

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

ADMINISTRATIVE ORDER NO. 2025-024 PA/PI-CIR

RE: COURTHOUSE FACILITY DOG PROGRAM

Courts are permitted to establish conditions it finds just and appropriate when taking the testimony of a child. Under section 92.55(5), Florida Statutes, certified therapy animals or courthouse facility dogs may be used to support participants in cases involving a sexual offense or child abuse, abandonment, or neglect.

Therefore, 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. COURTHOUSE FACILITY DOG PROGRAM

The Sixth Judicial Circuit has partnered with the nonprofit organization Hero to a Child (hereinafter “Hero to a Child”) to establish a Certified Courthouse Facility Dog Program for use in the Circuit. Certified courthouse facility dogs may be used to assist children, victims, and victim witnesses in traumatic proceedings, such as those in family court, dependency, and termination of parental rights proceedings. *See* section 92.55(5), Florida Statutes.

2. USE OF COURTHOUSE FACILITY DOG

A. Request

If the Office of the State Attorney, the Office of the Public Defender, the Office of Regional Counsel, the Department of Children and Families, the Guardian ad Litem, or privately retained counsel determine that the presence and use of a certified courthouse facility dog (hereinafter “facility dog”) may aid in the testimony of a child, victim, or witness at a hearing, trial, deposition, or other court proceeding, a request may be made by contacting Hero to a Child. Hero to a Child will determine which requests it can meet based on available resources. The use of a facility dog is contingent on the approval of the presiding judge.

B. Scheduling

All scheduling will be conducted by and through Hero to a Child. The requesting party is responsible for facilitating communication with Hero to a Child regarding the date, time, and location of any and all court events and related case events for which the requested services are needed.

C. Motion Requesting Approval for Use of Facility Dog

After coordinating the request with Hero to a Child, the party requesting to utilize the facility dog must file a timely motion, prior to the trial or hearing date, requesting approval for the use of a facility dog. The form Motion Requesting Use of Courthouse Facility Dog attached to this administrative order should be utilized for this purpose. If the presiding judge grants the motion, the judge may enter any orders deemed necessary for proper procedures, conduct, and use of the

facility dog in their courtroom. Once the request is approved by the presiding judge by written order and filed in the court file, the facility dog team is permitted into courthouse facilities for all case-related events.

3. RESPONSIBILITIES OF HERO TO A CHILD

Hero to a Child must:

1. Ensure that handlers and dogs have completed any and all necessary training and have passed a nationally recognized skills aptitude test and evaluation by an organization that certifies the team as appropriate to provide courthouse facility dog services.
2. Ensure that all facility dog teams adhere to policies of their individual certifying organizations and remain current on certifications.
3. Ensure that the dogs have been examined by a Florida veterinarian to ensure good health within the past year and all immunizations are current.
4. Ensure that every dog is properly registered and licensed in the State of Florida.
5. Ensure that Hero to a Child, handlers, and facility dogs are properly insured.
6. Carry a minimum of \$1,000,000 in liability insurance with a rider that includes facility dogs on the premises of Sixth Judicial Circuit courthouse facilities and naming the Sixth Judicial Circuit, Pinellas County, and Pasco County as named insureds.
7. Provide a copy of the insurance liability rider page to the Administrative Office of the Courts at the inception of the program and upon any change in coverage.
8. Ensure that the facility dog is leashed at all times with the handler in control of the dog and the leash.
9. Advise handlers to refrain from any and all overt displays of emotion during all court proceedings.
10. Ensure that the handler adheres to their certifying organization's policies regarding grooming and zoonotic disease/parasite control in attempts to reduce allergens and/or parasites.
11. Ensure that handlers will inquire if there are any known allergies or concerns prior to entering an enclosed space, including elevators.
12. Ensure that the handlers are responsible for arriving early enough to exercise the dog to avoid any elimination issues. All dogs must be trained not to eliminate indoors. Outdoor elimination must occur only in the designated area and be cleaned up by the handler using proper disposal methods to control odors.
13. Ensure that handlers are aware of their responsibility to articulate the facility dog's needs and to be aware of signs of fatigue and stress.
14. Ensure that any incidents are immediately reported to the presiding judge and the Chief Judge, or their designee. Reportable incidents include injuries to a person or an animal; situations with high potential that an injury could have occurred either to a person or the dog, even if no one was hurt at the time; situations with perception of

an injury; and damage to property, including animal elimination in the courthouse facility.

15. Ensure that all handlers have passed a law enforcement background check by the Florida Department of Law Enforcement or a United States federal law enforcement agency.
16. Ensure that all handlers will immediately report to Court Administration any incident that may change the status of their background check, including but not limited to, any arrest, conviction, or other incident involving law enforcement.
17. Ensure that handlers will maintain the confidentiality of all information, including, but not limited to, information pertaining to the individuals testifying and their families, whether written or verbal, received through the course of providing facility dog services.
18. Ensure that every handler will carry with and produce their certifying organization identification card and an identification card bearing their association or employment with the approved provider, and will produce same upon request by any court official, including court security. Additionally, the facility dog must identify itself by wearing a facility dog vest or other identifying garment.

4. PRESENCE OF FACILITY DOG TEAMS IN COURT FACILITIES

Hero to a Child facility dog teams are permitted on the premises of and inside courthouses and court facilities for all scheduled court events as well as case-related events. The facility dog and handler will be subject to the same security screening measures as the public when entering the courthouse. Facility dogs and handlers are generally not permitted in the secure areas of the courthouse facility unless properly accompanied by a court official. The party requesting to utilize the facility dog must ensure that an appropriate third party/representative is present at all times with the facility dog team while aiding in the testimony of a child, victim, or witness in a courthouse facility. An appropriate third party/representative is a party who has no interest in the case, such as a Guardian Ad Litem volunteer or a State Attorney Victim Advocate. At no time will the dog team be permitted to be alone with any child, victim, or witness without the presence of a non-interested third party or representative of the requesting party.

5. COST OF FACILITY DOG SERVICES

There will be no charge for facility dog services.

6. THERAPY ANIMALS SEPARATE FROM FACILITY DOG SERVICES

Courthouse facility dogs are not therapy animals. This program is specific to courthouse facility dogs and does not include therapy animals. For procedures related to use of therapy animals, please refer to the Circuit's administrative order addressing accommodations.

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

ORIGINAL SIGNED MAY 1, 2025
BY SHAWN CRANE, CHIEF JUDGE

Attachment A: Motion Requesting Use of Courthouse Facility Dog

cc: All Judges
The Honorable Bruce Bartlett, State Attorney
The Honorable Sara Mollo, Public Defender
The Honorable Nikki Alvarez-Sowles, Clerk of Court, Pasco County
The Honorable Ken Burke, Clerk of Court, Pinellas County
Jennifer Parker, Trial Courts Administrator
Michele Emmerman, Deputy Trial Courts Administrator
Bar Associations
Law Library, Pinellas County

IN THE CIRCUIT COURT OF THE SIXTH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT
IN AND FOR _____ COUNTY, FLORIDA

_____ ,

(Petitioner/Plaintiff),

v.

Case No.:
SECTION:

_____ ,

(Respondent/Defendant).

_____ /

MOTION REQUESTING USE OF COURTHOUSE FACILITY DOG

(Petitioner/Plaintiff/Respondent/Defendant) hereby moves this Honorable Court to grant this Motion Requesting Use of Courthouse Facility Dog, and in support thereof states as follows:

1. My name is _____ and my relationship to this case is as follows _____.

2. I am requesting approval from the Court to use the services of the approved courthouse facility dog in accordance with the local administrative order.

3. Specifically, I seek to use the courthouse facility dog for the following:

a. Type of Proceeding: _____

b. Date of Proceeding: _____

c. Time of Proceeding: _____

d. Location of Proceeding: _____

e. Mode of Appearance: _____

f. Name of Presiding Judge: _____

4. The courthouse facility dog is requested in accordance with applicable statute and local administrative order as articulated herein:

[PERSON MAKING REQUEST]
[CONTACT INFORMATION]

[CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE]