

SALINE COUNTY OFFICIALS REQUEST FAMILIES TAKE FIRM ACTION ON SOCIAL DISTANCING BY CANCELING VACATION PLANS AND KEEPING CHILDREN AND TEENS AT HOME

March 20, 2020—Pursuant to the recommendations of the White House and the CDC regarding the powerful value of social distancing in containing the COVID-19 outbreak, Saline County Judge Jeff Arey, Benton Mayor Tom Farmer, and Circuit Judge Robert Herzfeld are strongly recommending that Saline County parents and guardians take firm common sense measures to voluntarily limit and when possible eliminate person-to-person social interactions between their family members and others not in their household.

“We applaud the many folks who have shown tremendous initiative and creativity in social distancing. Many parents are already taking these or similar precautions, but as public servants we believe we have a responsibility to encourage these robust measures,” said Mayor Farmer, **“The more we can slow the spread—the safer we all are, the more time we’re buying to develop treatments and possible cures, and the sooner we can all get back to normal.”**

Judge Arey explained the first of the two provisions: “We understand that many families may have plans to travel for Spring Break or other purposes in the next several weeks. We are asking everyone to cancel their travel plans or postpone them until the crisis is over. Most of the new COVID-19 cases in Arkansas are travel-related. These are incredibly difficult decisions,” Judge Arey said. **“My daughter lives in Arizona and is scheduled to get married there in two weeks. My family has been absolutely devastated that we will not be able to be a part of her wedding.** But no matter how hard that decision is, it is the right call. We will participate by Facetime and phone and know that on the other side of this—we will be together again to celebrate. **It’s important that everyone understand that we’re not asking anyone to do more than we’re willing to do ourselves.”**

Judge Herzfeld, who presides over juvenile court, guardianships, and has two teenaged sons presented the second provision. “In the interest of their extended family and the community as a whole, **parents and guardians should require their children—particularly their teenagers who have vehicles—to stay at home at all times rather than spending “in person” time with other young people who may already be contagious but not demonstrating symptoms.** The difficult—and correct—decision to close schools is a wasted effort if kids from different households are still hanging out together—even in small groups or one-on-one.”

Herzfeld explained, **“It broke my heart to tell my 17-year-old-son he couldn’t leave the house to go visit someone he cares about deeply and whose family we trust absolutely—but in times of crisis, we adults have to make tough decisions and stand by them for the good of our families and our community.”**

These recommendations are more specific and targeted than you may have heard before, but they are merely applying common sense to the science described by the CDC. They are designed to keep everyone safer and to limit community exposure to COVID-19 during these

unusual times. These are not mandates, but the more everyone follows these recommendations, the less necessary it will be to take additional governmental action to preserve the health and safety of our communities.

Mayor Farmer said in conclusion, “We are aware that there will be significant challenges—economic, emotional, and otherwise to carrying out these guidelines. We ask everyone to use their very best judgment as we move forward together to save lives. We are praying for all of you, and we ask that you pray for us.”