

**IN THE FAMILY JUSTICE COURTS OF THE REPUBLIC OF SINGAPORE**

**REGISTRAR'S CIRCULAR NO. 2 OF 2020**

**UPDATES ON MEASURES RELATING TO COVID-19 (CORONAVIRUS DISEASE 2019) FROM 7 APRIL 2020 TO 4 MAY 2020**

In view of the press release issued on 3 April 2020 by the Ministry of Health on “Circuit Breaker to Minimise Further Spread of COVID-19”, every matter<sup>1</sup> scheduled for hearing in the Family Justice Courts (“FJC”) from 7 April 2020 to 4 May 2020 (the “Relevant Period”) will be adjourned to a date to be fixed, unless the matter is assessed to be essential and urgent. The matters which may be considered to be essential and urgent are set out in paragraph 1 of **Schedule 1**.

2 The Registry will inform parties by 6 April 2020, 5pm if their matters scheduled from 7 April 2020 to 9 April 2020 will be adjourned. For matters scheduled on or after 13 April 2020 to the last day of the Relevant Period (inclusive), parties will be notified as soon as possible and in any event, no later than three working days from the scheduled hearing date if the hearing will be adjourned. For the avoidance of doubt, the Court may continue to deliver judgments during the Relevant Period.

3 Any hearing conducted during the Relevant Period will be conducted through electronic means of communication, unless otherwise directed by the Court. Parties are to comply with all safe distancing and other applicable measures in the preparation, presentation and conduct of hearings during the Relevant Period.

4 Attendance before the Duty Judicial Officer in relation to matters falling within paragraph 1 of Schedule 1 will be by video conferencing. The directions in paragraph 6 of Schedule 1 of Registrar’s Circular No 1 of 2020<sup>2</sup> which apply to counsel shall apply to litigants-in-person (“LIPs”) as well. Any request for the urgent hearing of any matter which does not fall within paragraph 1 of Schedule 1 must be accompanied by reasons explaining

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<sup>1</sup> This includes appeals, trials, applications (interlocutory or otherwise), case management conferences, pre-trial conferences and mediations.

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.familyjusticecourts.gov.sg/docs/default-source/legislation/registrar-circulars/rc\\_2020\\_1\\_inforonmeasuresrelatingtocovid19.pdf](https://www.familyjusticecourts.gov.sg/docs/default-source/legislation/registrar-circulars/rc_2020_1_inforonmeasuresrelatingtocovid19.pdf)

why the matter is essential and urgent. In making such a request, parties should note the following:

- (a) In determining whether a matter is essential and urgent, the Court will have regard to, among other things, whether the determination of the outcome of the matter is time sensitive, and whether there is any legal requirement for the matter to be heard within any timeframe;
- (b) A matter is not essential and urgent merely because it is convenient for the parties to have the matter heard early or as scheduled; and
- (c) Parties should not make the request if the preparation, presentation and conduct of the hearing will entail parties breaching safe distancing measures (e.g. if lawyers will have to come into close physical proximity with one another, their staff or clients). Parties will be required to satisfy the Court that measures are in place to avoid this.

The Court may, in its discretion, grant a request for urgent hearing if the matter is assessed by the Court to be essential and urgent.

5 Parties may also email the FJC Registry at [fjcourts\\_maintpos@fjcourts.gov.sg](mailto:fjcourts_maintpos@fjcourts.gov.sg) for maintenance matters and [fjcourts\\_family\\_registry@fjcourts.gov.sg](mailto:fjcourts_family_registry@fjcourts.gov.sg) for all other matters on any urgent query with the email subject stating the relevant details such as, “[Urgent Query][Case Number][Case Name]”, as may be applicable.

6 With effect from 7 April 2020 until further notice, where a hearing is conducted by means of video conferencing or telephone conferencing using a remote communication technology approved by the Chief Justice or authorised by the Court, all recordings made of the hearing which have been authorised by the Court using such remote communication technology will constitute the official record of hearing for the purposes of Rule 611 of the Family Justice Rules.

7 The FJC Registry counters and other administrative court services will continue to operate during the Relevant Period to provide court services for essential and urgent matters as set out in paragraph 1 of **Schedule 1**. During the Relevant Period, counter services in relation to the filing of Magistrate’s Complaints will remain available, while verification of documents such as original wills will be suspended. All other counter services will be available by remote

means. Parties may email [fjcourts\\_family\\_registry@fjcourts.gov.sg](mailto:fjcourts_family_registry@fjcourts.gov.sg) for enquiries. Parties and their representatives should not visit the Court premises during the Relevant Period to tender documents in hard copy or in any media storage devices, including CD-ROMs. Any requirement to tender to the Court any hard copies of documents pursuant to the Family Justice Rules, the FJC Practice Directions or the Court's directions shall, if the documents are tendered during the Relevant Period, be complied with by electronically filing or submitting the soft copies within the applicable timelines. The Court may still issue directions for hard copies of the aforesaid to be tendered after the Relevant Period. For the avoidance of doubt, parties may continue to file documents electronically through the eLitigation system and send by AR registered post soft copy documents contained in CD-ROMs (as may be applicable) to the Court during the Relevant Period.

8 For family violence and maintenance matters under Part VII and Part VIII of the Women's Charter (Cap 353, 2009 Rev Ed), applicants are strongly encouraged to reserve an appointment slot using iFAMS before attending in person at the FJC to file their complaint. Where affidavit or documentary evidence needs to be tendered, it shall be deposited in a physical drop box at the entrance of FJC's premises at 3 Havelock Square, in lieu of tendering to the Court in person.

9 In relation to timelines for compliance under the Family Justice Rules or the FJC Practice Directions or pursuant to the Court's directions, the following shall apply:

- (a) Where matters scheduled for hearing during the Relevant Period are adjourned, parties may write in to the Court to request an extension of time; and
- (b) For all other matters, the applicable timelines will continue to apply but parties may write in to the Court to request an extension of time, if necessary.

10 All matters scheduled for hearing after the Relevant Period will continue as scheduled, unless otherwise directed by the Court. We will continue to monitor the situation. All court users and visitors are advised to refer to the FJC website at <https://www.familyjusticecourts.gov.sg> for the latest information and updates.

Dated this 5<sup>th</sup> day of April 2020.



KENNETH YAP YEW CHOH  
REGISTRAR  
FAMILY JUSTICE COURTS

## Schedule 1

During the Relevant Period, the FJC will hear only urgent and essential matters. In general, these comprise matters which are **time sensitive**, constitute a **threat to life and liberty** and/or involve **urgent needs of the family**. These matters, as well as matters before the Duty Judicial Officer, will be conducted by video conferencing to the maximum extent possible, including for cases involving litigants-in-person (“LIPs”). Where necessary, interpretation services will be provided by video conferencing. All other matters which are not urgent and essential will be adjourned for at least 4 weeks.

2 Subject to paragraph 1 of this Schedule, the following matters shall be adjourned for at least 4 weeks:

- (a) Matters which are heard by the **High Court (Family Division)**;
- (b) **Probate and adoption matters and matters under the Mental Capacity Act (Cap 177A, 2010 Rev Ed) (“MCA”)** unless the Court is satisfied that the matter is urgent (for example, applications for access to emergency funds<sup>3</sup> under the MCA will continue to be heard, with attendance of counsel or parties to be dispensed with where practicable); and
- (c) **All originating summonses (for matters other than those mentioned in paragraph 2(b) of this Schedule) and divorces and their related interlocutory applications as well as ancillary matters (including mediation)** save for child abduction cases where urgent orders are required.

3 For proceedings in the **Youth Court**:

- (a) Youth Arrest cases will be adjourned for at least 4 weeks unless the subject is in remand (in which case the proceedings will be conducted by video conferencing) or if the subject would otherwise be prejudiced as a result of an adjournment.
- (b) Child Protection cases where the safety of the child is at risk will proceed and hearings will generally be conducted by video conferencing. The child’s

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<sup>3</sup> [https://www.familyjusticecourts.gov.sg/docs/default-source/default-document-library/media-release\\_fjc-dbs-collaboration-for-emergency-funding\\_31-jan-2020.pdf](https://www.familyjusticecourts.gov.sg/docs/default-source/default-document-library/media-release_fjc-dbs-collaboration-for-emergency-funding_31-jan-2020.pdf)

attendance at the hearing will be dispensed with and if the child's parents consent, officers of the Ministry of Social and Family Development will attend hearings on the behalf of parents by video conferencing.

- (c) Beyond Parental Control cases will be adjourned for at least 4 weeks save in cases where the youth is in remand.

4 For **family violence proceedings** (including mentions and hearings) under Part VII of the Women's Charter (Cap 353, 2009 Rev Ed):

- (a) Proceedings will be adjourned for at least 4 weeks and where an expedited order ("EO") has been granted, the EO will be extended without the need for an application.
- (b) Matters involving a higher risk of imminent danger will continue to be heard. For such cases, hearings will be conducted by video conferencing as far as possible.
- (c) Proceedings consequential to Part VII proceedings such as reviews for Mandatory Counselling Orders and show cause hearings for bailors will be adjourned for at least 4 weeks.

5 For **maintenance proceedings** (including mentions and hearings) under Part VIII of the Women's Charter (Cap 353, 2009 Rev Ed):

- (a) The Court will continue to hear applications where the Court is satisfied that an urgent hearing is necessary due to immediate financial needs on the part of the applicant and/or his/her dependants.
- (b) Mediation between parties referred to in paragraph 5(a) of this Schedule will be conducted by video conferencing where practicable.
- (c) Mentions will be conducted by video conferencing where practicable.
- (d) For orders requiring physical attendance to show proof of monthly payment towards maintenance or arrears, this will generally be dispensed with and parties can show payment remotely by emailing [fjcourts\\_maintpos@fjcourts.gov.sg](mailto:fjcourts_maintpos@fjcourts.gov.sg).

- (e) Proceedings consequential to Part VIII proceedings such as show cause hearings for bailors will be adjourned for at least 4 weeks.

6 Where applicable, paragraph 4 of this Schedule shall apply to applications for protection orders under the **Vulnerable Adults Act 2018** (Act No 27 of 2018) (“VAA”). Other hearings under the VAA will generally be adjourned unless the Court is satisfied that an urgent hearing is necessary.

7 **Counselling** for divorce/guardianship matters or family violence proceedings will continue as they do not require attendance in Court or preparatory work by parties and will generally be provided by telephone conferencing or video conferencing. The Court may also, taking into account the urgency of the case and the welfare and vulnerability of the child, conduct child interviews and/or custody/access evaluation by video conferencing.