

NOTICE TO THE BAR

April 24, 2020

Last Thursday, April 16th, 2020, I participated in a Zoom Bench-Bar Meeting with your President, Joseph Maurice, Executive Director, Frank O'Marra, and the Chairs of your Civil, Family, Chancery, Criminal and Municipal Practice Committees.

My goal was to provide information about the new way we are doing the court's business during the COVID-19 pandemic. During the meeting, I listened intently to the concerns of the Bergen Bar and am hopeful that I allayed some fears. I wanted to reinforce that most court proceedings continue to be conducted remotely using video and/or phone options.

Just this morning, our Chief Justice issued a new Omnibus Order restating the judiciary's commitment "to supporting court operations in a virtual format to the greatest extent possible, subject to constitutional considerations and the limitations of our finite resources." The Order speaks for itself, but provides that no civil or criminal jury trials will be conducted until further notice, that grand juries are suspended through May 31, 2020, as are Landlord/Tenant calendars and lockouts. The Order provides for calculation of excludable time in criminal proceedings and extension of civil discovery deadlines. It provides for the resumption of civil arbitrations and matrimonial ESPs on April 27, 2020 by video or telephone conference. It also provides for the resumption of Municipal Court proceedings in a virtual (video or phone) format on May 11, 2020.

With the cooperation our of Surrogate, Michael Dressler, Bergen is prepared to remotely complete applications for probate and to continue the work of adjudications of incapacity and appointment of permanent guardians for one of our most vulnerable populations. This is particularly important here in Bergen County where the coronavirus has continued to increase exponentially with our death rate exceeding any other county in our State.

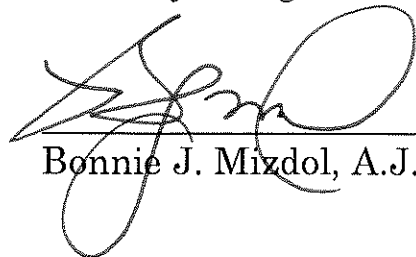
As for the courthouse, we have nineteen (19) courtrooms up and running with remote capabilities. Each division has been assigned specific courtrooms for use by the judges in that particular division and each division internally coordinates use among its judges.

The county hired an additional outside cleaning company who has been coming to the courthouse every evening for the past two (2) and on Saturdays. This outside cleaning crew is wiping down all surfaces in each office and courtroom and then completing a fogging sanitization.

As an added level of protection, the county has purchased thermal scanners that will be installed at each entrance of our buildings. The thermal scanner identifies people who are running a high temperature. Those persons running a high temperature will not be admitted into the building. I anticipate that these thermal scanners will arrive and be installed within the week. The equipment resembles two iPads on tripods. You step up to the first ipad and it takes your temperature. The second ipad, displaying the temperature scan, will be monitored by sheriff's staff. A copy of the signage that will be displayed at all entrances is attached.

Earlier today, I had the privilege of swearing in the Bergen Bar Association's new slate of officers and trustees, albeit by Zoom. I am delighted to report that I was joined by the Hon. Brian R. Martinotti, of the United States District Court, who never forgets his Bergen roots. Judge Martinotti and I both thanked your new officers and trustees in advance for the countless hours they will devote to your membership as we continue to navigate the COVID-19 pandemic. They serve with a sense of responsibility to the legal system, which strives, however imperfectly in today's times, to provide justice for all. I am confident that their strength will see your membership through this crisis in the only way Bergen knows how – Bergen Strong!

My wishes for everyone's continued safety and good health.



Bonnie J. Mizdol, A.J.S.C.