

# THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON THE FREE STATE BAR AND BENCH

Wondering how to capture the essence of the impact of Covid-19 on the Free State Bar whilst driving to chambers, I notice that the town appears to be in a lull, the same feeling one gets when driving through town during a holiday. The hustle and bustle is missing.

Covid-19 brought with it many unprecedented challenges. Its inevitable counterpart is uncertainty and doubt. What we took for granted pre-Covid is no longer assured. The effect of the pandemic has been both far-reaching and significant. It has resulted in the Bar faced with various novel, unprecedented and unexpected issues. It is impossible to deal with all the aspects of the impact of Covid-19 in this short piece.

As everywhere, in the Free State, we were severely restricted during Alert Levels 5 and 4. Court process could only be issued in limited circumstances. Most of our members did not receive any payment nor new instructions during Alert Level 5, and Alert Level 4 did not yield much relief.


Although Alert Level 3 has secured a substantial unlocking of the legal profession in the province, time will tell what the economic repercussions of the lockdown are for the Bar. It is still not business as usual.

The members of the Bar have however shown remarkable courage and resilience during this time. Members have adapted to changing needs at a moment's notice.

The announcement of the lockdown necessitated that the Bar Council be proactive to ensure that it could serve and protect its members' interests. Financial constraints as result of the lockdown and economic impact on the society at large remains the most prominent concern (and threat) to the Bar. Covid-19 requires us to re-prioritise and critically evaluate our practices. New methods must be found, to ensure that our members can survive financially and conduct sustainable practices.

If approached in a positive and constructive manner, this re-evaluation could serve our Bar and members well into the future.

Currently, in Alert Level 3, the Free State Bench is again attending to matters and depending on the specific needs or risks to those involved, audio-visual conferences are used interchangeably with appearances in court. Some of the judges, like some of our members, fall into the higher risk category and need to be accommodated.

In the words of Martin Luther King Jnr: "The ultimate measure of a man [and woman] is not where he [she] stands in the moments of comfort, but where he [she] stands at times of challenge and controversy." 

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