

# **COVID-19 Operating Plan for the Gray County Judiciary For Proceedings On or After June 1, 2020**

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 and its courtrooms, the Gray County Courthouse ("GCC"), housing Gray County offices other than courts and Gray County cooperating with the Gray County Judiciary in ensuring the safety of all entrants to the GCC, the courts of Gray County, Texas, will implement the following protective measures for the 31<sup>st</sup> and 223<sup>rd</sup> Judicial District Courts on the third floor of the GCC, the Gray County Court on the second floor of the GCC, the Justice Court on the first floor of the GCC, and the Justice Court in a separate building (sharing that building with Gray County Juvenile Probation) situated on N. Hobart St, Pampa, Texas:

## **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 as many proceedings remotely as is reasonably possible.
3. The local administrative district judge will maintain regular communication with the local health authority and county judge and will adjust this operating plan as necessary as conditions in the county dictate.
4. Judges will begin setting non-essential in-person proceedings no sooner than June 1, 2020

## **Judge and Court Staff Health**

1. Judges and court staff who can perform the essential functions of their job remotely will continue to telework when possible.
2. Judge and Court Staff Monitoring Requirements: a. Judges and court staff, including those in the office of the District Clerk of Gray County, Texas, after self-screening at home before arriving at the Courthouse, will have their temperature checked upon arrival in their respective offices with an infrared no-touch thermometer. A temperature equal to or greater than 99.6°F will send that person home immediately. Pertinent self-screening questions suggested by the Center for Disease Control ("CDC") will be asked. A "yes" answer to any one of those questions will send the person home immediately.
3. 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, will be sent home, and should seek medical advice.

4. Judges and court staff will be required to wear face coverings, practice social distancing, and practice appropriate hygiene recommendations at all times.
5. Protective Measures: In addition to screening, all areas and regularly touched surfaces, including, but not limited to, doorknobs, tables, desks, and chairs, will be regularly and frequently cleaned and disinfected. Hand sanitizer, disinfecting wipes, soap and water, or similar disinfectant will be kept readily available to the Judges and court staff. Six (6) feet of separation between individuals will be maintained or dividers between individuals will be provided to minimize the chances of transmission of COVID-19.

### **Scheduling**

1. Conducting as many proceedings remotely as possible, the courts will coordinate scheduling to reduce the number of people in the courthouse or on the respective court's floors at any one period of time to reduce occupancy in the courthouse to the lowest degree possible.
2. The following court schedules are established to reduce occupancy in the court building:
  - a. Hearings will be scheduled in-person only if remote hearings are not reasonably possible to conduct.
  - b. Hearings will be scheduled on a case by case basis one at a time with sufficient time between hearings to allow all areas and regularly touched surfaces, including, but not limited to, doorknobs, tables, desks, and chairs, to be cleaned and disinfected, including each location where participants were seated.

### **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 in orders setting hearings, notices of hearings, docket notices, and 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 as follows:
  - a. By conducting proceedings remotely if at all possible and advising members of vulnerable populations of all of the resources, such as electronic devices, available to them and the manner of use to allow vulnerable populations to participate remotely.
  - b. If remote proceedings are not at all reasonably possible, members of the vulnerable population as well as all other participants will wear face coverings or cloth face masks while in the court building. Hand-sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol will be provided for each such participant. Proper spacing between members of the at-risk population and other participants will be strictly maintained. Each and every participant, including those in the at-risk population, will be screened before entering the courtroom with temperature reading and pertinent questions concerning health and physical conditions.

All surfaces, buttons, handles, knobs, and other places touched will be periodically disinfected.

### **Social Distancing**

1. All persons not from the same household who are permitted in the courtroom will be required to maintain adequate social distancing of at least 6 feet.
2. No more than two individuals not from the same household will be permitted in an elevator. If more than one individual from the same household is in an elevator, no other individuals will be permitted in the elevator.
3. 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.
4. Public common areas, including breakrooms and snack rooms and conference rooms, have been closed to the public.

### *Gallery*

5. The maximum number of persons permitted in the gallery of each courtroom has been determined and posted. The maximum capacity of the courtroom will be monitored and enforced by court staff.
6. The gallery of the courtroom has been marked to identify appropriate social distancing in the seating. Seating is limited to every other row. Two or more members of the same household may sit adjacent to one another with six feet separation on either side.

### *Well*

7. 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 in strategic locations throughout the Courthouse, including, but not limited to entrances to the courthouse, outside each courtroom, at locations easily accessible by the "screener", outside each bathroom, and outside each elevator door.
2. Tissues have been placed near the door of the courtroom, at counsel tables, at the witness stand, on the judges' benches, and in the hallways.
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 courthouse.

## **Screening**

1. Entrants to the courthouse, i.e. courts building, will self-screen. Signage at all three entrances to the courthouse will be posted in English and Spanish asking each entrant to answer certain COVID-19 Screening Questions suggested by the CDC.
2. If an entrant to the courthouse answers any of those questions "Yes", the signage will direct that person to immediately leave the building and contact their desired office by telephone, email or other remote manner.
3. An individual desiring to enter a given courtroom will be screened by a person designated by each Court or Judge, who 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, and other pertinent questions suggested by the CDC. Individuals who indicate yes to any of these questions will be refused admittance to the courtroom and asked to immediately leave the courthouse. A hearing in which that individual is a participant will be rescheduled or conducted remotely if possible.
4. In addition to the screening questions, an individual desiring to enter a given courtroom will be screened by a person designated by each Court or Judge who will use an infrared thermometer to determine the temperature of the individual. Individuals whose temperature equals or exceeds 100.0°F will be refused admittance to the courtroom and asked to leave the courthouse immediately. A hearing in which that individual is a participant will be rescheduled or conducted remotely if possible.
5. Inmates being transported from the jail to the courthouse 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 courthouse.
6. Staff who are screening individuals entering the court building will be provided personal protective equipment, including masks/face coverings, gloves, hand sanitizer, and other PPE as designated by the "screener".

## **Face Coverings**

1. All individuals entering the courtrooms will be required to wear face coverings at all times.
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. The need for a cloth face covering will be set out in the notice of hearing.
3. Individuals who will be required to be in the courtrooms for over 1 hour will be provided surgical masks and required to wear them while in the courtrooms if the supply is available.

## **Cleaning**

1. Courthouse cleaning staff will clean the common areas of the courthouse so that common spaces are cleaned at least every eight hours at a minimum.
2. In courtrooms, all areas and regularly touched surfaces, including, but not limited to, doorknobs, tables, desks, chairs, microphones, and equipment will be cleaned and disinfected, including each location where participants were seated, by persons designated by the Court

or Judge between every hearing, between morning and afternoon proceedings, and by the Courthouse cleaning staff at the end of each day the courtroom is used.

3. Courthouse cleaning staff and those persons designated by the Court or Judge to clean and disinfect the courtroom and its areas and equipment between proceedings have been provided cleaning supplies shown to be effective with this coronavirus, COVID-19.
4. Courthouse cleaning staff have been trained on proper cleaning techniques and provided appropriate personal protective equipment.

#### Other

1. The Gray County District Clerk and the District Clerk's employees, the Gray County Clerk and the County Clerk's employees, and the Justice Court clerks, will maintained locked doors to enable each office to screen individuals wishing to enter those offices before entry will be permitted. Signage outside each such office door will provide a telephone number to call for screening. A "screener" will then exit the office with PPE and screen the individual in the same manner set forth above under Screening. If an individual is refused admittance and asked to leave, the individual will be given the necessary information to conduct business with such office remotely by telephone, by email, or by regular mail.

I have conferred with all judges of courts with courtrooms in the court buildings regarding this Operating Plan. In developing the plan, I consulted with the local health authority and Gray county judge, documentation of which is attached to this plan. I will ensure that the judges of courts with courtrooms in the courthouse and the Justice Court judge in the N. Hobart St. building covered by this Operating Plan conduct proceedings consistent with the plan.

Date: 5/28/2020



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Hon. Phil N. Vanderpool  
Local Administrative District Judge