

OPEN NINTH

CONVERSATIONS BEYOND THE COURTROOM

OPERATION GREEN LIGHT

REGAINING YOUR DRIVING RIGHTS

FEATURING CLERK TIFFANY MOORE RUSSELL

EPISODE 148

HOSTED BY: LISA T. MUNYON

(Music)

NARRATOR: Welcome to another episode of “Open Ninth: Conversations Beyond the Courtroom” in the Ninth Judicial Circuit Court of Florida.

And now here’s your host, Chief Judge Lisa Munyon.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Hello, and welcome to Open Ninth. Today I’m with Orange County Clerk of Courts Tiffany Moore Russell to talk about her offices’ upcoming initiative, Operation Green Light, which is a program that aims to get Orange County residents with outstanding tickets and fines back in the driver’s seat. I’m thrilled to have you in the studio here today, Clerk Russell.

CLERK RUSSELL: Thank you, Judge Munyon for having us and this is a great topic to share with those who are listening.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Well, I always enjoy talking to our wonderful Orange County Clerks.

CLERK RUSSELL: Thank you. You’re so kind.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Thank you for being with me. So tell me about Operation Green Light. What is it?

CLERK RUSSELL: So Operation Green Light is actually a program that’s built in our Florida Statutes. So the Florida Legislature, about three or four years ago directed all clerks throughout the state to have an Operation Green Light -- we all it OGL -- throughout the state at least once a year. So this is going to happen in 67 counties in the state of Florida. And so what we’ve done as an association for all clerks is to utilize all of our resources and have it around the

same time. So that's let's say a citizen owed in Seminole or Osceola, they knew we were all doing it around the same time, they could benefit from the same access even if they are a citizen of Orange County.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: So I know you've been doing it for several years.

CLERK RUSSELL: Yes.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: How many people have you helped?

CLERK RUSSELL: So typically during that time frame, which is usually about a week, it's about a thousand citizens that we help. Within that thousand, they could have one or two cases. They could have multiple cases so as far as individuals, we usually range about a thousand during that program.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Well, I know if I had a ticket I could go pay that ticket anytime. I don't have to wait for an Operation Green Light. But why is it an advantage to do it now during Operation Green Light?

CLERK RUSSELL: So the main advantage is really for people who owe the collection agency. We're going to bring them from the collection agency so they save on that 25 percent collection agency fee. So they're going to get a savings right now. So that's one of the benefits of participating now. Also, if you – say you once had your license and re-suspended, this allows you to get back in good graces. So this is a really benefit for someone who owes a large amount of money. They can get a payment plan and still get their license back. So you're not obligated to pay your entire balance off, but you can get back in right standing to be driving correctly in the state of Florida.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: So who's eligible for this program?

CLERK RUSSELL: Mostly everyone is eligible. I will say it's important that they reach out of the office to confirm because there are some, you know, a few circumstances like if you have a child – if you are suspended because of child support, right, but if it's a traffic or criminal fine, most of those individuals are eligible.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: And if they want to contact your office and take advantage of this program, do they need to bring anything with them?

CLERK RUSSELL: They don't need to bring anything with them. Of course, their ID. It will be helpful if they knew their case number. We'll look that up for them as well. They can also look that up online if they need to research to see what their balance is. But all we really need is some type of ID to make sure that's the person we are helping and that's their case.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: So where do they need to go if they want to participate?

CLERK RUSSELL: So first I will tell you they have to come to the downtown courthouse which is on Orange Avenue to the 4th floor, is where they should come because this allows them to come in, talk to someone who can talk through what they can afford to pay. And so it would be a one on one conversation. So physically coming to the courthouse, 425 North Orange Avenue on the 4th floor in our downtown courthouse.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Now, if someone owes a lot of money, is there a possibility for them to work out some sort of payment plan so that they can maybe get their driver's license back?

CLERK RUSSELL: Absolutely. Which is another benefit for Operation Green Light. So what the parameters are for this program is if this is your first time, you have to put an initial deposit down of \$100 because we believe it's important that they have a skin in the game, that they're committed to this. And then the rest of their balance owed will then be placed on a payment, as minimum as \$25.00 a month. But they do try to talk to them to see what they can afford to pay because we want them to be successful. Now, if they are – they have once been on a payment plan and didn't meet it and it was re-suspended, they are required to put a \$250.00 deposit down to get back into a renewed payment plan. But if they have a large balance, we will let them put down a deposit and then put the balance on a payment plan. And they will also get their D6 clearance because the incentive is, we're going to give you your license back, but it will get suspended again should you default on your payments.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: So they don't have to pay the entire balance off to get the D6 clearance that they would take to the Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles?

CLERK RUSSELL: They do not. That was the legislative intent from the creation of Operation Green Light. The Legislature wanted more citizens legally driving and getting people back their driver's licenses so they don't have to pay the balance but they will have to pay something to get on that payment plan.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: All right. And I know the clerk's office doesn't give people their driver's licenses?

CLERK RUSSELL: Correct.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: What do you give them?

CLERK RUSSELL: So what we do – so what we do is we give them their D6 clearance where we are now alerting the DMV that they have met their obligation or what was required on our end and now you can move forward with the Department of Motor Vehicles to – because they do have a \$60.00 fee, a reinstatement fee, to participate, what you have to do with them to get the actual license back.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: All right. Yeah, I don't want anybody to think that the Clerk is going to take their picture and hand them a license.

CLERK RUSSELL: No, we're not.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Okay, great. So how long does the process take? How long does it take in your office? And when they leave your office, how long does it take for them to get their driver's license back?

CLERK RUSSELL: So the goal is when they leave our office, they have gotten their D6 clearance. So I think it's important to share with those who are listening, is to look up on our website to see now what you think you owe so you can start thinking through what you can pay. So when you come to speak with us you have a plan in mind. So when they leave us, the goal is for them to leave that day with their D6 clearance. Now, at that point, it could be that same day if they're able to get over to the DMV office to get their license back. Now, if they owe a significant amount to them that would be the relationship between them and the Department of Motor Vehicles.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: All right. And I know that you have lots of awesome deputy clerks and that you'll have a lot of people working. How long should people set aside to be in your office if they come during Operation Green Light?

CLERK RUSSELL: Well, I've been telling those who are interested is pack your patience because it does take more time than just a regular payment business you're conducting. It's some back and forth conversation, so I would expect someone to at least prepare for an hour just because it's a very popular program. We have a very large county. We will have all of our windows open so we have about 20 windows. But I would estimate about an hour, but for them to come with patience.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: All right. So a better time in the day to come?

CLERK RUSSELL: In the morning. You can come as soon as we open before 10 o'clock. Come in the morning. Early bird gets the worm is what they say, right? So come early.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: And your office opens at 8 o'clock?

CLERK RUSSELL: Actually seven.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: At 7 o'clock?

CLERK RUSSELL: Yes.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Wow. So they could go before they went to work and get it done.

CLERK RUSSELL: And then we'll be - we'll start at 7:30, let me correct myself.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: All right.

CLERK RUSSELL: 7:30 to 4 p.m.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: And if they want to find out some more information about Operation Green Light, where can – so where can citizens go to get that?

CLERK RUSSELL: They can visit my website which is myorangeclerk.com and that's where – there's actually a banner on the front page, says Operation Green Light, they click that banner and it will take them to all the information they need for the program.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: You have lots of other very interesting information on your website too if they wanted to just explore.

CLERK RUSSELL: Yes, they could spend a good amount of time just going through the website and the different pages.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Is there anything else that you want to tell listeners about Operation Green Light or your office's participation?

CLERK RUSSELL: Well, what I do want to share with the listeners is Operation Green Light is a phenomenal program, but I want listeners – if they feel like they miss it, we do payment plans year around. We don't want people to feel like if they don't make it that week between April 4th and the 8th, they missed out. We do payment plans every day so please don't wait till Operation Green Light to address your situation with the court and the clerk. Come see us any day. We'll put you on a payment plan and work out something to make sure you can get your license back and I really hope people get that message out of all the messages which is we do it every day of the week.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: And this is a great time of year to do it because people are getting tax refunds now.

CLERK RUSSELL: This is a busy season for us. This is a perfect time. People are actually getting their tax returns and so they are allowing them to address some of the – any amount of money they owe.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Well, I want to encourage everyone to come down to the Orange County Clerk's Office at the Orange County Courthouse and meet with Clerk Russell's staff and take advantage of Operation Green Light and get your driver's license back so that you can do everything that you need to do in your life.

CLERK RUSSELL: That's right. Get it back, you can go to work safely and avoid any other additional challenges you may face if you're driving on a suspended license.

CHIEF JUDGE MUNYON: Absolutely. Well, thank you for joining us today, Clerk Russell.

CLERK RUSSELLZ: Thank you for having me.

NARRATOR: Thank you for listening to "Open Ninth: Conversations Beyond the Courtroom" brought to you by Chief Judge Lisa Munyon and the Ninth Judicial Circuit Court of Florida. Follow us on Facebook, Twitter or Instagram @ninthcircuitfl for updates on new episodes and subscribe to Open Ninth on your favorite podcast service.

(Music)