

# Florida Governor Announces Updates Concerning COVID-19 Pandemic

By Robert D. Pritt & Sherri Warner

On Monday, Florida Governor Ron DeSantis announced the following updates concerning the COVID-19 pandemic in Florida.

## Courts

Chief Justice Charles Canady issued an order Monday extending the suspension of criminal and civil jury trials, jury selection and grand jury proceedings until May 29, 2020. The circuit and county courts have been told to continue “essential court proceedings,” including arraignments, bail hearings and juvenile-delinquency detention hearings. According to the order, “No proceedings or other court events other than essential proceedings and proceedings critical to the state of emergency or the public health emergency shall be conducted through in-person hearings.” All other types of proceedings must be rescheduled unless they can be conducted using technology or teleconferencing. On the federal side the 11th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals is hearing arguments remotely.

## Unemployment

The Florida Reemployment Assistance Program, and the man overseeing the program, are under fire as they continue to try to process the record number of claims being filed by displaced Florida workers. Governor DeSantis held a press conference Monday to detail changes being made including the fact that the computer system is being enhanced and additional staff is being trained to hire the influx of claims. Members of the legislature are calling for investigations into the computer system and for Economic Opportunity Executive Director Ken Lawson to resign amidst the problems. A part of the solution is to shift employees from other state agencies to assist in the intake and processing of claims. Given the current challenges the state is considering making benefits retroactive to the day an employee lost their job.

## Hospitals

Hospitals in the state of Florida are facing significant budgetary challenges as people avoid their facilities for routine care and the facilities have stopped performing elective procedures. This has resulted in several facilities laying off staff and requesting that the state increase their Medicaid reimbursement for caring for obstetric patients during the crisis. Providing the care is more expensive as hospitals have to take additional safety precautions which come with added expense. The state is slated to receive an additional \$1.6 billion in Medicaid funding from the federal government because of recent bills passed by Congress. This increase will free up about \$93 million in state dollars. The safety net hospitals are asking that somewhere between \$51 - \$69 million of that savings be designated for them to stabilize their budgets.

The state continues to face increases in COVID-19 patients, particularly in both nursing homes and the state’s prison system. We will continue to provide updates on state action as we receive them. If you have questions please reach out to any of the listed Roetzel attorneys.

### Lewis Adkins, Jr.

Practice Group Manager  
Public Law, Regulatory and Finance  
216.615.4842 | [ladkins@ralaw.com](mailto:ladkins@ralaw.com)

### James D. Fox

239.649.2705 | [jfox@ralaw.com](mailto:jfox@ralaw.com)

**Beverly Grady**  
239.338.4207 | [bgrady@ralaw.com](mailto:bgrady@ralaw.com)

**Sherri Warner**  
614.723.2110 | [swarner@ralaw.com](mailto:swarner@ralaw.com)

**Robert D. Pritt**  
239.649.2714 | [rpritt@ralaw.com](mailto:rpritt@ralaw.com)

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