Little Road, New Port Richey, or in Pinellas County at the Pinellas County Justice Center, 14250 49th Street North, Clearwater, at noon, 48 hours after the cessation of the emergency.

17. Once this Administrative Order is activated, regular court operations will resume only to the degree and manner designated by the Chief Judge or the Acting Chief Judge.

18. For proceedings cancelled during the emergency, the following procedure will apply to rescheduling of hearings. If the parties scheduled the hearing or the proceeding was set upon request of a party, it is the responsibility of the parties to reschedule the hearing provided that the Court may sua sponte reschedule the matter. Proceedings such as traffic court and domestic violence proceedings scheduled by the Court will be rescheduled by the Clerks on order of the Court.

Attachment A may be amended without further amendment to this Administrative Order.

Administrative Order 2015-017 PA/PI-CIR is hereby rescinded.

DONE AND ORDERED in Chambers at Clearwater, Pinellas County, Florida, this ____ day of January, 2025.

ORIGINAL SIGNED ON JANUARY 14, 2025
BY SHAWN CRANE, CHIEF JUDGE

Attachment: (A) Emergency Response Teams

cc: All Judges, Judicial Assistants and Court Staff
The Honorable Bruce Bartlett, State Attorney
The Honorable Sara Mollo, Public Defender
The Honorable Nikki Alvarez-Sowles, Clerk of the Circuit Court, Pasco County
The Honorable Ken Burke, Clerk of the Circuit Court, Pinellas County
The Honorable Chris Nocco, Sheriff, Pasco County
The Honorable Bob Gualtieri, Sheriff, Pinellas County
Jennifer Parker, Trial Courts Administrator
Michele Emmerman, Deputy Trial Courts Administrator
Ngozi Acholonu, Assistant Regional Counsel
Jeffrey Steinsnyder, County Attorney, Pasco County
Jewel White, County Attorney, Pinellas County
Mike Carballa, County Administrator, Pasco County
Barry A. Burton, County Administrator, Pinellas County
Stacey Jenkins, Chief Correctional Officer, Pasco County Board of County Commissioners
Florida Department of Juvenile Justice
Florida Department of Children and Families
Florida Department of Corrections
Andrew Fossa, Emergency Management, Pasco County
Cathie Perkins, Emergency Management, Pinellas County
Yashira Gonzalez, Justice Coordination Manager, Pinellas County
Probation and Parole, Pasco County
Domestic Violence Shelters, Pasco and Pinellas Counties
Law Enforcement Agencies, Pasco and Pinellas Counties
Bar Associations
Law Library, Pinellas County

ATTACHMENT A

East Pasco County Emergency Response Team

Chief Judge: The Honorable Shawn Crane
Pasco Administrative Judge: The Honorable Kimberly Sharpe Byrd
Trial Courts Administrator: Jennifer Parker
Deputy Trial Courts Administrator: Michele Emmerman
Court Counsel: Lyndsey Siara
Court Technology Officer: Jim Weaver, or designee
Court Director of Community Relations: Stephen Thompson
Court Emergency Operations Coordinator: Jesus Gonzalez
Pasco Sheriff: Chris Nocco, or designee
Pasco Chief Correctional Officer: Stacey Jenkins, or designee
Sixth Judicial Circuit State Attorney: Bruce Bartlett, or designee
Sixth Judicial Circuit Public Defender: Sara Mollo, or designee
Pasco Clerk: Nikki Alvarez, or designee
Pasco County Administrator: Mike Carballa, or designee

West Pasco County Emergency Response Team

Chief Judge: The Honorable Shawn Crane
Pasco Administrative Judge: The Honorable Kimberly Sharpe Byrd
Trial Courts Administrator: Jennifer Parker
Deputy Trial Courts Administrator: Michele Emmerman
Court Counsel: Lyndsey Siara
Court Technology Officer: Jim Weaver, or designee
Court Director of Community Relations: Stephen Thompson
Court Emergency Operations Coordinator: Jesus Gonzalez
Pasco Sheriff: Chris Nocco, or designee
Pasco Chief Correctional Officer: Stacey Jenkins, or designee
Sixth Judicial Circuit State Attorney: Bruce Bartlett, or designee
Sixth Judicial Circuit Public Defender: Sara Mollo, or designee
Pasco Clerk: Nikki Alvarez, or designee
Pasco County Administrator: Mike Carballa, or designee

Pinellas County Emergency Response Team

Chief Judge: The Honorable Shawn Crane
Pinellas Criminal Administrative Judge: The Honorable Keith Meyer
Trial Courts Administrator: Jennifer Parker
Deputy Trial Courts Administrator: Michele Emmerman
Court Counsel: Lyndsey Siara
Court Technology Officer: Jim Weaver, or designee

Court Director of Community Relations: Stephen Thompson
Court Emergency Operations Coordinator: Jesus Gonzalez
Pinellas Sheriff: Bob Gaultieri, or designee
Sixth Judicial Circuit State Attorney: Bruce Bartlett, or designee
Sixth Judicial Circuit Public Defender: Sara Mollo, or designee
Pinellas Clerk: Ken Burke, or designee
Pinellas County Administrator: Barry Burton, or designee

Last Updated January 21, 2025