

**COVID-19 Joint Operating Plan for the Matagorda County Judiciary  
and  
for the Municipal Court of the City of Palacios Texas**

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 Matagorda County and the City of Palacios 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, adjusting this operating plan as necessary as conditions in the state and county warrant.
4. The presiding judge of the Municipal Court of Palacios, Texas will maintain regular communication with the local health authority and Mayor of Palacios, adjusting this operating plan as necessary as conditions in the state and city warrant.
5. Judges will begin setting non-essential in-person proceedings at the judge's discretion and 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 telework when possible.
2. Judge and Court Staff Monitoring Requirements: Judges will keep their staff informed regarding all health related best practices during the pandemic. Staff exhibiting relevant symptoms will take immediate action in accordance with guidelines for COVID-19.

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 and will be advised to seek medical advice.
4. Judges and court staff will be required to wear face coverings when in an environment where social distancing protocols are not possible to maintain and otherwise will practice social distancing and appropriate hygiene recommendations at all times.
5. Protective Measures: Judges and staff will incorporate protocols set forth in this Operating Plan relating to cleaning, social distancing and personal hygiene.

### **Scheduling**

1. The following court schedules are established to reduce occupancy in the court building: Court schedules will be modified by each judge to conform to the Supreme Court of Texas and Court of Criminal Appeals Emergency Orders. Judges will conform to the capacity and social distancing guidelines in this Operating Plan.

### **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 or linked 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 scheduling remote hearings.

### **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. 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. Public common areas, including breakrooms and snackrooms, are 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 gallery. Seating is limited to the six foot distance between persons and seating in every other row.

### *Well*

1. 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 person.

### **Hygiene**

1. Hand sanitizer dispensers have been placed at the entrances to the building, outside of elevators on the third floor and outside of any courtroom in session.
2. 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 building or courtroom, court staff 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,
2. Individuals who indicate yes to any of these questions will be refused admittance to the court building or courtroom.
3. Inmates being transported from the jail to the court building will be screened for symptoms of COVID-19 and have their temperature taken at the jail 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 facemasks and gloves.

## **Face Covering**

1. All individuals are recommended to wear protective face masks at all times while in the building.
2. Individuals who choose not to wear protective face masks must at all times maintain a six-foot distance between themselves and any other person not of their own household. Failure to maintain this social distance will result in removal from the courtroom and building.

## **Cleaning**

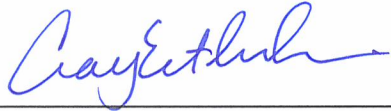
1. Court building cleaning staff will clean the common areas of the court building so that common spaces are cleaned at least every four hours.
2. Court building cleaning staff will clean the courtrooms between every session, a session being no longer than 3 hours in length, between morning and afternoon proceedings, and at the end of each day the courtroom is used.
3. Court building cleaning staff have been provided cleaning supplies shown to be effective with this coronavirus.

4. Court building cleaning staff have been trained on proper cleaning techniques and provided appropriate personal protective equipment.

#### LOCAL ADMINISTRATIVE JUDGE'S CERTIFICATION

I have attempted to confer with all judges of courts with courtrooms in the court building regarding this Operating Plan. In developing the plan, I consulted with the local health authority and 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.

Signed: May 26, 2020



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Hon. Craig Estlinbaum  
130<sup>th</sup> Judicial District Court  
Local Administrative Judge