

**Williamson County Justice  
Center Operating Plan  
Post June 1, 2020**



June 8, 2020

Dear Judge Stubblefield,

The Judges of the District Courts and County Courts at Law of Williamson County wish to express our solidarity with you as we continue to respond to challenges posed by the COVID-19 Pandemic, as well as our appreciation for your steady leadership in these difficult times.

As you know, the Texas Supreme Court and the Office of Court Administration has instructed judges to prepare an operating plan for court proceedings beginning after June 1. **This operating plan must comply with the guidelines set forth by the Office of Court Administration and the guidance provided by the Public Health Authority, and must be submitted to you, as the Regional Presiding Judge, for review and approval.** Accordingly, the documents required by the Office of Court Administration guidelines regarding the development of this plan are attached hereto along with an index to those documents.

In developing the operating plan the judiciary and principals at the Justice Center were divided into teams with each team taking the responsibility for the following sections: Judge and Court Staff Health, Scheduling, Vulnerable Populations, Social Distancing/Hygiene, Screening, Face Coverings/Cleaning, Grand Jury Proceedings, and Jury Trial. Conformity to the OCA guidelines and advice of the Williamson County and Cities Public Health Authority has been the constant focus in developing the operating plan.

As you can imagine there have been spirited discussions regarding the plan. We all recognize the need for conformity with the guidelines provided by the Texas Supreme Court, the Office of Court Administration, and the Williamson County and Cities Public Health Authority, and we look forward to the results of your review.

This Operating Plan represents the beginning of a gradual return to normalcy at the Justice Center, and presenting it to you is an opportunity to provide an update on how the Judiciary in Williamson County has managed the very important work of doing justice during this state of emergency.

On March 13, 2020, the Texas Supreme Court and Court of Criminal Appeals issued orders that directed local Courts to take steps to protect the safety of our litigants by minimizing in-person proceedings. Similarly, the Williamson County Judge and other officials enacted orders that impacted the operation of the justice system, all with the intent of promoting the health and safety of residents. What followed those orders is nothing less than an amazing example of teamwork coupled with a desire to preserve the system of justice on which our county and, indeed, our nation relies.

The nine judges at the Justice Center handle a wide variety of cases that have significant and lasting impacts on members of our community. These cases range from civil disputes to family law cases, from probate matters and mental health commitments to criminal cases

involving adult defendants and juvenile respondents. In the past weeks, there have been hearings in cases of all of these types, and it is a point of pride for each of the undersigned that the justice system in Williamson County has lived up to the mandate of the Texas Constitution, which states that **“All courts shall be open and every person...shall have remedy by due course of law.”**

- The first challenge we faced was to find a way to **hold court proceedings in a responsible, socially distant way** accessible to all participants. Using resources provided by the Commissioners Court, Wilco IT stepped up with the technical infrastructure needed to conduct remote hearings. As a result, **on March 23, 2020, we held our first video hearings.**
- Judges and Court Staff then collaborated with the Clerks’ Offices, Sheriff’s Office, Juvenile Services, and members of the Wilco Bar to draft procedures for each of the types of hearings needed. We created **procedures for civil case hearings, criminal case hearings with defendants in and out of custody, protective order hearings, mental health hearings, and juvenile hearings, all designed to be conducted virtually** in order to promote social distancing and comply with the various orders in place.
- As a result of these efforts, between March 24 and May 14, **Judges in Williamson County have held over 600 virtual hearings.** Additionally, the courts have held over 230 conferences in their specialty courts and over 300 attorney conferences. These included hearings that resolved civil and criminal cases, resulted in mental health commitments, and finalized divorces and child custody disputes.
- Recognizing that the County Jail is a high-risk facility for transmission of the virus, when the COVID-19 Crisis began, Associate Judges reviewed every individual in custody to identify inmates who could be **safely released on bond** during the emergency. This resulted in a **significant reduction to the jail population** and provided the Sheriff with needed space to implement a quarantine area for new arrestees and **protect the health and safety of Inmates and Correctional Staff.**
- Pretrial Services and Magistrate Court Staff have successfully transitioned to **virtual magistrature hearings.** This allows us to hold hearings with inmates in the quarantine area of the jail and staff in a remote location. The result is a **process that respects the legal rights of the accused but is also safe for all parties.** Between March 24 and May 14, **663 defendants were magistrated** on Misdemeanor and Felony cases.
- Court Staff have worked with the Sheriff’s Office to develop **telephone jail visitation processes for attorneys** so that they can interact with their incarcerated clients
- The Judiciary has authorized some **30 search warrants** between March 24 and May 14, which has enabled law enforcement to continue to investigate crimes and

protect the community.

- The Grand Jury has continued to meet while observing social distancing and using protective equipment. During the current emergency, **the Grand Jury has returned 129 indictments.**
- Our Community Supervision and Corrections Department Director was set to retire at the end of April 2020. At the request of Judge Arnold and Judge Mathews, Steve Morrison graciously agreed to extend his employment during this crisis, for which we are eternally grateful. The Community Supervision and Corrections has continued to provide **supervision to 3,804 individuals**, ensuring their compliance with court-ordered conditions of probation. During this emergency, **41 defendants have been placed on probation**, resolving their pending criminal cases, **and 74 defendants have been placed on Pretrial Supervision through the CSCD**, enhancing community safety while these defendants are free on bond.
- Our criminal courts have developed procedures to facilitate the plea process for out-of-custody defendants so criminal cases can continue to be resolved.
- Our Juvenile Services Department, led by Scott Matthew has supervised over 259 juveniles, in addition to providing residential services to over xx juveniles.
- The Courts have worked with the Clerks and County IT to **update our websites** to provide clear reset dates and civil and criminal case look-up capacity so that the public and the bar can more **easily obtain docket information remotely.**
- Williamson County is strongly invested in programs that are designed to address particular needs of litigants, including Veterans Court, DWI Court, Mental Health Court, Family Recovery Court, and the Transformative Justice Program. Each of these programs has **remained active** during the pandemic using technology to allow for social distancing, while **providing needed services, support, and accountability for participants.**
- The primary goal of the Justice System is the peaceful resolution of disputes, and the appropriate disposition of criminal cases. In both of those areas, we have excelled. From March 24, 2020 to May 14, 2020, **1,614 cases have been resolved in the District Courts and County Courts-at-Law of Williamson County.**
- The processes outlined above have allowed us to successfully **minimize risk to staff and the public.** In addition, we are proud that, in part, through our efforts, there have been **no confirmed COVID cases traced to the Justice Center, the County Jail, or the Juvenile Services Facility.**

The accomplishments that we have listed above fit squarely within our routine judicial functions and illustrate the work that has been done in order to keep the ordinary

June 3, 2020

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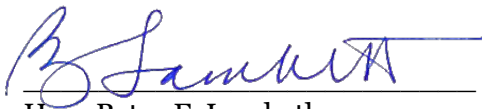
courthouse processes operational. However, as is the case for so many others in County Government, we and our staff were all called to stretch our roles and, in some cases, act outside of our roles at one time or another.

- One of our Williamson County Judges was designated to serve as the **Judge responsible for health-related cases** during the emergency. Fortunately, to date, no such cases have arisen, but we stand ready to address them if and when they do.
- Another of the Williamson County Judges helped to **lead the Wilco Mask Brigade**, which coordinated volunteers providing over 2,500 hours of service per week creating over 12,000 masks which were provided to first responders, medical professionals, nursing home residents, and other at-risk populations.
- Residents at the Central Texas Treatment Center (CTTC), operated by Wilco CSCD, participated in the Mask Brigade project.

What we have achieved since the beginning of this emergency could not be possible without the professional, collaborative relationships that exist in our building. The Judiciary, the Bar, the Clerks, our County's wonderful IT staff, the District Attorney's office, the County Attorney's office, the Sheriff and local law enforcement, and our respective staffs have all worked together to get us where we are today. This gives me great confidence that the operating plan that we have submitted to you is an attainable goal.

We all pledge to do our part in abiding by the plan. We will continue to monitor the local public health developments in conversation with the Williamson County Public Health Authority, and we look forward to continuing to work with you throughout this process.

Sincerely,



Hon. Betsy F. Lambeth

425<sup>th</sup> District Judge

Local Administrative District Judge

Cc: County Judge Bill Gravell  
County Commissioner Terry Cook  
County Commissioner Cynthia Cook  
County Commissioner Valerie Covey  
County Commissioner Russ Boles

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*Juvenile Plan*

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*Email from County Judge Bill Gravell After Final Review of the Plan – June 3rd, 2020*

*Email from Shantelle Brannon After Review of the Plan – June 2nd*

*Transcript of Meeting with Dr. Palazzo and Key Stakeholders – May 15th*

*Summary of Meeting with Dr. Palazzo- May 14th*

# COVID-19 Operating Plan for the Williamson County Justice Center

On May 4, 2020 at the direction of the Texas Supreme Court, the Office of Court Administration (OCA) directed Texas Courts to develop an operating plan for all court proceedings. The guidance directs the local administrative district judge (LADJ) in each county to attempt to confer with judges of all courts with courtrooms in county buildings, consult with the County Judge and the local health authority, and submit for approval the operating plan to the Regional Presiding Judge (RPJ). **Upon written acknowledgement from the RPJ, that the submitted operating plan meets the critical components required by the OCA and, the courts of Williamson County may then commence in-person proceedings as outlined in this operating plan. This plan covers the Justice Center, which houses five district courtrooms, four county court-at-law courtrooms, and the Attorney General Courtroom. Separate plans will be attached covering the Juvenile Justice Center and the Justice of the Peace offices.**

Recognizing the need to ensure the health and safety of litigants, attorneys, visitors, court staff, judges, and other individuals entering the buildings housing the courts, the courts of **Williamson County** will implement the following protective measures:

## General

1. All judges will comply with the Emergency Orders issued by the Supreme Court of Texas and Court of Criminal Appeals, including conducting in-person proceedings according to the guidance issued by the Office of Court Administration regarding social distancing, maximum group size, and other restrictions and precautions.
2. All judges will use all reasonable efforts to conduct proceedings remotely.
3. The local administrative district judge will maintain regular communication with the local health authority and county judge, and, adjust this operating plan as necessary based on conditions in the county.
4. Judges will begin setting non-essential in-person proceedings no sooner than the Williamson County courts have received written acknowledgment from the RPJ, that the submitted operating plan meets the critical components required by the Texas Supreme Court and the OCA.
5. A judge may not begin setting non-essential in-person proceedings until fully implementing the operating plan.
6. Every participant in a proceeding will be required to alert the court if the participant has, or knows of another participant who has: (i) COVID-19 or flu-like symptoms, or a fever, chills, repeated shaking with chills, cough, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, muscle pain, headache, sore throat, loss of taste or smell, diarrhea; or (ii) been in close contact with a person who is confirmed to have COVID-19;

## Judge and Court Staff Health

1. Judges and court staff who can perform the essential functions of their job remotely will telework when possible.

2. Judge and Court Staff Monitoring Requirements:
  - Bailiffs will take temperatures at the entrance of the Justice Center, and all Williamson County and State employees, including judges and their staff will be required to have a temperature screening daily.
  - Judge or court staff who feel feverish or have measured temperature equal to or greater than 99.6°F, or with new or worsening signs or symptoms of COVID-19 such as cough, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, chills, repeated shaking with chills, muscle pain, headache, sore throat, loss of taste or smell, diarrhea, or having known close contact with a person who is confirmed to have COVID-19 will not be permitted to enter the building and should seek medical advice.
3. Court staff will monitor and self-report symptoms to their supervisor, or individual judge. Judges and court staff will not be permitted to enter county buildings who have self-reported symptoms.
4. Court staff will report exposure to COVID-19 to their supervisor or individual judge. Judges and court staff will not be permitted to enter a county building for fourteen days following exposure. If a judge or court staff is still symptomatic after fourteen days, that person will not be permitted to enter county buildings until fourteen days after no longer being symptomatic. Exposure means greater than 15 minutes spent in close proximity (less than 6 feet) of someone who tests positive for Covid-19 within fourteen days of your contact with the COVID-19 positive individual.
5. Judges and court staff will be required to practice social distancing and practice appropriate hygiene recommendations at all times.
6. Appropriate social distancing will be expected and enforced in the Justice Center and signs reinforcing protective measures will be posted throughout the public areas of the building and made available to each Court for posting in each Courtroom.
7. Access to the non-public (employee) areas of the court chambers will be restricted to court staff and essential personnel only.
8. Protective Measures:
  - Courts are required until further notice, to continue to use all reasonable efforts to conduct proceedings remotely.
  - Judges and court staff shall wear a Face Covering when:
    - Interacting in person with any member of the public.
    - Working in any space visited by members of the public, including but not limited to, courtrooms, reception areas, public restrooms, hallways, and other spaces used to interact with the public, at all times regardless of whether anyone from the public is present
    - Working in or walking through common areas such as hallways, stairways, and elevators; or
    - In any room or enclosed area when other people (except for members of the person's own household) are present.
  - For clarity, a Face Covering is not required when a person is in a personal office (a single room) when others outside of that person's household are not present as long



as the public does not regularly visit the room. A face covering shall be worn when coworkers are nearby.

## **Scheduling**

### **Section 1. Overview of Scheduling Plan**

The following Justice Center scheduling plan has been developed pursuant to the Texas Supreme Court’s Twelfth Emergency Order, issued on April 27, 2020, and the Office of Court Administration’s (“OCA”) Guidance for All Court Proceedings During COVID-19 Pandemic, issued on May 4, 2020. It applies to both essential and nonessential hearings and trials. The schedule was developed with the assistance of the Williamson County Local Health Authority.

The scheduling plan provides a two-phased approach. The Williamson County Courts are currently in Phase 1, which is fully laid-out in this document for the purpose of providing context. Phase 2 would begin on the later of June 1, 2020 or upon approval of the Operating Plan by the Regional Presiding Judge.

In Phase 2 this Scheduling Plan allows for two courts on each floor of the Justice Center to be open for in-person proceedings each day. The intent would be to limit overall building load to 25% of capacity, to include any County Personnel, Hearing Participants, and Public Visitors to the Courts and other operating units (i.e. Clerks’ Offices and Community Supervision and Corrections Department (CSCD)) in the Justice Center.

### **Section 2. Definitions and General Principles**

#### **2.1. Scheduling In-Person Hearings & Trials**

The following schedule applies to all in-person hearings and bench trials, whether essential or non-essential, conducted at the Justice Center.

#### **2.2. Courts**

As used within this document, “Court” and “Courts” means the Williamson County District Courts and County Courts at Law.

#### **2.3. Essential Hearings**

Essential hearings include, but are not limited to, criminal magistration, CPS removal hearings, temporary restraining orders/temporary injunctions, juvenile detention hearings, family violence protective order hearings, specialty court dockets, and certain mental health proceedings.

#### **2.4. In-Person Hearing**

An in-person hearing, and bench trial is one where the judicial officer is present in the courtroom *and* at least one of the parties is present in the *same courtroom*.

#### **2.5. Virtual Hearing**

A virtual hearing and bench trial are proceedings where the judicial officer participates electronically, and all parties participate electronically.

#### **2.6. Hybrid Hearing**

A hybrid hearing is a proceeding that accommodates all participants, both those who can appear remotely, and those who are unable to appear remotely but appear in-person.

#### 2.7. Virtual Streaming

In order to reduce the number of persons in the courtroom and comply with the need for open courts, each Court will consider streaming their proceedings or providing some comparable form of remote viewing.

#### 2.8. Public Access to Technology for Virtual Hearings & Hybrid Hearings

- (a) Counsel are requested to assist their clients and witnesses with accessing technology in order to facilitate participation in virtual hearings and trials.
- (b) Courts may offer the use of technology located in their courtroom for parties or witnesses, particularly self-represented litigants who do not have access to technology that would allow them to participate in a virtual hearing or trial, so that party may participate in a Hybrid Hearing, and avoid having an in-person hearing with everyone in the Courtroom.

#### 2.9. Courtroom Compliance with Health-Related Directives During In-Person Hearings

- (a) In order to protect the health of courtroom visitors and participants, each Court will attempt to comply with the recommendations of the Williamson County Local Health Authority (“LHA”).
- (b) Depending on the needs of each Court, courtrooms may have markings to denote a 6-foot distance from the bench, witness stand, and staff areas. Seating will be arranged in such a way that individuals in the well and the gallery are able to maintain appropriate social distancing.
- (c) Courts will ensure the courtroom is cleaned between each hearing. Adequate supplies and time shall be provided in order to allow for cleaning to take place, at a minimum, at 30-minute intervals and between in-person hearings. In the event a hearing is scheduled for more the 30 minutes, the Court will break in order to ensure cleaning takes place.
- (d) Pursuant to OCA guidelines, Courts will ensure persons within the courtroom wear face coverings over the nose and mouth. At a minimum, cloth face coverings will be required of individuals while in the courtroom.

#### 2.10. Courtroom Security

Based on the Court’s need and bailiff availability, the bailiff(s) assigned to each Court holding hearings will provide security in the courtroom and in the case of Hybrid Hearings, assist with technology in the courtroom, and facilitate monitoring capacity having the next hearing “ready to go” outside the courtroom while facilitating social distancing.

### **Section 3. Phase 1: March 26 to Present – All Virtual Hearings (with highly limited exceptions)**

Pursuant to guidance issued March 26, 2020, Courts in Williamson County have been operating almost exclusively virtual for all proceedings, including proceedings considered “essential” as defined above.

**Section 4. Phase 2: Beginning on or about June 1 – Continued Virtual Hearings with increased frequency of scheduled in-person hearings**

Williamson County District Courts and County Courts at Law will continue to conduct essential and non-essential hearings and trials virtually unless litigants or other court participants are unable to successfully participate in a remote hearing for reasons beyond the court's control. In-Person and Hybrid Hearings will be held based on the Phase 2 procedures set forth below.

**4.1. Principles for In-Person and Hybrid Hearings Under Phase 2**

- (a) Courts will schedule no more than one In-Person or Hybrid Hearing at a time on the Court's assigned hearing days.
- (b) In-Person Hearings will be limited to instances where parties are not able to participate using virtual courtroom technologies, including court-provided technology (i.e. child witnesses, highly complex hearings, or emergency matters requiring in-person hearings), and the Court is unable to provide an alternative virtual accommodation.
- (c) Hybrid Hearings will be utilized when a party to the matter is not able to participate virtually using their own technology, but all other parties (Judge, Court Staff, Counsel, other parties) will participate virtually.
- (d) When an In-Person or Hybrid Hearing takes place, a Court is limited to having no more than ten (10) individuals in the Courtroom at any one time. This number includes the judge, court staff, bailiff, counsel, parties, etc., as necessary to conduct the hearing. Any other individuals involved in a hearing who must be present at the Justice Center, and who are in excess of the number of individuals allowed in the Courtroom, must wait in the hallway while observing appropriate social distancing and this should be monitored by a bailiff.
- (e) While court staff might not be present for a Hybrid Hearing, there should be a Bailiff for the purpose of courtroom security and to assist in operating the technology.
- (f) The subject matter for In-Person or Hybrid Hearings will be at the discretion of the individual Court and not prescribed in the schedule. The intent of this is to provide maximum flexibility for Courts to use available hearing time.
- (g) Courts will limit In-Person and Hybrid Hearings to 30-minute intervals. As explained by the guidance of the LHA, courtroom exposure of over 30 minutes significantly increases the risk of viral spread. If hearings are not able to be limited to 30 minutes, Courts will recess every 30 minutes to allow for a break and for the Courtroom to be cleaned prior to resuming the hearing.
- (h) For in-person hearings and trials, Courts will encourage as many participants as possible to appear virtually in order to further minimize the number of individuals present. This may include the court administrator and, if possible, the court reporter.
- (i) In order to ensure the Courts are able to limit the overall building load to 25% of capacity, at the end of each week each Court will report the daily number of in-person hearings, including the number participants that appeared in-person they had in their courtroom

for that week. Reports will be provided to the Presiding Judge of Third Administrative Judicial Region.

- (j) Each Court is reminded and acknowledges, that the Presiding Judge of Third Administrative Judicial Region has been tasked with reporting any proceedings that are being conducted contrary to the Texas Supreme Court’s Orders, which includes OCA guidelines.

**4.2. Hearing Schedules – Virtual Hearings**

Virtual Hearings that do not bring any parties to the Justice Center may be scheduled at the pleasure of each individual Court, according to their scheduling needs.

**4.3. Hearing Schedules – In-Person and Hybrid Hearings**

Each Court will be assigned days each week where members of the public can access the courtroom for In-Person hearings or to utilize technology in their courtroom for a Hybrid Hearing.

**Williamson County Justice Center Phase 2 Hearing Schedule**

		Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
First Floor (District Courts)		368	395	26	26	368*
		425	425	277	277	395
Second Floor (County Courts at Law & AG Court)	AM	1 & 2	1 & 2	1 & 3	1 & 3	AG & 4
	PM	3 & 1	3 & 4	1 & 2	2 & 4	AG & 4

\* In order to avoid having contiguous courtrooms, one of these courts will setup in a neighboring non-contiguous courtroom.

\*\*\*\*The District Courts and the County Courts at Law will set their schedules by agreement to allow a maximum of two courts per floor to hold court at any given time. The above schedule is an example of that structure. Actual courts meeting on a given day may vary but will comply with the above-mentioned restrictions.

**4.4. Perfecting the Record**

- (a) The Court will make a record that an in-person hearing or bench trial, whether essential or non-essential, was necessary because litigants or other court participants are unable to successfully participate in a remote hearing for reasons beyond the court’s control.
- (b) In cases of Hybrid Hearings, the Court will make a record that explains that a participant is in the Justice Center in order to access virtual technology that will facilitate their participation. The Court may further consider having the party explain why their presence in the Justice Center was necessary, and thus their participation was voluntary.
- (c) In cases of In-Person Hearings, in order to comply with OCA guidance, the Court will make a record that explains why it was not practicable to conduct the hearing virtually and may wish to consider a discussion with the parties that will illustrate that their in-person (or Hybrid Hearing) participation is entirely voluntary.

## **Vulnerable Populations**

1. Individuals who are over age 65 and individuals with serious underlying health conditions, such as high blood pressure, chronic lung disease, diabetes, obesity, asthma, and those whose immune systems are compromised such as by chemotherapy for cancer or other conditions requiring such therapy are considered to be vulnerable populations.
2. Each judge will include information on orders setting hearings, dockets, notices, and in other communications notifying individuals who are in vulnerable populations of the ability to contact the court to identify themselves as a vulnerable individual and receive accommodations. A notice with this information will be posted on the courts' websites and in conspicuous locations around the court building (a copy of which is attached).
3. Vulnerable populations who are scheduled for court will be accommodated by as follows: If a judge or court staff receive notice that an individual in the vulnerable population has been scheduled for a court proceeding, the judge will accommodate the individual by (1) allowing them to participate in the proceeding remotely, or (2) if the individual must appear in-person, court staff will set up a separate room for the individual to participate in the hearing remotely.

## **Social Distancing**

1. All persons not from the same household who are permitted in the court building will be required to maintain adequate social distancing of at least 6 feet.
2. If there is not adequate space for standing or seating to ensure adequate social distancing, Court staff will ask parties for their cell phone number. The parties will return to their vehicles or a space outside until they are called to return to the courtroom.
3. The County will measure the hallways. The County will then apply markings at least 6 feet apart in each location indicating where individuals may sit or stand.
4. The County will measure each courtroom and forward those measurements to each judge. Each individual judge will then work with county staff to apply markings at least 6 feet apart in each location indicating where individuals may sit or stand.
5. The County will place signage, in English and Spanish, about the social distancing policy throughout the Justice Center. At a minimum, signage will be placed at the entrance, outside of restrooms, hallways, and common areas to inform individuals about appropriate social distancing.
6. No more than two individuals will be permitted in an elevator.
7. Each restroom has been evaluated to determine the appropriate capacity to ensure social distancing and the maximum capacity has been posted on each restroom door.
8. Public common areas, including breakrooms and snackrooms, have been closed to the public.

## *Gallery*

9. The maximum number of persons permitted in each courtroom is ten. This number includes the judge, court staff, bailiff, counsel, parties, etc. as necessary to conduct the hearing. The maximum capacity of the courtroom will be monitored and enforced by court security staff.
10. The gallery of the courtroom has been marked to identify appropriate social distancing in the seating area. Seating is limited to every other row and no seat will be within 6 feet of any other seat decal. Capacity will be limited utilizing floor decals and ropes.

### *Well*

11. In each courtroom, the counsel tables, witness stand, judge's bench, and clerk, court reporter, adult probation, and bailiff seating have been arranged in such a way, and signage has been posted so that there is social distancing of at least 6 feet between each space.

### **Hygiene**

1. Hand sanitizer dispensers have been placed at the entrances to the building, outside of elevators on each floor, outside of each courtroom, and outside of bathrooms.
2. The local bar associations will be requested to recommend that attorneys bring personal hand sanitizer dispensers and travel-sized tissue packs for personal use when at the Justice Center.
3. The Department of State Health Service's "Stop the Spread of Germs Flyer" has been posted in multiple locations on each floor of the court building.

### **Screening**

1. When individuals attempt to enter the court building, they will be given a QR Code to access on their personal mobile device and answer the following questions: if they are feeling feverish; have a cough, shortness of breath, or difficulty breathing; or have been in close contact with a person who is confirmed to have COVID-19. Individuals who indicate yes to any of these questions will be refused admittance to the court building.
2. In the alternative, in the event that an individual attempting to enter the court building does not have a mobile device, or chooses not to use their mobile device, the Court Security Officers will provide the individuals with an iPad to answer screening questions, which will ask the user to disclose the following: if they are feeling feverish; have a cough, shortness of breath, or difficulty breathing; or have been in close contact with a person who is confirmed to have COVID-19. Individuals who indicate yes to any of these questions will be refused admittance to the court building. The Court Security Officers handling the iPad will wear gloves and are required to clean the service of the iPad after each use with an approved sanitizing agent that will not harm the iPad.
3. When individuals attempt to enter the court building, Court Security Staff will use an infrared thermometer to determine the temperature of the individual. Individuals whose temperature equals or exceeds 99.6°F will be refused admittance to the court building. If the individual believes their temperature is elevated due to outside weather conditions, the individual may be retested after waiting for fifteen minutes to cool down.

4. The Court will continue to collaborate with the Sheriff's Office to conduct virtual hearings for inmates in order to prevent transporting inmates to the Justice Center wherever possible. In cases where such virtual hearings are impracticable, inmates being transported from the jail to the court building will be screened for symptoms of COVID-19 and have their temperature taken prior to transport. Inmates with symptoms or a temperature equal to or above 99.6°F will not be transported to the court building.
5. Staff who are screening individuals entering the court building will be provided personal protective equipment, including disposable gloves, hand sanitizer, N95 masks, and Ranger Masks.
6. The Williamson County Public Information Office will publicize the screening policy through social media and press release to traditional media outlets with the intent of increasing public awareness.
7. The screening policy will be placed on the official county website.

### **Face Coverings**

1. Face Coverings will be required to be worn at all times by all individuals entering publicly accessible areas of the Williamson County Justice Center or Williamson County Justice of the Peace offices including but not limited to, courtrooms, reception areas, public restrooms, hallways, and other spaces used to interact with the public, at all times regardless of whether anyone from the public is present.
  - For clarity, a Face Covering is not required when a person is in a personal office (a single room) when others outside of that person's household are not present as long as the public does not regularly visit the room. By way of example and without limitation, a person working at the Justice Center is not required to wear a Face Covering if that individual is in a space not regularly visited by the public, but that individual must put on a Face Covering, when being visited by a member of the public, and anywhere members of the public are regularly present.
2. Individuals will be encouraged to bring cloth face coverings with them, but if the individual does not have a cloth face covering, a disposable face mask will be provided by court security staff.
3. Notwithstanding anything herein to the contrary, pursuant to current Center for Disease Control (CDC) guidance, children under two years old, people with breathing problems and people who are incapacitated or otherwise unable to remove the mask without assistance will not be requested or directed to wear a face covering regardless of the space of separation available between individuals.
4. In the event a person refuses to wear a face covering, admittance to the Williamson County Justice Center or Williamson County Justice of the Peace offices will be denied in order to ensure compliance with the Emergency Orders issued by the Supreme Court of Texas and Court of Criminal Appeals, and with the guidance issued by the Office of Court Administration.
5. Individuals with conditions that may inhibit them from wearing a face covering safely, or who may not be able to effectively communicate through a face covering in a court setting may be excepted from wearing a face covering and will be treated as a member of the Vulnerable

Population. Accommodations for people unable to wear masks must be made as stated in this Operating Plan. This may include, but is not limited to individuals who:

- Cannot breathe safely with a mask.
  - Due to a behavioral health diagnosis, are unable wear a mask.
  - Rely on lip-reading to communicate with others.
  - Require supplemental oxygen to breathe.
6. As used in the Operating Plan, a “face covering” means a covering made of cloth, fabric, or other soft or permeable material, without holes, that covers only the nose and mouth and surrounding areas of the lower face. A covering that hides or obscures the wearer’s eyes or forehead is not a face covering. Examples of Face Coverings include a scarf or bandana; a neck gaiter, a homemade covering made from a t-shirt, sweatshirt, or towel, held on with rubber bands or otherwise; or a mask, which need not be medical grade. A face covering may be factory-made or may be handmade and improvised from ordinary household materials. The face covering should be comfortable, so that the wearer can breathe comfortably through the nose and does not have to adjust it frequently, so as to avoid touching the face.
  7. The face coverings are considered an article of clothing. Individual judges at their discretion may exclude a participant from the courtroom for inappropriate messaging on the face covering.
  8. Information about how to wear and clean face coverings may be found at the website of Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, at <https://sss.cc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/diy-cloth-face-doverings.html>.
  9. Signs will be posted, reminding Justice Center visitors of the requirement that they wear a Face Covering while inside of or waiting in line to enter.
  10. The intent of these guidelines is to ensure that -- subject to certain specified and limited exceptions -- all people who are visiting or working at the Justice Center wear a Face Covering to reduce the likelihood that they may transmit or receive the COVID-19 virus. The hope is that these guidelines will help reduce the spread of the COVID-19 virus and mitigate the impact of the virus on members of the public and the justice system for those in need of efficient and fair justice.
  11. The use of a mask does not replace important social distancing measures. All individuals must continue to maintain more than 6 feet of distance from other people; wash hands regularly with soap and water for at least 20 seconds; and stay home when sick.

## **Cleaning**

1. Court building cleaning staff will clean the public and non-public restrooms after each use.
2. Court building cleaning staff will clean the common areas of the court building so that common spaces are cleaned at least four times per day or upon request. The common spaces include all services touch by individuals, including push bars, door knobs, and chairs.
3. Courts will ensure the courtroom is cleaned between each hearing. Adequate supplies and time shall be provided in order to allow for cleaning to take place, at a minimum, at 30-minute intervals and between in-person hearings. In the event a hearing is scheduled for more than 30 minutes, the Court will break in order to ensure cleaning takes place.



4. Court building cleaning staff have been provided cleaning supplies shown to be effective with this coronavirus.
5. Court building cleaning staff have been trained on proper cleaning techniques and provided appropriate personal protective equipment.
6. The water fountains will be made inaccessible.

**Other**

The County has begun the installation of sneeze guards in the courtrooms which will be placed between the bench and the well, between the witness stand, the judge and the well, the litigant tables and the well, and other necessary areas as needed.

**Juvenile Justice Center Plan**

The Juvenile Justice Center Plan is attached hereto as Exhibit 2.

**Justice of the Peace Plans**

The Justice of the Peace Plans will be submitted separately.

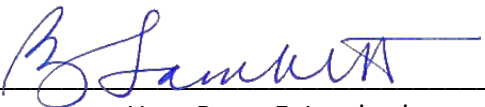
**Jury Trial Plan**

The Judges of Williamson County have created a Jury Trial Planning Team. Upon receipt of further guidance from the Texas Supreme Court and the Office of Court Administration the Jury Trial Planning Team will prepare a Jury Trial Plan in accordance with those guidelines. Until such time as direction and guidance is received from the Texas Supreme Court, there will be no jury trials conducted in Williamson County.

**Statement of Compliance**

I conferred with all judges of courts with courtrooms in the court building regarding this Operating Plan. In developing the plan, I consulted with Dr. Lori Palazzo, the Williamson County and Cities Local Public Health Authority, County Judge Bill Gravell, Dale Butler, Director of Facilities-Williamson County and Shantelle Brannon, Deputy Director Williamson County Office of Emergency Management - documentation of which is attached to this plan. I will ensure that the judges of courts with courtrooms in the court building covered by this Operating Plan conduct proceedings consistent with the plan.

Date: 6/8/2020

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Hon. Betsy F. Lambeth  
Local Administrative District Judge

# APPENDIX

# JUVENILE PLAN

# COVID-19 Operating Plan for the Williamson County Juvenile Justice Center

On May 4, 2020 at the direction of the Texas Supreme Court, the Office of Court Administration (OCA) directed Texas Courts to develop an operating plan for all court proceedings. The guidance directs the local administrative district judge (LADJ) in each county to attempt to confer with judges of all courts with courtrooms in county buildings, consult with the County Judge and the local health authority, and submit for approval the operating plan to the Regional Presiding Judge (RPJ). **Upon written acknowledgement from the RPJ, that the submitted operating plan meets the critical components required by the OCA and, the court located at the Williamson County Juvenile Justice Center may then commence in-person proceedings as outlined in this operating plan.**

Recognizing the need to ensure the health and safety of litigants, attorneys, visitors, court staff, judges, and other individuals entering the buildings housing the courts, the Williamson County Juvenile Court will implement the following protective measures:

## General

1. All judges will comply with the Emergency Orders issued by the Supreme Court of Texas and Court of Criminal Appeals, including conducting in-person proceedings according to the guidance issued by the Office of Court Administration regarding social distancing, maximum group size, and other restrictions and precautions.
2. All judges will use all reasonable efforts to conduct proceedings remotely.
3. The local administrative district judge will maintain regular communication with the local health authority and county judge, and, adjust this operating plan as necessary based on conditions in the county.
4. Judges will begin setting non-essential in-person proceedings no sooner than the Williamson County courts have received written acknowledgment from the RPJ, that the submitted operating plan meets the critical components required by the Texas Supreme Court and the OCA.
5. A Judge may not begin setting non-essential, in-person proceedings until fully implementing the operating plan.
6. Every participant in a proceeding will be required to alert the court if the participant has, or knows of another participant who has: (i) COVID-19 or flu-like symptoms, or a fever, chills, repeated shaking with chills, cough, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, muscle pain, headache, sore throat, loss of taste or smell, diarrhea; or (ii) been in close contact with a person who is confirmed to have COVID-19;

## Judge and Court Staff Health

1. Judges and court staff who can perform the essential functions of their job remotely will telework when possible.
2. Judge and Court Staff Monitoring Requirements:

- All staff and judges will comply with temperature screening daily prior to entering the Juvenile Justice Center and will adhere to the recommended CDC precautions as listed below.
  - Judges or court staff who feel feverish or have measured temperatures equal to or greater than 99.6°F, or with new or worsening signs or symptoms of COVID-19 such as cough, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, chills, repeated shaking with chills, muscle pain, headache, sore throat, loss of taste or smell, diarrhea, or having known close contact with a person who is confirmed to have COVID-19 will not be permitted to enter the building and should seek medical advice.
3. Court staff will monitor and self-report symptoms to their supervisor, or individual judge. Judges and court staff who have self-reported symptoms will not be permitted to enter county buildings.
  4. Court staff will report exposure to COVID-19 to their supervisor or individual judge. Judges and court staff will not be permitted to enter a county building for five days following exposure. If a judge or court staff is still symptomatic after five days, that person will not be permitted to enter county buildings until five days after no longer being symptomatic.
  5. Judges and court staff will be required to wear face coverings, practice social distancing, and practice appropriate hygiene recommendations at all times.
  6. Appropriate social distancing will be expected and enforced in the Juvenile Justice Center and signs reinforcing protective measures will be posted throughout the public areas of the building and made available to each Court for posting in each Courtroom.
  7. Access to the non-public (employee) areas of the Juvenile Justice Center will be restricted to staff and essential personnel only.
  8. Protective Measures:
    - Courts are required until further notice, to continue to use all reasonable efforts to conduct proceedings remotely.
    - Judges and court staff shall wear a Face Covering when:
      - Interacting in person with any member of the public.
      - Working in any space visited by members of the public, including but not limited to, reception areas, public restrooms, hallways, and other spaces used to interact with the public, at all times regardless of whether anyone from the public is present
      - Working in or walking through common areas such as hallways, stairways, and elevators; or
      - In any room or enclosed area when other people (except for members of the person's own household) are present.
    - For clarity, a Face Covering is not required when a person is in a personal office (a single room) when others outside of that person's household are not present as long as the public does not regularly visit the room. A face covering shall be worn when coworkers are nearby.

## Scheduling

1. The following court schedules are established to reduce occupancy in the Juvenile Justice Center and courtroom:

At all times, and in the interest of health and safety, in-person access to the Juvenile Justice Center Courtroom will be limited to no more than ten persons, including staff, youth, and family. Because of this, the Juvenile Docket will be set by appointment by individual case and cause number. The goal is for all participants to participate remotely whenever possible and practical. Juvenile Justice Court Staff will coordinate and facilitate participation between youth, parent, and defense attorney.

With the goal of remote participation, it is preferred that all families and those youth who are summoned to court who are not in secure custody should participate from a remote access point in their home. If this is not practicable they will be allowed to participate from one of the remote access points described below.

Juvenile Services staff will, at all times, attempt to coordinate accommodations for all parties attending court remotely from their homes first, and then in separate spaces within the juvenile facility as a second option.

Multiple Juvenile Court access points will be available throughout the Juvenile Justice Facility, and each of those spaces will have capacity limitations:

- A public access conference room (in the non-secure portion of the facility) will be equipped with a computer with audio and visual capabilities so that a maximum of five people can access and participate in court hearings from that location.
- The court room will also be equipped with the same technology so that a maximum of five people may participate from that location.
- Youth who are in secure custody will participate via the same technology from a remote station inside the secure facility assisted by Juvenile Services Staff.

In order to ensure social distancing, building access will be limited and movement within the building will be tightly controlled. The Juvenile Justice Center's three lobbies will be used as staging areas for the families with no more than two families in the building at any given time. Families will be limited to no more than three family members including the youth who are not in secure custody and being summoned to court. These persons will be moved through the building to the appropriate areas with the aid of Court and Facility Staff. The youth and parents will be required to wear a mask when entering the building. If they do not have one, a mask will be provided. Their temperature will be taken at the entrance door and COVID-19 screening questions will be asked before they can enter the staging area. Juvenile Services staff will coordinate families coming to the courtroom or their remote access location at their scheduled time. There will be a staff member assigned to clean the staging and remote interaction areas and court and public restrooms between hearings. Once the family

completes their court hearing, they will continue one way down the hallway out the exit door. Traffic will only move one way through the building and will be dependent on staff coordination. Juvenile Services Staff will assist and directional signage will be present throughout the building. A bailiff will be present any time a youth, defense or prosecution witness is present in the Juvenile Justice Courtroom or any of the virtual participation areas in the Juvenile Justice Facility.

### **Vulnerable Populations**

1. Individuals who are over age 65 and individuals with serious underlying health conditions, such as high blood pressure, chronic lung disease, diabetes, obesity, asthma, and those whose immune systems are compromised such as by chemotherapy for cancer or other conditions requiring such therapy are considered to be vulnerable populations.
2. Each judge will include information on orders setting hearings, dockets notices, and in other communications notifying individuals who are in vulnerable populations of the ability to contact the court to identify themselves as a vulnerable individual and receive accommodations. A notice with this information will be posted on the courts' websites and in conspicuous locations around the court building (a copy of which is attached).
3. Vulnerable populations identified through their own admission and who request alternatives to what is laid out in this plan will receive accommodations through the following process: They will be scheduled for court by participating through Microsoft Teams, Zoom, Cisco Webex or other appropriate remote technology platform from their home. The person will provide their e-mail address and be sent an invitation to the hearing by the Court Coordinator. If needed, a person who is not providing sworn testimony can join the call with audio only. Juvenile Services Staff will help facilitate the person getting linked to the hearing by providing technical assistance, or physical assistance. This may include providing a laptop with Wi-Fi to the person in their home. If the person has the ability to travel but wants to maintain precautions of limited public contact, Juvenile Services will have a computer set up in a conference room for the person to use as outlined above and all CDC precautions will be followed in sequence as described above. The person will follow protocol to enter the building that includes wearing a mask, temperature check and answering COVID-19 screening questions. The conference room will be wiped down before they enter. Juvenile Services Staff will then walk them out the exit door when the hearing is over.

### **Social Distancing**

1. All persons not from the same household who are permitted in the court building will be required to maintain adequate social distancing of at least 6 feet.
2. If there is not adequate space for standing or seating to ensure adequate social distancing, Court staff will ask parties for their cell phone number. The parties will return to their vehicles or a space outside until they are called to return to the courtroom.
3. The County will measure the hallways. The County will then apply markings at least 6 feet apart in each location indicating where individuals may sit or stand.

4. The County will measure each courtroom and forward those measurements to each judge. Each individual judge will then work with county staff to apply markings at least 6 feet apart in each location indicating where individuals may sit or stand.
5. The County will place signage, in English and Spanish, about the social distancing policy throughout the courthouse. At a minimum, signage will be placed at the entrance, outside of restrooms, hallways, and common areas to inform individuals about appropriate social distancing.
6. No elevators exist at the Juvenile Justice Center.
7. Each restroom has been evaluated to determine the appropriate capacity to ensure social distancing and the maximum capacity has been posted on each restroom door. (**1 person in each restroom at the same time**)
8. Public common areas, including breakrooms and snackrooms, have been closed to the public.

#### *Gallery*

9. The maximum number of persons permitted in the gallery of each courtroom has been determined and posted. ***Observation of a particular court proceeding may be accomplished remotely from home or by accessing one of the non-secure remote access points in the Juvenile Justice Facility.*** The maximum capacity of the courtroom and all remote access points will be monitored and enforced by court staff and Bailiff.
10. The gallery of the courtroom has been marked to identify appropriate social distancing in the seating. Seating is limited to every other row.

#### *Well*

11. In each courtroom, the counsel tables, witness stand, judge's bench, and clerk, court reporter, and bailiff seating have been arranged in such a way so that there is social distancing of at least 6 feet between each space.

#### **Hygiene**

1. Hand sanitizer dispensers have been placed at the entrances to the building, outside of the courtroom, Remote Access Points and outside of bathrooms.
2. Tissues have been placed near the door of the courtroom, at counsel tables, at the witness stand, on the judges' benches, at Remote Access Points and in the hallways. Additionally, the local bar associations will be requested to recommend that attorneys bring personal hand sanitizer dispensers and travel-sized tissue packs for personal use when at the courthouse.
3. The Department of State Health Service's "Stop the Spread of Germs Flyer" has been posted in multiple locations on each floor of the court building.

#### **Screening**

1. When individuals attempt to enter the Juvenile Justice Center Court Building, Juvenile Staff or Sheriff's Deputy will ask the individuals if they are feeling feverish; have a cough, shortness of breath, or difficulty breathing; or have been in close contact with a person who is confirmed



to have COVID-19. Individuals who indicate yes to any of these questions will be refused admittance to the court building.

2. When individuals attempt to enter the court building, Juvenile Services Staff or Sheriff's Deputy will use an infrared thermometer to determine the temperature of the individual. Individuals whose temperature equals or exceeds 99.6°F will be refused admittance to the court building. If the individual believes their temperature is elevated due to outside weather conditions, the individual may be retested after waiting for fifteen minutes to cool down.
3. Juveniles appearing in court will be screened for symptoms of COVID-19 and have their temperature taken prior to their scheduled time. Inmates with symptoms or a temperature equal to or above 99.6°F will not be admitted into the courtroom.
4. Staff who are screening individuals entering the court building will be provided personal protective equipment, including gloves, hand sanitizer, and masks.
5. The Williamson County Public Information Office will publicize the screening policy through social media and press release to traditional media outlets with the intent of increasing public awareness.
6. The screening policy will be placed on the official county website.

### **Face Coverings**

1. Face Coverings will be required to be worn at all times by all individuals entering publicly accessible areas of the Juvenile Justice Center Court Building including but not limited to, courtrooms, reception areas, public restrooms, hallways, and other spaces used to interact with the public, at all times regardless of whether anyone from the public is present.
  - For clarity, a Face Covering is not required when a person is in a personal office (a single room) when others outside of that person's household are not present as long as the public does not regularly visit the room. By way of example and without limitation, a person working at the Juvenile Justice Center Court Building is not required to wear a Face Covering if that individual is in a space not regularly visited by the public, but that individual must put on a Face Covering, when being visited by a member of the public, and anywhere members of the public are regularly present.
2. Individuals will be encouraged to bring cloth face coverings with them, but if the individual does not have a cloth face covering, a disposable face mask will be provided.
3. Notwithstanding anything herein to the contrary, pursuant to current CDC guidance, children under two years old, people with breathing problems and people who are incapacitated or otherwise unable to remove the mask without assistance will not be requested or directed to wear a face covering regardless of the space of separation available between individuals.
4. In the event a person refuses to wear a face covering, admittance to the Williamson County Juvenile Justice Center will be denied in order to ensure compliance with the Emergency Orders issued by the Supreme Court of Texas and Court of Criminal Appeals, and with the guidance issued by the Office of Court Administration.
5. Individuals with conditions that may inhibit them from wearing a face covering safely, or who may not be able to effectively communicate through a face covering in a court setting may be excepted from wearing a face covering. This may include, but is not limited to individuals who:

- Cannot breathe safely with a mask.
  - Due to a behavioral health diagnosis, are unable wear a mask.
  - Rely on lip-reading to communicate with others.
  - Require supplemental oxygen to breathe.
6. As used in the Operating Plan, a “face covering” means a covering made of cloth, fabric, or other soft or permeable material, without holes, that covers only the nose and mouth and surrounding areas of the lower face. A covering that hides or obscures the wearer’s eyes or forehead is not a face covering. Examples of Face Coverings include a scarf or bandana; a neck gaiter; a homemade covering made from a t-shirt, sweatshirt, or towel, held on with rubber bands or otherwise; or a mask, which need not be medical grade. A face covering may be factory-made or may be handmade and improvised from ordinary household materials. The face covering should be comfortable, so that the wearer can breathe comfortably through the nose and does not have to adjust it frequently, so as to avoid touching the face.
  7. The face coverings are considered an article of clothing. Individual judges at their discretion may exclude a participant from the courtroom for inappropriate messaging on the face covering.
  8. Information about how to wear and clean face coverings may be found at the website of Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/diy-cloth-face-coverings.html>.
  9. Signs will be posted reminding Juvenile Justice Center visitors of the requirement that they wear a Face Covering while inside of or waiting in line to enter the Justice Center.
  10. The intent of these guidelines is to ensure that – subject to certain specified and limited exceptions-all people who are visiting or working at the Juvenile Justice Center wear a Face Covering to reduce the likelihood that they may transmit or receive the COVID-19 virus. The hope is that these guidelines will help reduce the spread of the COVID-19 virus and mitigate the impact of the virus on members of the public and the justice system for those in need of efficient and fair justice.
  11. The use of a mask does not replace important social distancing measures. All individuals must continue to maintain more than 6 feet of distance from other people; wash hands regularly with soap and water for at least 20 seconds; and stay home when sick.

## **Cleaning**

1. Court building cleaning staff will clean the public and non-public restrooms after each use.
2. Court building cleaning staff will clean the common areas of the court building so that common spaces are cleaned at least four times per day or upon request. The common spaces include all services touched by individuals, including push bars, door knobs, and chairs. Cleaning staff will clean remote access points between individual users.
3. Court building cleaning staff will ensure the courtroom is cleaned between each hearing. Adequate supplies and time shall be provided in order to allow for cleaning to take place, at a minimum, at 30-minute intervals and between in-person hearings. In the event a hearing is scheduled for more than 30 minutes, the Court will break in order to ensure cleaning takes place.

4. Court building cleaning staff have been provided cleaning supplies shown to be effective with this coronavirus.
5. Court building cleaning staff have been trained on proper cleaning techniques and provided appropriate personal protective equipment.
6. The water fountains have been made inaccessible.

### **Other**

The County has begun the installation of sneeze guards in the courtrooms, which will be placed between the bench and the well, between the witness stand, the Judge and the well, the litigant tables and the well, and other necessary areas as needed.

### **Summonses**

Summons will be served during this process with limited physical contact precautions in place. The summons officer will contact the family and advise that a summons has been issued for them to appear in court. They will ask the family COVID-19 screening questions and if anyone has had a fever or has been feeling sick. Should any answers be yes, the summons will be e-mailed to the family and the officer will review the paperwork and answer any questions on the phone.

If the family reports no symptoms, the Summons Officer will go the home of the family. They will knock on the door and stick the summons in the door. The Summons Officer will step six feet back so the family can come to the door. From the six-foot distance, the Summons Officer will explain the summons and attached paperwork and answer any questions they may have.

The officer will be provided gloves, a mask and hand sanitizer to utilize during and after any in-person contact.

### **Witnesses**

When possible, witnesses will testify from their own remote location in order to limit the number of people in the courtroom and using other Remote Access Points inside the Juvenile Justice Center. Should a witness not have technology to join a remote hearing from home, they will report to the Juvenile Justice Center to utilize a Remote Access Point as outlined above. They will be subject to the same screening process will take place as noted above.

### **Confined Youth**

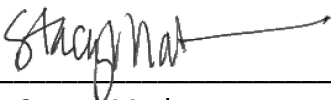
Youth who are confined in the secure juvenile facility will attend and testify from a remote location inside the facility, which may not necessarily be in the court room.

### **Preparation for Hearings**

Juvenile Services staff will work to coordinate with the prosecutor and defense attorney to assure all paperwork is completed ahead of time and cases are ready to be heard at their scheduled time.

All judges with courtrooms in the court building regarding this Operating Plan have been consulted. In developing the plan, Dr. Lori Palazzo, the Williamson County and Cities Local Public Health Authority, County Judge Bill Gravell, Dale Butler, Director of Facilities-Williamson County and Shantelle Brannon,

Deputy Director Williamson County Office of Emergency Management have been consulted - documentation of which is attached to this plan. I will ensure that the judges of courts with courtrooms in the court building covered by this Operating Plan conduct proceedings consistent with the plan.



Date June 8, 2020

Hon. Stacey Mathews

277<sup>th</sup> Judicial District Court serving as Juvenile Judge for Williamson County



Date June 8, 2020

Hon. Betsy F. Lambeth

425<sup>th</sup> Judicial District Court

Local Administrative District Judge

EMAIL FROM  
DR. PALAZZO AFTER FINAL  
REVIEW OF THE PLAN  
JUNE 18TH

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**From:** Lori Palazzo <lori.palazzo@wilco.org>  
**Sent:** Monday, June 8, 2020 11:00 AM  
**To:** Betsy Lambeth <blambeth@wilco.org>  
**Cc:** Bill Gravell <bgravell@wilco.org>  
**Subject:** RE: COVID Operating Plan FINAL.

I approve Judge Lambeth.

**Lori L Palazzo MD**  
**Medical Director, Local Health Authority WCCHD**  
**355 Texas Ave**  
**Round Rock, Texas 78664**  
**512-248-3250/Phone**  
**512-248-3255/Fax**

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**From:** Betsy Lambeth <blambeth@wilco.org>  
**Sent:** Monday, June 8, 2020 10:54 AM  
**To:** Lori Palazzo <lori.palazzo@wilco.org>  
**Cc:** Bill Gravell <bgravell@wilco.org>  
**Subject:** COVID Operating Plan FINAL.

Dr. Palazzo,

I made the two changes highlighted. One allows for the use of a QR code to enter the building and answer questions instead of the use of an iPad. The other allows courts to switch days under certain conditions. I highlighted the changes. Please approve via email.

HON. BETSY F. LAMBETH  
Judge, 425th Judicial District Court  
Williamson County, Texas  
512-943-3380



*Board Certified – Family Law*  
*Board Certified – Child Welfare Law*  
*Member – Texas Academy of Family Law Specialists*  
*Member – The College of the State Bar of Texas*



EMAIL FROM  
COUNTY JUDGE BILL GRAVELL  
AFTER FINAL  
REVIEW OF THE PLAN  
JUNE 3RD

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**From:** Bill Gravell <bgravell@wilco.org>  
**Sent:** Wednesday, June 3, 2020 10:57 AM  
**To:** Betsy Lambeth <blambeth@wilco.org>; Lori Palazzo <lori.palazzo@wilco.org>  
**Subject:** RE: COVID Operating Plan FINAL DRAFT.June 3.11am

Judge Lambeth  
The plan looks great! "Thank You", for your hard work.

Bill Gravell Jr.  
Williamson County Judge  
(512)943-1577  
[Bgravell@wilco.org](mailto:Bgravell@wilco.org)

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**From:** Betsy Lambeth <blambeth@wilco.org>  
**Sent:** Wednesday, June 3, 2020 10:46 AM  
**To:** Lori Palazzo <lori.palazzo@wilco.org>; Bill Gravell <bgravell@wilco.org>  
**Subject:** COVID Operating Plan FINAL DRAFT.June 3.11am

Dr Palazzo and Judge Gravell,

Attached is the revised draft of the Operating Plan. The only change made from the previous version is the change of the hearing intervals to 30 minutes as per Dr. Palazzo's recommendation. If you could both send me an email approving this plan I would appreciate it.

Thank you.

HON. BETSY F. LAMBETH  
Judge, 425<sup>th</sup> Judicial District Court  
Williamson County, Texas  
512-943-3380



*Board Certified – Family Law*  
*Board Certified – Child Welfare Law*  
*Member – Texas Academy of Family Law Specialists*  
*Member – The College of the State Bar of Texas*





EMAIL FROM  
SHANTELE BRANNON AFTER  
REVIEW OF THE PLAN  
JUNE 2ND

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**From:** Shantelle Brannon <shantelle.brannon@wilco.org>  
**Sent:** Tuesday, June 2, 2020 8:25 AM  
**To:** Betsy Lambeth <blambeth@wilco.org>  
**Cc:** Bill Gravell <bgravell@wilco.org>; Billy Ray Stubblefield <bstubblefield@wilco.org>; Michael Shoe <michael.shoe@wilco.org>  
**Subject:** RE: JUSTICE CENTER OPERATING PLAN

Good morning Judge Lambeth—

I miss your bright and shining face too!

Michael and I have reviewed the plan and have provided suggestions below:

- Add acronym page. Possibly include definitions for certain terms and include what are the responsibilities of certain departments i.e. Williamson County & Cities Health District (as the local health authority), Office of Emergency Management (OEM), etc.
- Add a Table of Contents
- Single-page document rather than 2-sided (if printed)
- Save as a PDF, after securing necessary signatures
- Page 3 – what does CSCD stand for? CPS? [I think CPS stands for child protective services, but did not want to assume.]
- Page 5 – CDC [I think CDC stands for Center for Disease Control, but did not want to assume.]

We both felt the plan was not restrictive and will work perfectly for the needs of the Justice Center.

Have a great rest of your week.

Shantelle

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**From:** Betsy Lambeth <blambeth@wilco.org>  
**Sent:** Friday, May 29, 2020 12:23 PM  
**To:** Michael Shoe <michael.shoe@wilco.org>; Shantelle Brannon <shantelle.brannon@wilco.org>  
**Cc:** Bill Gravell <bgravell@wilco.org>; Billy Ray Stubblefield <bstubblefield@wilco.org>  
**Subject:** JUSTICE CENTER OPERATING PLAN

Dear Michael and Shantelle,

Miss seeing your bright shiny faces! Attached is the Operating Plan for the Justice Center that I have been tasked with preparing. The Texas Supreme Court has mandated that I speak with Judge Gravell and Dr. P about the plan. I also thought it would be a good idea for Emergency Management to have a look at it. Would one of you please review the plan and let me know if there is anything we have left out, or even if you think we are being too overly restrictive and protective.

Thanks so much!

TRANSCRIPT OF MEETING  
WITH DR. PALAZZO AND KEY  
STAKEHOLDERS  
MAY 15TH

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OFFICIAL REPORTER'S RECORD

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VIRTUAL WEBEX WEBINAR

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On the 15th day of May, 2020, the following remote proceedings came on to be heard before the Honorable Betsy Lambeth, Judge presiding, held in Georgetown, Williamson County, Texas;

Proceedings reported by machine shorthand.

1 (Remote Proceedings Begin 10:10am)

2 JUDGE BETSY LAMBETH: First of all, thank you  
3 for being here especially on such short notice. As you all  
4 know, on May the 5th the Texas Supreme Court and the Office of  
5 Court Administration released orders requiring a local  
6 administrative district judge to prepare an operating plan for  
7 the opening of all courthouses in the county. This includes  
8 the justice center, the juvenile services building and each of  
9 the JP courtrooms. This is a very heavy responsibility for us  
10 all, we are very different from other businesses and retail.  
11 We order people to appear in our building and therefore, must  
12 do everything in our power to make sure the environment is  
13 safe.

14 The OCA set out specific actions that I must  
15 document as this operating plan is completed. Upon receiving  
16 the guidelines, I read all of the guidelines and all of the  
17 footnotes. On Monday, May the 11th, I requested the assistance  
18 of Judge Staudt in preparing a plan for the JP courts. On  
19 Wednesday, Judge Mathews offered the aid of the juvenile  
20 services department in preparing the plan for the juvenile  
21 center. On Thursday, May the 13th, Judge McMaster,  
22 Judge Gravell and I met with Dr. Lori Palazzo which is one of  
23 the requirements set out in the guidelines. At Judge  
24 McMaster's recommendation, we hastily scheduled this meeting so  
25 that each of you could hear the very important information

1 directly from Dr. P.

2 I am in the process of forming committees to  
3 address each of the different required areas of the plan. This  
4 is going to be a cooperative effort and I want to make certain  
5 that everybody understands that. It is my intent to be open  
6 and transparent about all of the processes. As you work on  
7 your committees, I request that you document in writing the  
8 content of each of the meetings and the result. That is why I  
9 have my court reporter present today taking a transcript of  
10 this meeting. This documentation is required to be part of the  
11 plan that is submitted to Judge Stubblefield and the OCA. If  
12 you have a casual conversation with someone else about ideas,  
13 it's not necessary to document the content of those discussions  
14 but I would make a notation that the conversation occurred.

15 Please, as we go through this what we're going  
16 to do...this is going to be very organic, there's been very  
17 little preparation for this. Dr. Palazzo is going to basically  
18 give us an overview of the medical information and the data we  
19 have in the county right now. We will then have an  
20 opportunity, you all can post the questions and I will ask her  
21 those questions. No one can speak other than Dr. Palazzo,  
22 myself, and maybe Rory, our IT guru. The purpose is for us to  
23 be very focused and for the questions to be presented. You  
24 should be able to see the question and answer panel to the  
25 right and I believe everyone can see the questions as they are

1 posted.

2                   With that, Dr. Palazzo, could you give us an  
3 update? First of all, I want to make sure that everybody  
4 understands; Dr. P, you and I haven't talked in advance of  
5 this, the first time we met about this information was  
6 yesterday; is that correct?

7                   DR. LORI PALAZZO: That's correct, Judge.

8                   JUDGE BETSY LAMBETH: And I haven't asked you to  
9 deliver a specific opinion. Your opinion is based on the data  
10 that you're receiving in your medical opinion; is that correct?

11                   DR. LORI PALAZZO: That is correct.

12                   JUDGE BETSY LAMBETH: Ok. If you could please  
13 provide us with a general update of the coronavirus cases in  
14 Williamson County including whether there is an uptick, a slow  
15 down, what the status is.

16                   DR. LORI PALAZZO: Thank you, Judge. If  
17 everybody can mute their computers, it'll make it easier for me  
18 because I'm getting echos as I talk. Nice to meet all you guys  
19 today and I'm glad to be here and to help out as much as I can.  
20 First of all, I'd like to say a few facts and there are a few  
21 facts regarding this coronavirus because there's so many things  
22 that are unknown and as you all know as well as I do, every day  
23 we hear different things from the authorities, from the CDC,  
24 from the WHO, from the President, from Dr. Fauci who is  
25 supposed to be the expert...things change on a daily basis but

1 the things that we do know, especially here in Williamson  
2 County, is we're continuing to get cases. On our morning  
3 meeting this morning we saw that based on last month -- now in  
4 this month -- the number of daily cases has doubled. Last  
5 month it seemed like we had a lot but it was based on a cluster  
6 in one nursing home. This month it's not nursing home  
7 clusters, it's community spread and it's people out in the  
8 community that are testing positive.

9           Our hospital cases are also going up. We were  
10 averaging 8 to 10 in the hospital at a time and now we're  
11 anywhere from 12 to today's total is going to be 15 because we  
12 had several new admissions this morning. That may even  
13 increase. Our deaths have gone up, those are mainly nursing  
14 home deaths because of that one nursing home but we do have  
15 some critically ill people in the hospital on vents that are  
16 not related to the nursing home and these are people -- which  
17 is scary to me -- not 65 and older but these are people in that  
18 50-to-60 year old range and they're not doing well.

19           The cases are going up, the hospital cases are  
20 going up, we're seeing community spread and this virus is not  
21 going away. When will it go away? I have no idea. When will  
22 it be safe? I can't answer that. The other thing we have to  
23 deal with is that these tests that are out there are not the  
24 best. We're seeing a lot of false negatives with the nasal  
25 swabs. The antibody test, we're seeing results all over the



1 place and now the FDA has clamped down and requiring all the  
2 manufacturers to prove the accuracy of these tests because  
3 again, they're giving people a false sense of security. When  
4 you get an antibody test, all it can tell us is you've been  
5 exposed to this virus, it doesn't tell us whether you're  
6 infectious or not or either whether you're immune because we're  
7 seeing cases upon cases of people getting sick, getting better,  
8 and then getting sick again.

9                   That whole concept of herd immunity, we don't  
10 even know if we can apply that to this virus because it's not  
11 acting like regular coronaviruses have done in the past so it's  
12 surprising us every day and now I don't know if you guys are  
13 aware but the children are getting affected. It's going across  
14 the country with young children who have tested positive for  
15 COVID, been completely asymptomatic so we're thinking *oh,*  
16 *that's great, we don't have to worry about them,* and now two to  
17 three, maybe four weeks later, these same kids are coming down  
18 with an inflammatory process that's affecting their blood  
19 vessels and their hearts. Some of them are ending up in the  
20 ICU or on the ventilators. Thank God we haven't seen that yet  
21 in Williamson County but I'm worried we may. It's spreading  
22 across the country so even though we have the orders to slowly  
23 open up, we're still in my opinion in a very dangerous  
24 situation and we're still at risk and we still have to be  
25 vigilant.

1                   Going forward from there, what they're saying as  
2 far as the CDC goes with the small businesses opening up is to  
3 be extremely careful and to do things as remotely as possibly.  
4 I think this is applicable to the courtrooms and the  
5 courthouses. I was able to look at your site where they said  
6 guidance for all court proceedings and that's what their big  
7 thing is, try to do everything remotely. I know there's a push  
8 for people coming in and getting their cases in front of judges  
9 and sometimes you can't do things remotely. In that case, if  
10 you have to open up and there's no other way to do it, you have  
11 to be really careful. You have to test people at the doors  
12 coming in, you have to ask them symptoms, you have to test  
13 temperature checks, you have to mandate them wearing face masks  
14 and you have to have hand sanitizer there. You need to limit  
15 the number of people in the rooms at any given time.

16                   Liberty Hill and Taylor municipal courts have  
17 sent me already their plans and their templates for reopening  
18 and they said two in a room at a time. I like that, two in a  
19 room. The less there is, the less chance for spreading of this  
20 disease. Surfaces have to be wiped down frequently during the  
21 day because that's something we still don't know about how long  
22 this virus stays on the surfaces.

23                   JUDGE BETSY LAMBETH: Dr. P, I'm going to  
24 interrupt you just real quickly. When you say *two in a room*,  
25 I'm assuming that that is exclusive of the staff. What if

1 there's five staff members in the room; can you address that?

2 DR. LORI PALAZZO: Right, and here's the deal...  
3 you have to do the social distancing of six feet but if it's an  
4 enclosed space and they're in there for a prolonged period of  
5 time, we still have to worry about transmission of that disease  
6 because the masks, even though they say they're protecting  
7 others from you, they're not N-95 masks which means there will  
8 be some transmission. Yes, it will be less, but if you're in a  
9 room with five, six, ten people and you're in there for an hour  
10 even though you all may be wearing a mask, I don't feel  
11 comfortable that there's not transmission unless you're also  
12 wearing N-95 masks that you've been fit tested for to make sure  
13 there's no transmission. The cloth masks are for quick  
14 interactions in enclosed spaces, not prolonged interactions.  
15 I'm trying to think of anything else. Maybe some questions,  
16 Judge? The bottom line here, guys, is it's still out there,  
17 we're still getting cases, it's still dangerous.

18 JUDGE BETSY LAMBETH: Ok, thank you. Can you  
19 tell us any specific recommendations that you have for meetings  
20 of large groups such as churches or courthouses? I know  
21 yesterday we talked about your concern about enclosed spaces  
22 for a long period of time and 15 minutes is one thing but  
23 anything beyond 50, the risk of infection is fourfold. Can you  
24 address that, please.

25 DR. LORI PALAZZO: Yes. So I know that some

1 people want to open up churches and they're saying that they're  
2 going to try to do the six feet social distancing. That's  
3 great but you're in an enclosed space for a prolonged period of  
4 time and that means you're all breathing that same air. Again,  
5 I think it goes back to we're getting a false sense of security  
6 wearing a cloth mask. They're not good enough to be there for  
7 a prolonged period of time and protect you and we've got to  
8 remember that this virus -- this is something we do know --  
9 that the viruses shed a lot of the times when people are  
10 asymptomatic. They have no symptoms whatsoever and they're  
11 shedding virus and then three days later they're really sick  
12 and they end up in the hospital and then we have to worry about  
13 that vulnerable population: The diabetics, the age over 65,  
14 the immunocompromised and the people who have the elevated  
15 BMIs, the morbidly obese or even what I'm seeing in the  
16 hospital with just the obese, not even morbidly obese. Those  
17 with underlying diabetes, that's all vulnerable populations  
18 that not only get this but get it in a very severe manner and  
19 end up in the hospital and lots of times on a vent. So my  
20 advice is if you can avoid being in a situation like that, by  
21 all means, avoid it, especially if you're in a vulnerable  
22 situation.

23 I personally think that churches should still do  
24 their services remotely. I know we all want to be with each  
25 other and we want to have that community spirit but at this

1 time, I personally as a physician, think it's too dangerous  
2 even with the six feet of social distancing. Even with the  
3 cloth mask to be in an enclosed space for longer than fifteen,  
4 twenty minutes you increase your risk of catching that disease.

5 JUDGE BETSY LAMBETH: Dr. P, I've gotten the  
6 fire code capacity of each of the courtrooms and for the most  
7 part they're somewhere around 115 to 130. When you have that  
8 big of a courtroom what is your recommendation about the number  
9 of people including staff that can safely be present in that  
10 courtroom for an hour or more?

11 DR. LORI PALAZZO: How many staff are you  
12 talking about?

13 JUDGE BETSY LAMBETH: Probably minimal staff  
14 would be two. I'm thinking the court reporter could be remote  
15 and the judge would be there as well as a bailiff.

16 DR. LORI PALAZZO: So three from the courtroom  
17 and then what would be the amount in the courtroom from the  
18 people who are coming for the trial?

19 JUDGE BETSY LAMBETH: That's what I'm asking  
20 you; what would be the maximum amount of people that can be in  
21 the courtroom exclusive of the judge and the bailiff?

22 DR. LORI PALAZZO: I can't give a definite  
23 number, Judge. I can just say that the more people there are,  
24 the more increase of the risk. I know that your guys' guidance  
25 says don't even think about jury trials until the middle of the

1 summer and I know that that's how Travis County is going so my  
2 recommendation would be everything remote. If they have to  
3 come in, they come in even more than six feet of separation and  
4 as quick as possible to have the proceedings done but to come  
5 up with an exact number, I don't know that. I don't think  
6 anybody does.

7 JUDGE BETSY LAMBETH: So the longer they're in  
8 the courtroom...

9 DR. LORI PALAZZO: You increase the risk,  
10 correct.

11 JUDGE BETSY LAMBETH: Ok. Talk to us about the  
12 common areas like the hallways and bathrooms.

13 DR. LORI PALAZZO: The bathrooms are very risky  
14 because of the surfaces and because of the virus that can  
15 remain on surfaces, the counter, the sink handles, the  
16 doorknobs, the doors going into the stalls. It just came out  
17 recently this past week about they're still not sure about the  
18 virus being in urine or in feces but they do know that flushing  
19 a toilet with the lid up can distribute those particles up into  
20 the air so they're advising to close the toilet lid but again,  
21 people don't have gloves on and they're touching anything in  
22 there and they don't wash their hands right away and they have  
23 that mask off to scratch their nose...that puts them at risk so  
24 for those common areas, disinfecting all day long constantly is  
25 what I would recommend and using a product that is specific for

1 COVID-19 which I believe the county has and has been using.

2 JUDGE BETSY LAMBETH: Ok. Yesterday in our  
3 discussions you recommended that there be no more than five  
4 people in a courtroom widely spaced with mask mandatory; are  
5 you changing that?

6 DR. LORI PALAZZO: I mean, it's hard for me to  
7 give that...that's better than more people, you know? And if  
8 you have to have that many and you have a courtroom that could  
9 seat 120, those five people could be at the four corners of the  
10 room as far apart as possible but then again, remember, you're  
11 still in an enclosed space so the longer you guys are in there,  
12 if anybody is symptomatic or asymptomatic that has that virus,  
13 that virus is staying in that room so the longer you're in  
14 there, the increased risk of you getting that virus. Like I  
15 said, unless you have the N-95 mask on and we don't have enough  
16 N-95s to equip everybody that comes into a courtroom nor do we  
17 have the man power to test everybody for N-95s.

18 JUDGE BETSY LAMBETH: Talk to us about the stuff  
19 that we're hearing in the news about the air conditioning  
20 system and the effects of recirculated air.

21 DR. LORI PALAZZO: Yeah, well, you know, that's  
22 something that they're looking at and they're worried about in  
23 the enclosed space and if you're on that same system, that air  
24 could be coming in and could be possibly infecting you and  
25 they're saying about having separate systems for the air

1 conditioning. The thing is, personally, I think we're trying  
2 to open up too soon and we're trying to -- I understand the  
3 need to have the trials, I understand the need to give people  
4 due process but I think like I said yesterday, we have to start  
5 thinking out of the box and trying to use technology more and  
6 trying to get around people being in enclosed spaces for long  
7 periods of time.

8 JUDGE BETSY LAMBETH: Talk to us about screening  
9 of both employees and attendees to the courthouse.

10 DR. LORI PALAZZO: It has to be done every day  
11 when they're coming in. That should be a temperature check, a  
12 symptom check, they need to make sure that they have a mask on,  
13 that there's hand sanitizer available for them. Anybody with a  
14 temp of 99.6 -- and, yes, it has gotten lower and that's  
15 because about 30, maybe 35 percent of people with COVID do not  
16 have a temperature and yet there's a high percentage who they  
17 only have that low-grade fever of 99.6 so we've lowered that  
18 standard at the health district from 100.4 to 99.6 to try to be  
19 more careful so if they have a temperature of that they're not  
20 allowed in. If they have any symptoms -- and of course the CDC  
21 recently has increased that list of symptoms to look for  
22 because now it's not only respiratory, it's GI, it's affecting  
23 the nervous system, it's affecting the kidneys. So there's a  
24 list on the CDC website of all the different symptoms you need  
25 to ask and then the most important one is have you had exposure



1 to someone who has tested positive?

2                   We're finding daily when we do our phone calls  
3 and monitoring that we have family members who are going out  
4 into the workforce and going out into the community and they  
5 have somebody back home who has tested COVID positive so no  
6 matter how hard we're trying, our control orders, deputies at  
7 the door, people are still being resistant and a lot of it is  
8 because these people...if they don't work then they don't get  
9 paid and they're asymptomatic, they don't feel bad but they're  
10 probably shedding virus. So those are the questions you would  
11 ask and the mandated face mask, if they don't have one, I  
12 suggest the court have face masks to give them because they  
13 shouldn't be allowed in without face masks.

14                   JUDGE BETSY LAMBETH: Ok. Looking at the CDC  
15 guidelines in the President's guidelines for reopening America,  
16 are we seeing a downward or upward trajectory of influenza-like  
17 illnesses within the past 14 days?

18                   DR. LORI PALAZZO: Influenza we've seen downward  
19 at the health district.

20                   JUDGE BETSY LAMBETH: Ok. Is there --

21                   DR. LORI PALAZZO: This isn't flu season right  
22 now.

23                   JUDGE BETSY LAMBETH: Ok. Is there a downward  
24 or upward trajectory of COVID-like cases reported within the  
25 last 14 days?

1 DR. LORI PALAZZO: Upward, going up.

2 JUDGE BETSY LAMBETH: Ok. Is there a downward  
3 or upward trajectory of documented cases within the last 14  
4 days?

5 DR. LORI PALAZZO: Upward.

6 JUDGE BETSY LAMBETH: Is there an upward or  
7 downward trajectory of positive tests as a percent to total  
8 tests within the 14-day period?

9 DR. LORI PALAZZO: Actually, we've just seen  
10 that within the past three days with our drive-thru testing.  
11 At the beginning there were a lot of negatives and now we're  
12 popping positives every single day. We had four I think on  
13 Monday, five on Wednesday, I think five or six Thursday. We're  
14 popping positives now with the drive-thru which is really  
15 scaring me because at first with all the negatives I was kind  
16 of cautiously optimistic but not anymore and the rate of  
17 positives that we're seeing is the same that we're seeing from  
18 the CDC in our area which is about 7 percent of the testing.

19 Now, as we increase our testing I'm curious how  
20 many more positives we're going to see and now that the family  
21 emergency room is testing asymptomatic people, I'm curious as  
22 to what kind of positives we're going to see there. What  
23 you've got to remember too is that with this test, this nasal  
24 test, there is a high percentage about 30 to 35 percent of  
25 false negatives. That means people with symptoms getting

1 tested and the test comes back negative and yet they've got the  
2 classic symptoms of COVID and the CDC just this week released  
3 something new saying that we're going to start calling these  
4 people probable cases and treat them as positives, so we have a  
5 lot of those.

6 JUDGE BETSY LAMBETH: Are hospitals treating all  
7 patients without crisis care?

8 DR. LORI PALAZZO: Without what care?

9 JUDGE BETSY LAMBETH: Crisis care, that's just  
10 in the CDC guidelines.

11 DR. LORI PALAZZO: I don't know how the  
12 hospitals -- I know that the hospitals are treating people as  
13 probable COVID cases and even if they test negative they're  
14 isolating and treating them as if they were COVID. They're  
15 ruling out other things but they're doing every test known to  
16 man and everything else is coming back negative so you can feel  
17 pretty secure it's COVID.

18 JUDGE BETSY LAMBETH: Do you believe there is a  
19 robust testing program in place for at-risk health care workers  
20 including the antibody testing?

21 DR. LORI PALAZZO: I'm not impressed with the  
22 antibody testing. The nasopharyngeal swabs for our health care  
23 workers, I think that we have that at least in Williamson  
24 County. What I've been seeing is that they're able to get  
25 tested. I know with our drive-thru we are not allowing COVID

1 positive health care workers to go back to work without two  
2 negative tests and completely asymptomatic for three days and  
3 ten days since the onset. That used to be seven days and now  
4 it's ten days since the onset of their symptoms. I'm not  
5 liking what I'm seeing and some health care workers are testing  
6 positive again. So yes, we have enough at least in Williamson  
7 County. The hospitals, I checked in with all of them, they  
8 have enough to check their workers and we have enough to check  
9 the workers and chiropractor's offices, dental offices, the  
10 nursing homes. We're doing that daily but the sad thing is  
11 that we're finding some of them are still positive ten to  
12 fifteen days after their original symptoms and some of them are  
13 getting sick again.

14 JUDGE BETSY LAMBETH: One of the questions from  
15 Judge Arnold is -- it's kind of appropriate right here; what  
16 benchmarks are you looking at in terms of number of cases,  
17 hospitalizations and deaths in the community to determine  
18 whether and when it would be appropriate to resume live  
19 courtroom hearings?

20 DR. LORI PALAZZO: What we're basing it on is  
21 we're going to look both at Williamson County and Travis County  
22 and that's because we're so close. You just have to go across  
23 the street in some areas and you're in Travis and people flow  
24 back and forth, they work in one county and live in another.  
25 We're going to look for a 14-day decline in not only active

1 cases in the community but a decline in hospital cases and we  
2 want that to be in both Williamson and Travis before we feel  
3 comfortable.

4 JUDGE BETSY LAMBETH: How would you recommend  
5 handling paper documents that come from outside of the office  
6 by customers and other county offices to be filed in the  
7 district clerk's office? And I'm assuming that we don't have  
8 the ability to do e-filing, I'm assuming that these are  
9 official documents; how would you recommend that those  
10 documents be sanitized?

11 DR. LORI PALAZZO: They've talked about that  
12 that they're not sure how long that virus stays on paper  
13 products like that. To me, out of an over abundance of caution  
14 I would recommend using gloves and not doing that with your  
15 hand. I don't know of any good way you could disinfect paper  
16 and not destroy what's on the paper or what's on that text so I  
17 think the best way to do it would be to use gloves.

18 JUDGE BETSY LAMBETH: Do you have a  
19 recommendation, like for the district clerk's office, it's very  
20 difficult for them to social distance with the number of people  
21 that are in there. Do you recommend that they reduce to 25  
22 percent capacity or what kind of guidelines can you give them?

23 DR. LORI PALAZZO: They need to reduce so they  
24 can actually do the social distancing. If they can't, they  
25 shouldn't be working. Whatever kind of decrease they have to

1 do so social distancing is available to do they need to do,  
2 whatever that percentage happens to be.

3 JUDGE BETSY LAMBETH: Ok. One of the questions  
4 that was submitted previously had to do with the hallways and  
5 you and I and Judge McMaster yesterday discussed -- I was very  
6 concerned about these common areas, the hallways, but from your  
7 description, just casual passing is not a concern in these  
8 common areas, it's all about touching the surfaces; is that  
9 correct?

10 DR. LORI PALAZZO: That's correct. Now, if  
11 you've got people having conversations in the hallway, that's a  
12 whole different story but if you just have the flow of traffic  
13 and people are six feet apart and not standing there talking  
14 and telling them how their day is going, that's fine, but if  
15 you have clusters in that hallway having conversations, that's  
16 a whole different story.

17 JUDGE BETSY LAMBETH: Ok. Do you recommend that  
18 we have limits on the public restrooms to only one person at a  
19 time?

20 DR. LORI PALAZZO: Yes, I think that would be a  
21 great idea.

22 JUDGE BETSY LAMBETH: I'm assuming that you  
23 recommend that in between hearings or in between client visits  
24 with the office that the surfaces be disinfected?

25 DR. LORI PALAZZO: That's correct, Judge.

1 JUDGE BETSY LAMBETH: Regarding those  
2 guidelines, Judge Arnold had another question. What levels in  
3 terms of cases, hospitalizations and deaths; is it a number or  
4 just looking, is it going up or going down?

5 DR. LORI PALAZZO: Right, it's not a number,  
6 it's looking at the trend and we want to continue to see a  
7 decline of cases consistently because the cases go up and down  
8 every day and a lot of that is based on who is coming in for  
9 testing and when we're getting the results back. Some people  
10 got tested a week or two ago and we're just getting the results  
11 today so cases vary day by day. That's why we decided as a  
12 health district to allow 14 days and to see the decline be  
13 consistent for 14 days. Then that gives us a better idea of  
14 what's going on in the community and to have that be mirrored  
15 in Travis County as well.

16 JUDGE BETSY LAMBETH: I know one of the Justices  
17 of the Peace and Judge Gravell are really concerned about the  
18 restriction against evictions have been lifted and there's  
19 probably going to be a flood of eviction cases in the JP courts  
20 and then appealed to the county courts at law. Do you have any  
21 recommendations about how to manage those? I'm assuming it  
22 would be to do them one case at a time -- well, do them  
23 remotely if possible and if not, one case at a time and clean  
24 the courtrooms in between. Any other recommendations that you  
25 would have?

1 DR. LORI PALAZZO: No, that's perfect. Remotely  
2 if possible and then one at a time and disinfect after each  
3 case.

4 JUDGE BETSY LAMBETH: Ok. The other question  
5 was you're looking for a sustained decrease over a 14-day  
6 period, correct?

7 DR. LORI PALAZZO: Correct.

8 JUDGE BETSY LAMBETH: So that means if day 14  
9 there's suddenly an uptick then we start the 14 days over  
10 again?

11 DR. LORI PALAZZO: I would hope that wouldn't  
12 happen. I think that if we see that, we're going to have to  
13 investigate more closely and see what's going on. I would hope  
14 that we don't see that but with this virus, it surprises us  
15 every day, who knows.

16 JUDGE BETSY LAMBETH: Well, we're lawyers and we  
17 need specifics.

18 DR. LORI PALAZZO: Yeah, I know. My brother is  
19 a lawyer so I feel very comfortable with you guys.

20 JUDGE BETSY LAMBETH: Great. So I don't think  
21 -- oh, in regard to the elevators it would be kind of the same  
22 thing? These elevators are really small so I'm assuming just  
23 one person.

24 DR. LORI PALAZZO: I agree, one person and then  
25 a wipe down after that person gets out so you're going to have



1 to have dedicated staff all around that building, like maybe  
2 one person just for the restroom, one person just for the  
3 elevator, one person just for the hallway. Some of the other  
4 courts, Liberty Hill and Taylor, have five different people,  
5 one of them has three and that's their only duty is cleaning  
6 restrooms and cleaning elevators and cleaning hallways so there  
7 will have to be designated staff to be doing that all day long.

8 JUDGE BETSY LAMBETH: One of the questions from  
9 Judge Barker is from time to time she's going to need to have  
10 an essential hearing in person, a high-risk, high-need veteran  
11 with mental health needs. What time period for the hearing is  
12 best for her to conclude the hearing?

13 DR. LORI PALAZZO: What does she mean, like how  
14 long a duration?

15 JUDGE BETSY LAMBETH: Yeah, how long a duration  
16 for the hearing?

17 DR. LORI PALAZZO: The shorter the possible.  
18 The shorter she can make it the better so if she can keep it --  
19 right now we consider a high-risk contact to be somebody who  
20 has spent fifteen to twenty minutes with an active case. So  
21 anything above twenty minutes you've got to worry about that  
22 transmission. Some people are even stricter across the country  
23 and do ten minutes. I like the fifteen to twenty minute rule.  
24 I think that's more plausible and more common sense so if she  
25 can limit that courtroom appearance to twenty minutes or less

1 and have that spread out, minimal people, five in all corners  
2 of the courtroom, everybody wearing a mask, having their hands  
3 sanitized, everybody being screened appropriately before coming  
4 in, then that's the best she can do. The longer she goes over  
5 20 minutes, the increase of risk of transmission.

6 JUDGE BETSY LAMBETH: Another question about the  
7 14-day; do you mean a decrease each day or a lower amount on  
8 day 14 than day 1?

9 DR. LORI PALAZZO: A decrease each day.

10 JUDGE BETSY LAMBETH: Another question was are  
11 our offices ok with air circulation for staff to be sitting in  
12 the same room social distancing for the entire day?

13 DR. LORI PALAZZO: How many staff are in these  
14 rooms?

15 JUDGE BETSY LAMBETH: I'm going to guess three.

16 DR. LORI PALAZZO: Yeah, the whole day....that's  
17 hard. You would hope that they were screened and that they  
18 were truthful that they didn't have a family member that didn't  
19 have symptoms. As long as they're staying far away from each  
20 other and using the hand sanitizer, but there's still going to  
21 be risk. I can't tell you there won't be risk, there will  
22 still be risk in that room. There's risk every day and  
23 everywhere we go and if you can have that staff working  
24 remotely then that's the better thing to do.

25 JUDGE BETSY LAMBETH: Are there any other

1 questions I'm not seeing? Could you then, like you did  
2 yesterday, just kind of give us an overall summary of your  
3 recommendations?

4 DR. LORI PALAZZO: Sure. Cases are going up,  
5 hospital cases as well as community spread. My recommendation  
6 to the court system is everything and anything you can do  
7 remotely, please, do it remotely. If you have to and you've  
8 tried every other alternative and have to be in that  
9 courthouse, limit the staff and the people in those rooms to  
10 the bare minimum and limit the time to as fast as you can get  
11 in and out. Definitely using social distancing, mandate mask  
12 wearing, screen everybody coming in, clean every room, every  
13 area after a person has been there. Stay safe guys. I mean,  
14 it's tough out there.

15 We have that vulnerable population and that's  
16 something that I didn't say earlier. I think you need to make  
17 concessions or some kind of accommodations if you have to have  
18 some vulnerable-population-type person show up in person. You  
19 have to see if you can work around that because they're the  
20 people that end up dying from this disease so that's real  
21 important too. So if you have a case coming up or something  
22 that involves a vulnerable population, again over the age of  
23 65, an immunocompromised disease, diabetes, obesity, anything  
24 like that, you need to do everything in your power to do that  
25 remotely to protect that person.

1 JUDGE BETSY LAMBETH: Well, and our plan has to  
2 include a portion regarding that vulnerable population so that  
3 will be dealt with.

4 DR. LORI PALAZZO: Good.

5 JUDGE BETSY LAMBETH: Thank you very much,  
6 Dr. P, you've been very, very helpful. I appreciate your hard  
7 work, I know it's been crazy for you these last several months  
8 and we do appreciate your service to the community.

9 Just for the rest of you, I am creating  
10 committees to help with each of these different areas and I  
11 will be sending out an e-mail probably later today regarding  
12 those committees and what I'm going to need from everybody so  
13 thank you all very much and this concludes the webinar.

14 DR. LORI PALAZZO: Thank you.

15 (End of Remote Proceedings 10:50am)

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REPORTER'S CERTIFICATE

THE STATE OF TEXAS )  
COUNTY OF WILLIAMSON )

I, MANDI M. ALVAREZ, Official Court Reporter in and for  
the 425th District Court of Williamson County, State of Texas,  
do hereby certify that the above and foregoing contains a true  
and correct transcription of all portions of said webinar  
proceedings, all of which occurred online via virtual Webex and  
were reported by me.

WITNESS MY OFFICIAL HAND this the 17th day of  
May, 2020.

/s/Mandi M. Alvarez  
MANDI M. ALVAREZ Texas CSR #9129  
Expiration Date: 08/31/2021  
Official Court Reporter  
425th District Court  
Williamson County, Texas  
Georgetown, Texas

SUMMARY OF MEETING  
WITH DR. PALAZZO  
MAY 14TH

**From:** [Evelyn McLean](#)  
**To:** [Betsy Lambeth](#)  
**Subject:** Re: Summary of Meeting with Dr. Palazzo Thursday, May 14, 2020 at 9:00 a.m.  
**Date:** Thursday, May 14, 2020 3:17:17 PM  
**Attachments:** [image001.png](#)  
[image003.png](#)

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Thank you Judge and again thank you for all your doing to keep us safe!

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**From:** Betsy Lambeth <blambeth@wilco.org>  
**Sent:** Thursday, May 14, 2020 3:06 PM  
**To:** Evelyn McLean; Edna Staudt; Stacy Hackenberg; KT Musselman; Shawn Dick; Doyle Hobbs; Lisa David; Nancy Rister; Brandy Hallford; Donna King; Doug Arnold; John McMaster; Laura Barker; Rick Kennon; Ryan Larson; Stacey Mathews  
**Cc:** Billy Ray Stubblefield; Alexandra Gauthier; Dawn Baardsen; Steve Morrison; Roland Luna; Marlys Tidrick; Ronald Morgan  
**Subject:** RE: Summary of Meeting with Dr. Palazzo Thursday, May 14, 2020 at 9:00 a.m.

Dear Judge McLean,

I am attempting to set this up as a webinar for all parties on this email to attend. Hopefully there will be the availability to present written questions to Dr. P during the webinar. I am currently working on that ability. The tentative plan is for the meeting to occur on Friday, May 15 at 10:00 a.m. I will confirm by this afternoon.

HON. BETSY F. LAMBETH  
Judge, 425<sup>th</sup> Judicial District Court  
Williamson County, Texas  
512-943-3380



*Board Certified – Family Law*  
*Board Certified – Child Welfare Law*  
*Member – Texas Academy of Family Law Specialists*  
*Member – The College of the State Bar of Texas*



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**From:** Evelyn McLean <evelyn.mcLean@wilco.org>  
**Sent:** Thursday, May 14, 2020 3:01 PM  
**To:** Betsy Lambeth <blambeth@wilco.org>; Edna Staudt <estaudt@wilco.org>; Stacy Hackenberg <stacy.hackenberg@wilco.org>; KT Musselman <kt.musselman@wilco.org>; Shawn Dick <shawn.dick@wilco.org>; Doyle Hobbs <DHobbs@wilco.org>; Lisa David <LDavid@wilco.org>; Nancy Rister <nrister@wilco.org>; Brandy Hallford <brandy.hallford@wilco.org>; Donna King

<dking@wilco.org>; Doug Arnold <darnold@wilco.org>; John McMaster <jmcmaster@wilco.org>;  
Laura Barker <laura.barker@wilco.org>; Rick Kennon <Rkennon@wilco.org>; Ryan Larson  
<ryan.larson@wilco.org>; Stacey Mathews <smathews@wilco.org>

**Cc:** Billy Ray Stubblefield <bstubblefield@wilco.org>; Alexandra Gauthier <agauthier@wilco.org>;  
Dawn Baardsen <Dawn.Baardsen@txcourts.gov>; Steve Morrison <steve.morrison@wilco.org>;  
Roland Luna <roland.luna@wilco.org>; Marlys Tidrick <mtidrick@wilco.org>; Ronald Morgan  
<ronald.morgan@wilco.org>

**Subject:** Re: Summary of Meeting with Dr. Palazzo Thursday, May 14, 2020 at 9:00 a.m.

Judge Lambeth,

Thank you for keeping all of us informed. At the end of your meeting notes it states, "Meeting concluded with Dr. Palazzo agreeing to be available for a meeting with all nine judges for her to make her recommendations." Does that mean the JP's will not be a part of that meeting?

I know this is all so fluid and quite the undertaking. Thank you for all of your hard work in putting together a joint plan.

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**From:** Betsy Lambeth <blambeth@wilco.org>

**Sent:** Thursday, May 14, 2020 12:56 PM

**To:** Edna Staudt; Stacy Hackenberg; KT Musselman; Evelyn McLean; Shawn Dick; Doyle Hobbs; Lisa David; Nancy Rister; Brandy Hallford; Donna King; Doug Arnold; John McMaster; Laura Barker; Rick Kennon; Ryan Larson; Stacey Mathews

**Cc:** Billy Ray Stubblefield; Alexandra Gauthier; Dawn Baardsen; Steve Morrison; Roland Luna; Marlys Tidrick; Ronald Morgan

**Subject:** FW: Summary of Meeting with Dr. Palazzo Thursday, May 14, 2020 at 9:00 a.m.

Dear all,

As you all know, in my role as Local Administrative District Judge, I am responsible to the Texas Supreme Court and the OCA in preparing a plan for expanding the in-person services provided at the Justice Center and at the Justice of the Peace offices. The OCA has laid out a map for the process in preparing the plan. I have enlisted the help of many people but key in the process are the following: Judge McMaster as the Local Administrative County Court at Law Judge, Judge Staudt as the Justice of the Peace representative, Dr. Palazzo as the Public Health Authority, Judge Gravell, Roland Luna as Director of District Court Administration.

As we proceed in this endeavor I think it is important for elected officials and department heads to have information. The first order of business in preparing the operating plan was to have a meeting with Judge Gravell, Judge McMaster and Dr. Lori Palazzo, the Williamson County Public Health Authority. That meeting occurred this morning. All conversations in preparing the plan must be documented per the OCA guidelines.



After the meeting this morning I prepared the following memorandum of the discussion and sent to Dr. Palazzo for her review. Below is the memorandum and her response with her changes.

As I move forward in the preparation of the plan I will be providing you with an update on the process and progress. Today I am in the process of scheduling a webinar with Dr. Palazzo and the principals at the courthouses as well as a Action Item list. I will send you the webinar information as soon as the technology for the webinar is configured. I will send the Action Item list upon completion.

Please know that this is a collaborative process. It is important that we all have equal access to the information forming the decisions to be made. I intend for this process to be open and transparent. Please know that no decisions have been made at this time, regardless of what you may hear.

Please be patient.

HON. BETSY F. LAMBETH  
Judge, 425<sup>th</sup> Judicial District Court  
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**From:** Lori Palazzo <[lori.palazzo@wilco.org](mailto:lori.palazzo@wilco.org)>  
**Sent:** Thursday, May 14, 2020 12:03 PM  
**To:** Betsy Lambeth <[blambeth@wilco.org](mailto:blambeth@wilco.org)>; Bill Gravell <[bgravell@wilco.org](mailto:bgravell@wilco.org)>  
**Cc:** John McMaster <[jmcmaster@wilco.org](mailto:jmcmaster@wilco.org)>  
**Subject:** RE: Summary of Meeting with Dr. Palazzo Thursday, May 14, 2020 at 9:00 a.m.

Judge Lambeth,  
I agree with everything you wrote and just made a few changes that I highlighted.  
Thank you.

**Lori L Palazzo MD**  
**Medical Director, Local Health Authority WCCHD**  
**355 Texas Ave**  
**Round Rock, Texas 78664**  
**512-248-3250/Phone**  
**512-248-3255/Fax**

---

**From:** Betsy Lambeth <[blambeth@wilco.org](mailto:blambeth@wilco.org)>

**Sent:** Thursday, May 14, 2020 10:12 AM

**To:** Bill Gravell <[bgravell@wilco.org](mailto:bgravell@wilco.org)>; Lori Palazzo <[lori.palazzo@wilco.org](mailto:lori.palazzo@wilco.org)>

**Cc:** John McMaster <[jmcmaster@wilco.org](mailto:jmcmaster@wilco.org)>

**Subject:** Summary of Meeting with Dr. Palazzo Thursday, May 14, 2020 at 9:00 a.m.

Dear Judge Gravell and Dr. Palazzo,

By order of the Texas Supreme Court and the Office of Court Administration I am required to present correspondence memorializing all conversations with you regarding the creation of the operating plan. Please review the summary below and respond with either an approval of the minutes of our meeting or any changes that you may have. Thank you.

The purpose of this memo is to memorialize in writing (as required by the Texas Supreme Court and the Office of Court Administration) our discussions this morning regarding the public health aspect of the operating plan for the Justice Center post June 1 2020.

The meeting was convened via TEAMS. Present were Dr. Lori Palazzo (Local Health Authority Williamson County), Judge Gravell (Williamson County Judge), Judge McMaster (Local Administrative County Court at Law Judge), Judge Lambeth (Local Administrative District Judge). The meeting proceeded as follows:

#### GENERAL UPDATE:

Dr. Palazo provided a general update of coronavirus cases in Williamson County as follows:

- More positive cases
- Hospital cases are up
- We have not reached our peak
- The public has a false sense of security
- We are seeing community spread not just clusters in nursing homes

#### SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS

Judge Lambeth asked what recommendations Dr. Palazzo had for meetings of large groups such as churches or courthouses. She stated the following concerns

- The concern is with enclosed spaces and duration of time spent in enclosed spaces
- Anything above 15 minutes in an enclosed spaces is problematic.
- When the amount of time in enclosed space is more than 50 minutes the risk of exposure increases significantly
- The recommendation is no more than 5 people in a courtroom, widely spaced, with masks mandatory.

Judge Lambeth asked for recommendations regarding common areas, such as hallways and bathrooms.

- Dr. Palazzo stated that the issue with common spaces is not the casual passing. It is the

- surfaces, people touching surfaces.
- She recommended continuous cleaning of all surfaces, tables, door knobs, push bars, counter tops, elevators, and stair rails.
  - She recommended posting instruction signs in the bathrooms, suggesting closing of the toilet lid prior to flushing.
  - Dr. Palazzo recommended hand sanitizer be available at multiple locations throughout the courthouse.
  - She recommended thorough cleaning between each hearing.

#### SCREENING

Dr. Palazzo recommended specific screening at the entrance. Requesting information from the visitors regarding symptoms, contact with sick people and mandating the taking of temperatures. Dr. Palazzo recommended that masks be required of all people entering the courthouse.

#### CONCLUSION

Dr. Palazzo recommended going remotely as much as possible. It is one thing to take on a risk ourselves, an entirely different thing to order others to take a risk. The main thing is to continue remote. This is the best way to go. She recommended being creative in terms of using kiosks for situations requiring a person to be present. Use technology as much as possible.

The meeting concluded with Dr. Palazzo agreeing to be available for a meeting with all nine judges for her to make her recommendations.

HON. BETSY F. LAMBETH  
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