

Anna M. Benjamin

Associate Judge
Courtroom J
101 E. Main St.
Urbana, Illinois 61801

Sixth Judicial Circuit
Champaign County

Telephone (217) 384-3715

To: **Litigants in Family Law Cases**

Date: **April 21, 2020**

RE: **FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS DURING THE COVID – 19 CLOSURE**

Although the Courthouse is closed for all but essential operations, there are things divorcing and separating spouses and parents can do in the meantime. Below are a few questions and answers to help during this unprecedented time.

Q: I have a case or document that I have not yet filed, can I go ahead and file it?

A: Yes, the Circuit Clerk’s office is accepting filings electronically, and by regular mail if you are exempt from electronic filing. If you need help finding a form to use, go to www.illinoiscourts.gov/Forms/approved/Circuit.asp for a list of Illinois Supreme Court approved forms, or go to Illinois Legal Aid online at www.illinoislegalaid.org/.

Q: Can I file documents in person at the Courthouse?

A: Only requests for emergency orders of protection (and stalking/no contact orders) may be filed in person at this time.

Q: I need help filing electronically, or I cannot file online because I do not have reliable internet access, what can I do?

A: Go to the Circuit Clerk’s website at www.champaigncircuitclerk.org/forms-and-resources/electronic-filing or contact their office by phone at (217) 384-3725, or by email at cccircuitclerk@co.champaign.il.us. You can mail documents to the Circuit Clerk at 101 East Main Street, Urbana, IL 61801 for filing, *if you are exempt from electronic filing* (requires a separate certificate, which is available on the Illinois Courts website, above). If you have a question about a case scheduled in Courtroom J, contact the Judge’s clerk by phone at (217) 384-3715. We are checking messages daily and will return your call as quickly as possible.

Q: Can I still complete the required parenting education class?

A: Yes. Although in person classes are not being held at this time, you can use an online program instead, such as Children In Between Online at online.divorce-education.com/.

Remember to file your certificate of completion with the Circuit Clerk. 4 hours of instruction are required, and all programs are subject to final Court approval.

Q: Is there a way to mediate parenting time and decision-making right now?

A: Yes, there are court-approved mediators who are helping parents resolve these issues remotely, through phone and video conferencing. Mediation means the parties work with a trained individual to try to come to an agreement. Mediation is required in all cases involving parental responsibilities, unless excused by the Court. The following is a quick list of local mediators using this technology, which will be updated as more information is received:

Jim Linder (217) 377-3317 www.lindermediation.com

Cari Rinker (217) 531-2179 rinckerlaw.com

Scott Lerner (217) 607-2227 www.scottlernerlaw.com

Q: Is meeting for parenting time exchanges allowed under the stay at home order?

A: Yes, you can still travel for parenting time exchanges during the stay at home order. Travel required by law enforcement or court order, including to transport children under a custody agreement, is essential travel according to the Governor's Executive Order No. 8.

Q: I have a hearing that was cancelled, when will it be rescheduled?

A: Some hearings are already being rescheduled, depending on the case type. Most rescheduled hearings will not be held until June at the earliest. If you are representing yourself in a case and no attorney is involved, we have already been sending notices with new court dates. If you are involved in a case with an attorney, the attorney will be sending the new hearing date. We are updating court dates on the Circuit Clerk's website regularly as well.

Q: What if I have an emergency situation?

A: If you are a victim of domestic violence, call 911 immediately. You may also request an emergency order of protection by filing your petition in person at the Courthouse. For other types of emergencies, contact an attorney or the judge's clerk for instructions. You will need to file an emergency petition for Judge Difanis to review before a hearing can be set.

Q: What else is the Court doing to keep the public safe at this time?

A: In addition to working with our justice partners during the closure, we are working to make sure people coming into the Courthouse in the near future are safe. This includes rescheduling cases in a way that will maintain proper social distancing as best as possible.

We recognize that this a frustrating time for many litigants and appreciate your cooperation as we work to keep everyone safe.