

COVID-19 OPERATING PLAN **FOR THE GREGG COUNTY JUDICIARY**

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 Gregg County Courts 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 exercise reasonable efforts to conduct proceedings remotely.
3. The Local Administrative District Judge will maintain regular communication with the local Gregg County Health Authority and the County Judge and adjust this operating plan as necessary with conditions in Gregg County, Texas.
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 staffs that can perform the essential functions of their job remotely will telework when possible.
2. Judges or court staff who feel feverish or have measured temperatures equal to or greater than 99.6 degrees, 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. Judges and court staff will, as practical, practice social distancing, and practice appropriate hygiene recommendations at all time. The Court will make masks available for the Judge and Court staff and those will be provided upon request.

4. Protective Measures: At the request of the Judge, or any staff member, plexi-glass barriers will be provided to that individual to be used in places where they may come in contact with the public as a further deterrent to exposure to the COVID-19 virus.

Scheduling

The following court schedules are established to reduce occupancy in the court building:

307th District Court

The Court will maintain normal scheduling for cases set on Monday, Tuesday and Friday of each week. The court will modify its Thursday Temporary Order and Enforcement docket from what has normally been a significant number of cases to scheduling single cases at 1 ½ hour intervals. This should limit the Court's docket to 4 cases each Thursday.

The Court normally has a 1:15, 2:15, 3:15 and 4:15 docket on the 1st and 2nd Wednesday afternoons for CPS review hearings. These dockets normally have 5-6 cases set per hour. The Court will limit those dockets to 3 cases per hour except for Permanency Managing Conservatorship Cases which will be limited to 4 cases per hour. Further, the Court is waving the requirement for children to attend the hearings unless there is a specific and urgent necessity for the child or children to attend. The Court will also begin holding CPS review hearings every Wednesday afternoon.

124th District Court

The Court will only conduct hearings on Monday, Wednesday, and Thursday with the exception of arraignment dockets and status docket held once or twice a month on Friday morning.

The Court will attempt to have no more than 3 hearings per hour in the morning and in the afternoon. The Court will also attempt to limit hearings on Thursday to morning only.

On Fridays will hold an arraignment docket or status docket. The Court will hear no other dockets on Fridays.

188th District Court

The Court will only conduct hearings on Tuesday, Thursday and Friday with the exception of status docket held once a month on Wednesday morning.

The Court will try to have no more than 3 hearings per hour in the morning and in the afternoon. The Court will also try to limit hearings on Thursday to afternoon only.

On Friday, if there is no arraignment docket, the Court normally has only 1 or 2 hearings in the morning, followed by Drug Court and 1 or 2 hearings in the afternoon.

County Court at Law No. 1

The Court will conduct misdemeanor plea hearings on Mondays, Tuesdays, and Wednesdays. The mornings will be divided into two sessions starting at 8:00 a.m. and 10:00 a.m. The afternoon session will begin at 1:00 p.m. For each session, courtroom capacity will be limited to twenty-five (25) persons, not including court staff.

Thursdays will be reserved for Juvenile hearings and special limited hearings as may be required.

Friday Arraignment dockets will be divided into a morning session at 8:00 a.m. and an afternoon session at 1:00 p.m. with capacity limited to twenty-five (25) persons.

Friday Mandatory Appearance dockets will be conducted via email for the month of June, and until further notice.

County Court at Law No. 2

Nonjury/Tax Docket

The Court will only permit the attorneys representing the tax authorities, and the parties involved in the case before the Court in the Courtroom, with remaining parties remaining in the hall. The Court will schedule an additional hour to complete the docket.

Probate Docket

The Court will continue to conduct probate docket by submission, with any contested hearings and guardianship matters being held by virtual means.

CPS Judicial Review Docket

The Court is scheduling CPS review hearings for Thursday afternoons, and will have a single docket. The Court will only permit the attorneys representing the Department of Family and Protective Services, together with the parties and the attorneys representing said parties involved in the case before the Court in the Courtroom, with remaining parties and counsel remaining in the hall. Additionally, the Court is waiving the requirement for children to attend the hearings unless there is a specific and urgent necessity for the child/children to attend. To reduce the number of cases on each docket, the Court is adding a CPS docket for the 3rd and 4th week of the month going forward.

General Hearings

The Court will schedule in-person hearings, but will also continue to take cases by submission and will encourage the use of Courtcall and Zoom where available. The Court will strictly maintain social distancing within the Courtroom, and will not exceed the posted capacity of the Courtroom.

Vulnerable Populations

1. Individuals who are over age 65 and individuals with serious underlying health conditions, such as high blood pressure, chronic lung disease, obesity, asthma, and those whose immune systems are compromised such as by chemotherapy for cancer treatment or other conditions requiring such therapy are considered to be vulnerable population.
2. Each judge will include information on orders setting hearings, docket 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 court's websites and in conspicuous locations around the court building. A copy of the notice is attached hereto.
3. Vulnerable populations who are scheduled for court will be accommodated by:
 - a. Being provided the opportunity to be placed in the courtroom further from other persons than normal social distancing guidelines;
 - b. If a witness in, or a party to the case, provided the opportunity to participate in the proceeding by Zoom, Skype, Facetime, telephone or some other electronic means when practical; or
 - c. Provided other accommodations set forth within the discretion of the Court.

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. 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.

3. All public common areas, including breakrooms and snackrooms, are required to have signs posted to remind all to engage in appropriate social distancing.
4. 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.
5. The gallery of the courtroom has been marked to identify appropriate social distancing in the seating.
6. 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.
7. Signs have been placed throughout the Courthouse to remind patrons to social distance at all times while in the Gregg County Courthouse.

Hygiene

1. Hand sanitizer dispensers have been placed at the outside of elevators on each floor.
2. Tissues have been placed at counsel tables, at the witness stand, and on the judges' bench.
3. The Center For Disease Control (CDC) "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, Sheriff's Deputies will direct individuals to review a sign located at security that asks each individual if they are feeling feverish; have a cough, shortness of breath, difficulty breathing or any other symptom of COVID-19; or have been in close contact with a person who is confirmed to have contracted COVID-19. Individuals who indicate yes to any of these questions will be refused admittance to the court building. Any individual refused entry who has a court setting will be identified by security and the officer will notify the court that they were denied admittance so the court can make appropriate arrangements. Security will provide an email address and phone number where the individual can be contacted by the court with instructions.

2. 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 100 degrees, will not be transported to the court building.
3. Staff who is conducting screening of individuals entering the building or inmates for transport will have masks and gloves made available.

Face Coverings

1. All individuals entering the court building will be strongly encouraged 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 facemask will be provided upon request.

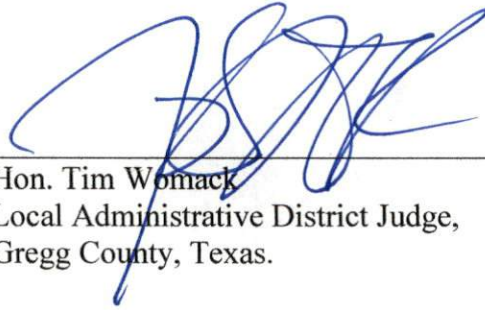
Cleaning

1. Court building cleaning staff will clean the common areas of the court building so that common spaces are cleaned at least every morning. Cleaning staff are available to provide additional cleaning upon the request of a Department Head.
2. Court building cleaning staff have been provided cleaning supplies believed to be effective with this coronavirus
3. Court cleaning staff has been trained on proper cleaning techniques.

I have conferred with all judges of courts with courtrooms in the court building regarding this Operating Plan. In developing the plan, I consulted with the Gregg County Health Authority and the County Judge, 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 1, 2020



Hon. Tim Womack
Local Administrative District Judge,
Gregg County, Texas.



Hon. Bill Stoudt
County Judge, Gregg County, Texas



Lewis Browne, M.D.
Gregg County Health Authority



NOTICE FOR ACCOMODATIONS

IF YOU ARE AN INDIVIDUAL OVER THE AGE OF 65 OR HAVE SERIOUS UNDERLYING MEDICAL CONDITIONS THAT PLACE YOU AT HIGH RISK FOR CONTRACTING THE COVID-19 CORONAVIRUS, AND ARE A COURT PARTICIPANT, PLEASE NOTIFY THE COURT UPON ARRIVAL TO ALLOW THE COURT TO MAKE SPECIAL ACCOMODATIONS FOR YOU.