

March 21, 2020

To the Members of the Bar,

As you are caring for yourself and your families, know that we are thinking of you. These are unprecedented times. Some of you may be like me, a member of the legal community for over 30 years. Dealing with a critical situation impacting the operation of our courts day to day is a first. I would like to assure you that Chief Carey, Chief Gants and Chief Casey are working day and night to put protocols in place to ensure the ongoing operations of our court.

On a local level, Register Seguin, Chief Probation Officer Babinski and your very devoted staff at the Probate and Family Court, as well as our security team, have put themselves and their families second to ensure the courts remain open and responsive to emergencies. Our AJCMs have worked tirelessly to reschedule cases, triage emergencies and communicate with the bar. The lobby and registry staff will continue to work each day on reduced staffing. The operations of the court will be altered for the time being. Know that all changes being made are done to keep you and the public safe during this crisis. This is an ever-evolving situation. The changes being made have sometimes been minute to minute. We are coordinating between lobby, registry, probation and security. Additionally, lobby staff meets daily to address the ever-changing situation.

We have disseminated the new standing orders and protocols we have put in place to implement the standing orders. The First Justices of each county have worked together to make as many policies as uniform as possible. You may notice differences from county to county. This is primarily due to the specific needs of each county. Each county has a distinct demographic it serves and the volume and type of case, and therefore emergency, differs greatly.

Each day we may see changes being made in the court protocols. Be assured that if changes are being made, they are necessary to meet the challenges this crisis presents. Although I cannot offer you consistency from day to day, I can offer you a commitment to this court, the public, our litigants and to the bar. We are committed to being here every day to address your emergencies. We will continue to update you with any changes. The Probate and Family bar has a great resource in the bench bar committee. Thanks to Attorney Katie O'Malley for getting the word out each day.

I would be remiss if I did not thank the staff and judges of the Probate and Family Court for their commitment and energy at this time. They stepped up in ways you will never know. I admire their dedication. I overuse the word awesome but there is no other way to describe them. They have been awesome.

Thank you for your understanding. You will be affected, and I know you will rise to the occasion. I am honored to be a member of this legal community. You have never let us down. We will try our best not to let you down during this crisis. Keep your families close and safe.

With the utmost respect,

Barbara M. Hyland
First Justice
Hampden Division
Probate and Family Court