



ASSOCIATION OF CLERKS OF THE DISTRICT COURTS OF VIRGINIA

April 7, 2020

Dear District Court Clerks and Deputy Clerks:

Today would have been our Annual Clerks Association Conference and Meeting; however, instead we find ourselves living in unprecedented times whereby the Chief Justice has declared a Judicial Emergency for at least forty-two days, the Governor has issued a “Stay at Home” Order until June 10, 2020, and the Center for Disease Control has recommended wearing masks and gloves at all times. Like many of you, we find ourselves wondering what to do, or how to remedy being “essential” employees while we worry about our families at home.

By now, many of us probably know someone who is infected with COVID-19, or have come in contact with an infected person. We are inundated daily with a deluge of negative information surrounding COVID-19 and the numbers of Virginians, Americans, and citizens of the world who are infected or who have passed; however, we like to believe that each day brings us closer to a viable treatment or cure.

These are trying times for Clerks who are doing their very best to effectively manage their offices during this crisis with limited resources, understaffing challenges, and little collective direction. Additionally, it is difficult to make decisions regarding mission-critical functions without obviating the reality of social distancing and protecting employees. That being said, it is very important to maintain regular communication with your judges and local officials in determining the essential functions of the office and best practices for protecting you and your staff. Continue to look for ways to improve safety procedures within your office and have a plan if someone in your office becomes infected.

Please begin thinking about what will happen when “normal business resumes” and what that will actually entail. There are probably many things that will never return to the way they were *pre*-COVID-19. You may have to look for *even more* innovative ways to serve the public. We recommend starting from “yes” for all ideas, and working backwards from there in tiny increments before “no” is your answer. Maybe “we’ve always done it this way” can finally be retired as an answer to problem solving. Now is your time to shine!

Never have relationships and communication been so important. Many of us rely daily on our Sheriff’s Offices to screen visitors coming into our courthouses and Clerk’s Offices. Take a moment to thank them for their service. Many of us have received hand sanitizer, cleaning supplies, gloves, and masks from our local governments. Thank them for including the judicial branch. And, many of us have had our janitorial providers elevate the level of cleaning over the past weeks; remember them with gratitude.

When all is said and done, and COVID-19 becomes a distant memory, people will remember those who served them during this crisis. You are serving in an essential way, and we thank you. You may never receive a public thank you for all that you’ve done during this, but we see

you. We know what you're doing to serve the public during this time, and your work is not in vain.

Finally, the judicial branch is often referred to as “the weakest branch” of government; however, in the last few weeks our independent and essential nature has been on full display. We cannot close for a very simple reason: we must remain available to serve the public. District courts specifically must remain open to protect society and offer services that cannot be provided by any other agency or institution. It is a privilege and an honor to be a judicial branch employee, and during this time of crisis, we must be resolute and exhibit servant leadership to our employees, our communities, and to one another. Now is not the time to lament that we must come to work, but to *be proud* that we must come to work.

If you need some encouragement, please know that we are all “making this up as we go.” There could be ten thousand plans for how to act in an emergency, but those are only a guide – until March 16, 2020, we had no idea how to act during a pandemic. There will be mistakes and missteps along the way, but instead of fretting over them, use them as a learning experience and forgive yourself. We would never get past this if our Chief Justice and Governor did not err on the side of caution, so please err on the side of grace and mercy with yourself and your staff and move on from mistakes you may have made during this crisis. We are all in this together, and if you need any assistance or help, please rely on your fellow Clerks during this time. Trust us – only another court administrator will ever understand what you are going through pre-, during, and post-COVID-19.

Two very important and encouraging quotes that have been meaningful reminders to us over the years are pasted below. We hope you will find some encouragement by reading them. Take good care of yourselves during the next several weeks, and thank you for all that you are doing during this challenging time. Get plenty of rest, eat well, take time for exercise, and by all means, wash your hands!

With kind regards,



Rick Kahl,
President



Laura Griffin,
President-Elect



Terri Rea,
Past-President

“I slept and dreamt that life was joy. I awoke and saw that life was service. I acted and behold, service was joy.”

—Rabindranath Tagore

“...[t]he ordinary administration of criminal and civil justice... contributes, more than any other circumstance, to impressing upon the minds of the people affection, esteem, and reverence towards the government.”

—Alexander Hamilton, New York Delegate, *The Federalist No. 17*