



Nadia K. Daughtrey

DeSOTO COUNTY CLERK OF THE CIRCUIT COURT

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To All Residents of DeSoto County:

The ripple effects of COVID-19 have unfortunately reached the doors of our office. My office has remained open and committed to serving you via phone and email although the courthouse has remained closed to public entry since March 20, 2020. Under the order issued by the Supreme Court of Florida, we remain in Phase 1, which mandates the closures of all justice centers throughout the state. This pandemic has created a major challenge for Clerks of the Court across the State of Florida, with a 60 million dollar reduction in operating funds. In DeSoto County, this translates into a 13.3% annual reduction in our operating budget. Because we are in the 4th quarter of our fiscal year, and the reduction was not actually spread out throughout the year, this is equal to a 53.3% reduction for this quarter.

This massive cut will affect my ability to serve the courts and you, the resident, which is counter to my commitment to efficiently provide the essential services that promote public safety in our county. As Clerk's offices across the state make plans for the implementation of extreme cost-saving measures, each office must take into account their local circumstances. This is what it means for DeSoto County:

- Office Closures

We will be closed to the public on the following dates:

Friday, July 10th

Monday, July 13th

Tuesday, July 14th

Friday, July 17th

Friday, July 24th

Monday, July 27th

Tuesday, July 28th

Friday, July 31st

Currently our office is open by phone, email, fax, or we can receive customers at the front door. On the dates listed above there will be no staff available for regular services or phone calls. Please note that these closures are for the Clerk's Office ONLY. **If you are scheduled to appear for Injunction court, your appearance is still mandatory.** The bailiffs will direct you accordingly.

- Furlough of Staff

All deputy clerks are furloughed 10 days for the month of July. This is unpaid leave and they are unable to use paid time off to compensate for the unpaid days. This has had a tremendous impact on my employees and their families. This is not a decision that was made lightly, but as 90% of the operating budget comprises staff salaries and benefits, there is no other remedy to absorb a cut of this magnitude.

By law, the only way for Clerk of Court offices to avoid such cuts to employees and services is through some type of emergency funding by the Governor or by the legislature when members convene. Florida Court Clerks & Comptrollers, the statewide association of Clerks of the Circuit Court, is working closely with the Governor's Office on finding ways to help address this funding crisis. I want those who rely on our services to understand the major dilemma we face. I have the strongest commitment to provide trusted, quality services. At the same time, due to efforts to minimize the spread of COVID-19 mitigation statewide and the way our operations are funded, I must resort to extreme cost-reducing measures that will impact county residents.

I realize the impact and inconvenience the closure of my office will cause many people. Please understand every effort has been made to avoid any closures. I have taken great pride in remaining open throughout this pandemic and it pains me to resort to closing my doors due to budget cuts that are beyond my control. After 20 years of service to DeSoto County I remain committed to you, the residents, and our justice partners. I am optimistic this is a very temporary setback for my office and Clerk's offices across the state. As this is a very fluid situation, I will keep you informed of any updates we receive from the Governor's Office, the Florida Court Clerks and Comptroller's Association, and the Supreme Court of Florida. I ask that you keep my staff in your thoughts and prayers during this trying time.

Respectfully,



Nadia K. Daughtrey, Clerk of Courts