



CHERYL SUANN WILLIAMS
NADIA CONTE
FARNAZ MIRSHAHI

TRICIA ALCENDOR
KIRAN CHOOTI

UPDATE

October 27, 2020

Due to the public health recommendations for COVID-19 in Ontario, we have implemented the following social distancing policy until further notice:

- A non-medical mask/facial-covering is mandatory when entering our office;
- We welcome collaboration and meetings using telephone and [video conferencing](#) only. We suggest that a suitable time to speak be arranged in advance
- For written communication and delivery of documents, we ask that this be done solely by email. Faxes will not be reviewed or answered; and
- We request a mutual consent for service of Court documents by email, if necessary.

Thank you for your co-operation. We hope that you and your family remain safe and healthy.

March 17, 2020

URGENT

DEAR VALUED CLIENT:

By now you would have heard that the world is experiencing a pandemic of epic proportions known as the COVID-19 (coronavirus) and of the joint responsibility of all persons in keeping ourselves and each other safe. From the earliest reports, your team at Williams Family Lawyers began to proactively monitor developments and assess potential impacts to our staff and our clients. As the situation appears to be evolving rather quickly and unpredictably, our top priority is our employees, clients and greater

community at large and we have undertaken several actions to ensure their health and safety as well as ensuring the continued availability of our services.

IMPORTANCE NOTICE FROM THE ONTARIO AND SUPERIOR COURTS OF JUSTICE

The Ontario Superior Court of Justice and Ontario Court of Justice have recently announced that **effective today, March 17, 2020**, all regular operations will be suspended until further notice and only the most urgent matters will be heard during this emergency period. However, to the best of our knowledge and belief, **there will be a mandatory closure until June 1, 2020**. As such, all currently scheduled family law Court matters will be adjourned and rescheduled once the Court resumes regular operations unless the Court deems otherwise. In addition, all in-person meetings will be cancelled and will be dealt with on an individual basis. Pursuant to the Superior Court of Justice website at ontariocourts.ca, only urgent family law events as determined by the presiding justice, or events that are required to be heard by statute will be heard during this emergency period, including:

- a. requests for urgent relief relating to the safety of a child or parent (e.g., a restraining order, other restrictions on contact between the parties or a party and a child, or exclusive possession of the home);
- b. urgent issues that must be determined relating to the well-being of a child including essential medical decisions or issues relating to the wrongful removal or retention of a child;
- c. dire issues regarding the parties' financial circumstances including for example the need for a non-depletion order; and
- d. in a child protection case, all urgent or statutorily mandated events including the initial hearing after a child has been brought to a place of safety, and any other urgent motions or hearings.

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The Court has discretion to decline to schedule for immediate hearing any particular matter described in the above list, if appropriate.

...



A hearing may be conducted in writing, by teleconference or videoconference, unless the Court determines that an in-person hearing is necessary. If an in-person hearing is needed, coordination will occur between the Ministry of the Attorney General, the trial coordinator and the parties/counsel to find a safe and appropriate physical facility for the hearing.

Regardless of the Court closures, it is mandatory that deadlines for the exchange of disclosure and documents between lawyers and/or parties and filings in the Court Office will remain. Existing Court Orders of every kind should still be complied with and any payments for child or spousal support should be kept up to date regardless of whether the Family Responsibility Office may eventually close.

Therefore, if you have a matter that is scheduled for Court during this emergency time including but not limited to a Trial commencing in the May 18, 2020 Trial sittings, you can assume that it will be adjourned unless we advise you otherwise. We understand that such delays may cause hardship to you and we will attempt to find other available ways of resolving your matter outside of the Court process.

WHAT WE ARE DOING TO DECREASE THE SPREAD OF COVID-19

We are actively monitoring this situation and government reports and keeping our clients updated on any changes that will impact their files and Court proceedings.

We recognize that everyone is anxious about their matter and we are taking every available measure to continue to provide the services and support that you need. As of today, we are implementing work from home measures for some or all of our team as the situation changes to ensure continuity and availability of the support and service that you may need. Rest assured, we will continue answering phones, responding to emails and communicating with opposing counsel, when necessary, however there may be some delay in doing so from time to time. We have heard from other family law firms that they may also be reducing their staffing and regular practices and therefore, we ask for your cooperation and understanding during this difficult time.

Accordingly, we will:

- Ensure that our waiting areas and public areas are sanitized on a daily basis;

- Reduce the number of visitors to the office and eliminate face-to-face meetings when a telephone call or video conferencing will suffice;
- If it becomes necessary to have a face-to-face meeting with a visitor,
 - first utilize a health questionnaire to confirm any recent travel outside Canada or signs of symptoms of COVID-19;
 - wash our hands thoroughly with soap and water prior to greeting the visitor; and
 - avoid shaking hands with the visitor;
- Use email for regular communication to avoid the exchange of paper;
- Use Dropbox or a similar program for the exchanging large files;
- Utilize a mail drop box for files and deliveries outside of the internal office door; and
- Wipe any incoming papers, documents, etc. into our office with sanitizer, prior to reviewing them.

WHAT YOU CAN DO TO DECREASE THE SPREAD OF COVID-19

We are asking our clients and others to:

- Use email, phone or video conferencing to communicate with lawyers and team members;
- Only attend our office for a pre-scheduled meeting;
- In the event that they do have to come to the office, wash their hands upon arrival at the office and use the hand sanitizer that has always been set up in our reception area;



- Refrain from shaking hands with our lawyers and team members. This is not personal, it's a recommended safety precaution by the World Health Organization;
- In the event that it is necessary for visitors to sign documents, to please arrive at our office with their own black or blue pen which they will take with them thereafter;
- Scan, email or fax any documents they need to submit. If they must drop off a hard copy of a document, utilize the mail drop box outside of our internal office door; and
- Make payments preferably via Interac. If necessary to pay by credit card, such payments can be processed over the phone during business hours.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding the above, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Thank you in advance for your co-operation and understanding during this unusual time. We wish you and your family the best of health, safety and peace.

Yours truly,
WILLIAMS FAMILY LAWYERS

Cheryl Suann Williams
CSW:lc