

Jury Proceeding Addendum to COVID-19 Operating Plan for the Hood County Judiciary

Effective on and after October 1, 2020

Recognizing the need to ensure the health and safety of jurors, litigants, attorneys, visitors, court staff, judges, and other individuals entering the buildings housing the courts, the courts of Hood County, Texas will implement, in addition to the procedures and protocols in the previously submitted COVID-19 Operating Plan, the following protective measures for jury proceedings:

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 jury proceedings according to the guidance issued by the Office of Court Administration.
2. The justice courts will not conduct an in-person jury proceeding until the Supreme Court permits such proceedings.
3. Judges of the district court and constitutional and statutory county courts will conduct in-person jury proceedings in accordance with the previously approved Operating Plan and this addendum only after this jury proceeding addendum is submitted and accepted by the Regional Presiding Judge.
4. Not more than five days before an approved in-person jury proceeding is scheduled to occur, the local administrative district judge or designee will consult with the local public health authority to verify that local health conditions and plan precautions are appropriate for the jury proceeding to proceed.
5. Except for criminal cases where confinement in jail or prison is a potential punishment, judges may conduct remote jury proceedings if the court follows the requirements of the hearings on objections or motions section below and ensures that all potential and selected petit jurors have access to technology to participate remotely. Judges may conduct remote jury proceedings in a criminal case where confinement in jail or prison is a potential punishment only with appropriate waivers and consent obtained on the record from the defendant and the prosecutor.

Jury Proceeding Approval Process

1. Judges wishing to conduct a jury proceeding will follow the procedure detailed below to obtain approval to proceed with the jury proceeding from the local administrative district judge and Regional Presiding Judge:

Judges wishing to conduct a jury proceeding must contact the local administrative district judge and Regional Presiding Judge and certify to said judges his/her intent to conduct a jury proceeding at least 10 days before trial, and will certify his/her knowledge of the requirements of the previously submitted Operating Plan and the requirements of this addendum, and his/her

intention to comply with each and all of such requirements in conducting the proposed jury trial.

2. The local administrative district judge will, not more than five days before the jury proceeding, consult with the local public health authority to verify that the local health conditions and plan precautions are appropriate for the jury proceeding to proceed with the following procedure:

The local administrative judge shall contact, either in person or by email or regular mail, the County Health Officer and verify with him that local health conditions and precautions are appropriate and safe for jury trials to proceed in the County.

Hearings on Objections or Motions Related to Proceeding

1. Parties who are scheduled for a jury proceeding are encouraged to make any objections or motions related to proceedings at least 10 days prior to the trial setting.
2. Any objections or motions related to proceeding with a jury proceeding will be heard by the judge presiding over the case at least seven days prior to the jury proceeding or as soon as practicable if the objection or motion is made or filed within seven days of the jury proceeding.

Communication Protocols

1. Each judge with an approved in-person jury proceeding will require the parties to communicate with the court if any participant in the jury proceeding, including attorneys, parties, attorney support staff, or witnesses, has tested positive for COVID-19 within the previous 30 days prior to any portion of the jury proceeding, currently has symptoms of COVID-19, or has had recent known exposure to COVID-19.
2. If the approved in-person jury proceeding involves an incarcerated participant, the judge will require the sheriff to report any positive COVID-19 test of the incarcerated participant within the previous 30 days prior to any portion of the jury proceeding, any current symptoms of COVID-19, or any recent known exposure to COVID-19.

Scheduling

1. A judge who obtains approval for an in-person jury proceeding will schedule no more than ten cases for that jury trial setting, unless pre-approval for larger dockets is obtained from the Regional Presiding Judge.
2. Judges should attempt to alert parties who will not be proceeding prior to the day of trial to reduce attendance at the court facility.

Summoning Jurors

1. The jury clerk must include with in-person juror summonses information regarding precautions that have been taken to protect the health and safety of prospective jurors (see Attachments A and B) and COVID questionnaires (see Attachment C) that elicit from prospective jurors information about their exposure or vulnerability to COVID-19.
2. Judges will consider using juror questionnaires for voir dire to assist in shortening the length of voir dire or the number of venirepersons.
3. Excuses or requests to reschedule from in-person prospective jurors who have been potentially exposed, who are symptomatic, and who are vulnerable or live with someone vulnerable to COVID-19 will be liberally granted.

Location for Jury Selection, Trial, and Deliberation

1. The following locations have sufficient space to permit adequate social distancing and will be used for in-person jury proceedings:
 - a. Jury Qualification: __ Lake Granbury Conference Center _____
 - b. Voir Dire: __ Hood County Justice Center _____
 - c. Trial: __ Hood County Justice Center _____
 - d. Jury Deliberation: __ Hood County Justice Center _____
2. Security protocols at the locations for jury proceedings have been reviewed with the appropriate courthouse security personnel and are adequate for the proceeding.

Screening

1. In addition to the requirements of the previously submitted in-person Operating Plan, all court participants and observers attending an in-person jury proceeding will be screened for elevated temperatures and will be questioned to determine if the individual has recently had symptoms of COVID-19 or been exposed to COVID-19.
2. All participants in a trial who are incarcerated will be screened by the jail/prison prior to transport to the courtroom and any known exposure, symptoms, or COVID-19 positive test results within the past 30 days will be reported to the judge presiding over the jury trial prior to the transport of the participant to the courtroom.

Face Coverings

1. In addition to the requirements of the previously submitted in-person Operating Plan, all persons entering the common areas of a courthouse, including a courtroom or any other location being used to conduct a jury trial, will be required to wear a face covering at all times unless the person is an individual that is not recommended to wear a mask by the Centers for Disease Control or the Texas Department of State Health Services.
2. All court participants will be required to wear face coverings from jury qualification through the end of trial.

3. Court participants who may need to lower their face mask to speak or for a short period of time will be required to wear a face shield. When speaking, judges will permit a court participant to lower his or her mask so long as a face shield is worn, and the person speaking is immobile.

Social Distancing

1. Social distancing of all court participants and observers will be maintained at all times during the jury proceeding, including during the trial and deliberation.
2. Special attention will be paid by courts to ensure adequate social distancing and managed exits of individuals during breaks, especially when dismissing large groups of people for a break.

Alternate Jurors

1. Each judge with an approved in-person jury proceeding will be encouraged to consider selecting alternate jurors to permit the trial to continue in the event of a juror becoming ineligible to serve for a reason unrelated to that person's exposure to or contraction of COVID-19.

Arrangement of Courtroom

1. The following attached drawings (Attachments D and E) detail how each of the courtrooms or facilities will be arranged during the jury proceeding.

Microphone Protection Protocols

1. Judges will limit, to the degree possible, the shared use of microphones during the jury proceeding.
2. If a microphone must be shared, judges will limit the passing of the microphone unless the microphone is cleaned between each user.
3. Disposable microphone covers will be placed on shared microphones and changed between each user.

Exhibit/Evidence Management

1. Judges will limit, to the degree possible, the use of physical or paper exhibits/evidence where feasible or appropriate by converting the exhibit/evidence to a digital form.
2. When physical or paper exhibits/evidence is required, judges will reduce the exchange of that exhibit/evidence to the number of persons necessary and will limit passing the exhibit/evidence to the individual members of the jury.
3. If an exhibit/evidence is required to be transferred from person-to-person, single use gloves will be provided, worn, and discarded immediately after handling the exhibit/evidence.
4. During jury deliberations, judges will make efforts to provide the jury with access to digital exhibits/evidence that would normally be shared with the jury during deliberation. Where digital exhibits/evidence is not feasible, judges will consider limiting the transfer of the

exhibits/evidence from juror-to-juror by spreading the exhibits/evidence on a table for inspection from the table in the jury deliberation room.

Witnesses

1. Judges will inquire whether witnesses to the proceedings have COVID-related issues.
2. To the degree constitutionally permissible or with the consent of the parties, judges will permit witnesses to testify remotely via videoconference, especially if that witness has symptoms of or a recent positive test for COVID-19, has been recently exposed, or is vulnerable to contracting COVID-19.

Food Precautions

1. Courts that provide food to jurors or other participants during a jury proceeding will ensure individual food portions, such as individually boxed meals, are provided.

Cleaning

1. In addition to the requirements of the previously submitted in-person Operating Plan, frequent cleaning protocols in the courtrooms and facilities will be maintained throughout the jury proceeding as appropriate.
2. Shared spaces such as witness stands, seating in the gallery, and seating during qualification/voir dire will be cleaned during transitions of those spaces.
3. Seats for members of the jury panel and selected jurors will be assigned to reduce potential transmission and the need for more frequent cleaning.

I have attempted to confer with all judges of courts with courtrooms in the court building regarding the Jury Proceeding Addendum to the 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.

Date: October 5, 2020


Local Administrative District Judge

ATTACHMENT A

THE 355TH JUDICIAL DISTRICT COURT

Hood County Justice Center
1200 West Pearl Street
Granbury, Texas 76048
817-579-3233
FAX 817-579-3243



RALPH H. WALTON, JR.
- JUDGE -
BOARD CERTIFIED - CRIMINAL LAW
TEXAS BOARD OF LEGAL SPECIALIZATION

October 1, 2020

RE: Your Upcoming Jury Service in the Era of Coronavirus

Dear Prospective Jurors:

This letter is in addition to the Summons directing you to appear for Jury Service at the Lake Granbury Conference Center. These will be the first jury trials we have undertaken since the advent of the Coronavirus pandemic. We want to assure you that every reasonable precaution will be taken to enhance the health and safety of the jury, the parties, the lawyers and the Court staff during jury selection and the jury trial(s) to follow.

So that you won't be surprised when you arrive, please be aware of the following:

Each prospective juror will have their temperature taken via a hand-held thermometer as they enter the facility, to ensure that no one with fever or an elevated temperature is admitted;

Masks will be distributed, or you may wear your own when you enter the building;

Hand sanitizer (alcohol based) will be available to you at multiple locations;

The courtroom, jury room and jury room bathrooms will be cleaned each evening when the court recesses, and this will continue throughout the trial;

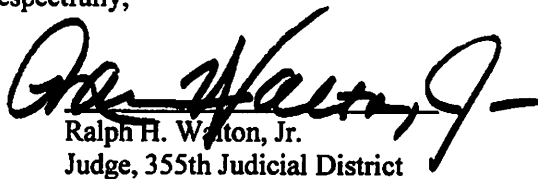
If you:

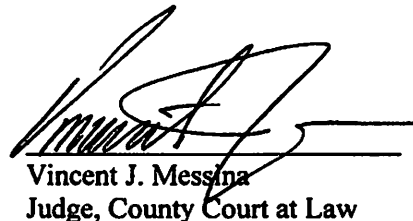
- a. have been diagnosed by a licensed physician as having Coronavirus anytime within the past 30 days;
- b. are actively caring for a family member or loved one who has tested positive for the Coronavirus, or
- c. are now in self-quarantine status and that status will continue during the date on your jury summons,

Then, in any of these situations, please immediately advise the district clerk at 817-579-3236.

It is vital that you appear and present yourself for jury service as summoned; however, the Court wants you to know that we are mindful of these challenging times and we will take every reasonable precaution to maintain your health as well as that of the parties, lawyers and Court staff during these upcoming trials.

Respectfully,


Ralph H. Walton, Jr.
Judge, 355th Judicial District


Vincent J. Messina
Judge, County Court at Law

PENNY WEISEND
- COURT ADMINISTRATOR -
817-579-3233

ROBERT FRENCH
- OFFICIAL COURT REPORTER -
817-579-3233

TRICIA WALTERS
- ADMIN. ASSISTANT -
817-579-3233

RON BERRYMAN
- BAILIFF -
817-579-3255

ATTACHMENT B

SAFEGUARDS TO ENSURE PARTICIPANTS' HEALTH

The court realizes that this is a very trying time in our nation's history and that many jurors have had their lives disrupted as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. One of the core foundations of our freedom and democracy are trials by jury.

In Order to ensure trials by jury can continue safely in this trying time, the court has instituted several safety measures to protect you, the parties and all court staff. These safety measures include the following: requiring that anyone entering the courthouse wear a mask at all times while in the building; limiting the number of individuals in any room in accord with the Governor's orders; requiring that all individuals participating in jury service or trials maintain a distance of six feet from any other person at all times during the trial (except when not feasible); and making masks, sanitary wipes, hand-sanitizer, and hand-washing readily available to everyone.

ATTACHMENT C

JURY SERVICE COVID-19 PRE-SCREENING QUESTIONNAIRE

Dear Prospective Juror:

As part of the court's ongoing measures to protect against the spread of the COVID-19 disease, we ask that you complete the following before reporting for Jury Service on _____, 2020. Bring this completed questionnaire with you for jury service.

1. **SYMPTOMS NOW OR BETWEEN (insert date that is 14 days before date of jury service), 2020 AND (insert date of jury selection proceeding), 2020:** check any that apply to YOU or A MEMBER OF YOUR HOUSEHOLD

_____ Fever (above 100.0) _____ Change in taste or smell _____ Cough _____ Nausea or Vomiting

_____ Headache _____ Shortness of Breath/Difficulty Breathing _____ Diarrhea _____ Chills

_____ Muscle pain or body aches _____ Sore throat _____ Fatigue _____ Congestion or Runny Nose

_____ I certify that NONE of the symptoms above have been experienced by me or a member of my household between (insert date that is 14 days before date of jury service) and (insert date of jury selection, 2020).

IF YOU ARE EXPERIENCING ANY OF THE ABOVE SYMPTOMS, CALL THE DISTRICT CLERK'S OFFICE at (817) 579-3236 BEFORE REPORTING ON _____, 2020.

2. **CONTACT HISTORY** - check any that apply to YOU or A MEMBER OF YOUR HOUSEHOLD:

_____ I or a member of my household has been diagnosed with COVID-19 within the past 4 months;

_____ I or a member of my household has been in close contact with someone exposed to or infected with COVID-19 in the last 14 days;

_____ I or a member of my household are currently on a watch list or self-quarantining because of possible COVID-19 exposure;

_____ NONE of the above apply.

IF ANY OF THE ABOVE APPLY, CALL THE DISTRICT CLERK'S OFFICE at (817) 579-3236 BEFORE REPORTING ON _____, 2020.

3. **COVID-19 RELATED EXCUSE OR POSTPONEMENT** - 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 and may request to postpone or be excused from jury service at this time. If you wish to be excused or request that your jury service be postponed, check the box below.

I certify that I meet the above-described conditions and I am requesting to be excused from jury service or desire to have my service date postponed because of those conditions.

IF YOU ARE REQUESTING TO BE EXCUSED OR YOUR SERVICE DATE BE POSTPONED DUE TO A COVID-19 RELATED REASON, CALL THE DISTRICT CLERK'S OFFICE at (817) 579-3236 BEFORE REPORTING ON _____, 2020.

4. FACE COVERINGS:

Prospective jurors are required to wear a face covering while they are in the courthouse and/or Lake Granbury Conference Center. Individuals are encouraged to bring a cloth face covering with them. If an individual does not have a cloth face covering, a disposable face mask will be provided.

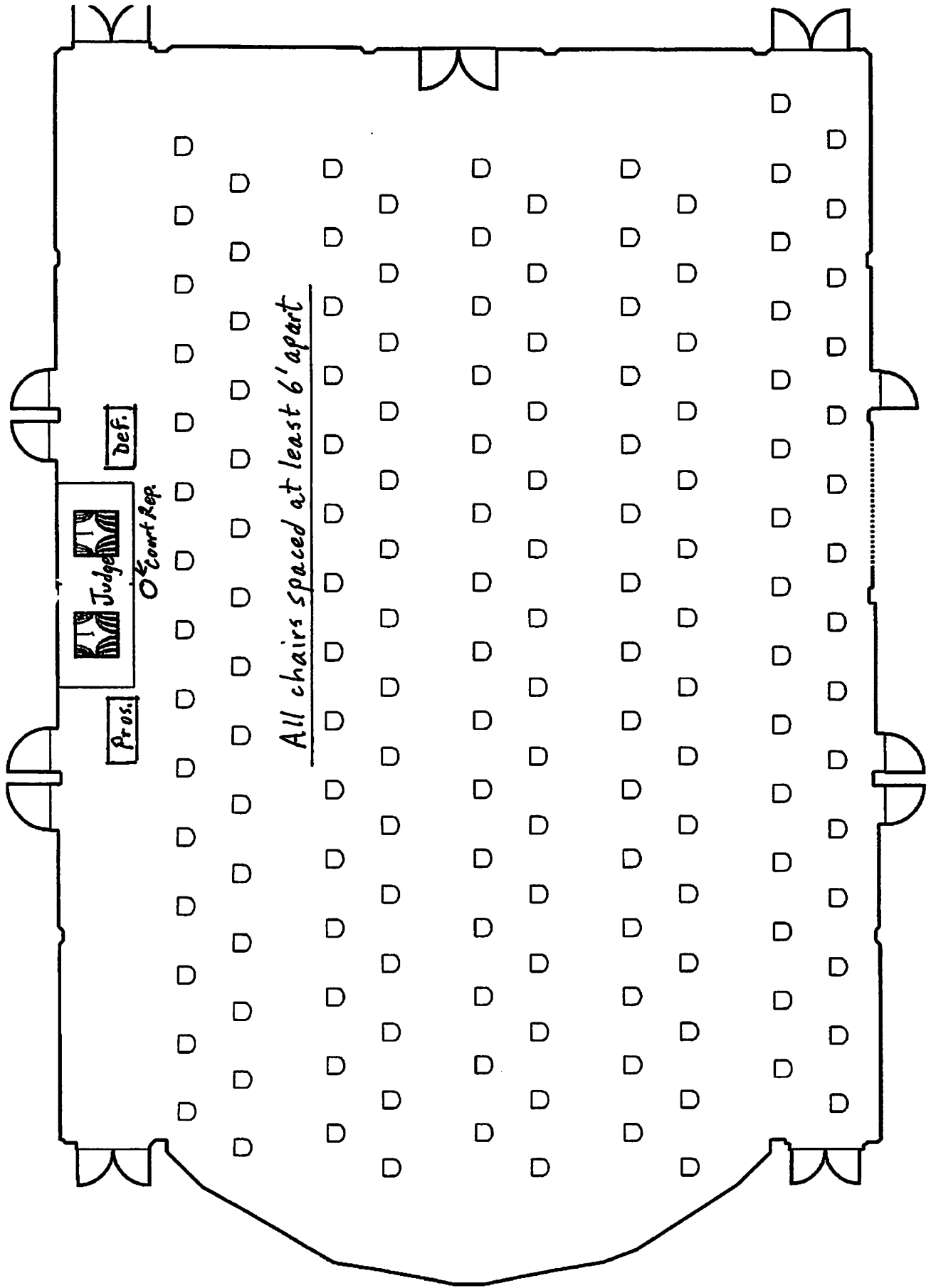
I certify the above is true and correct:

Signature

Printed Name

ATTACHMENT D

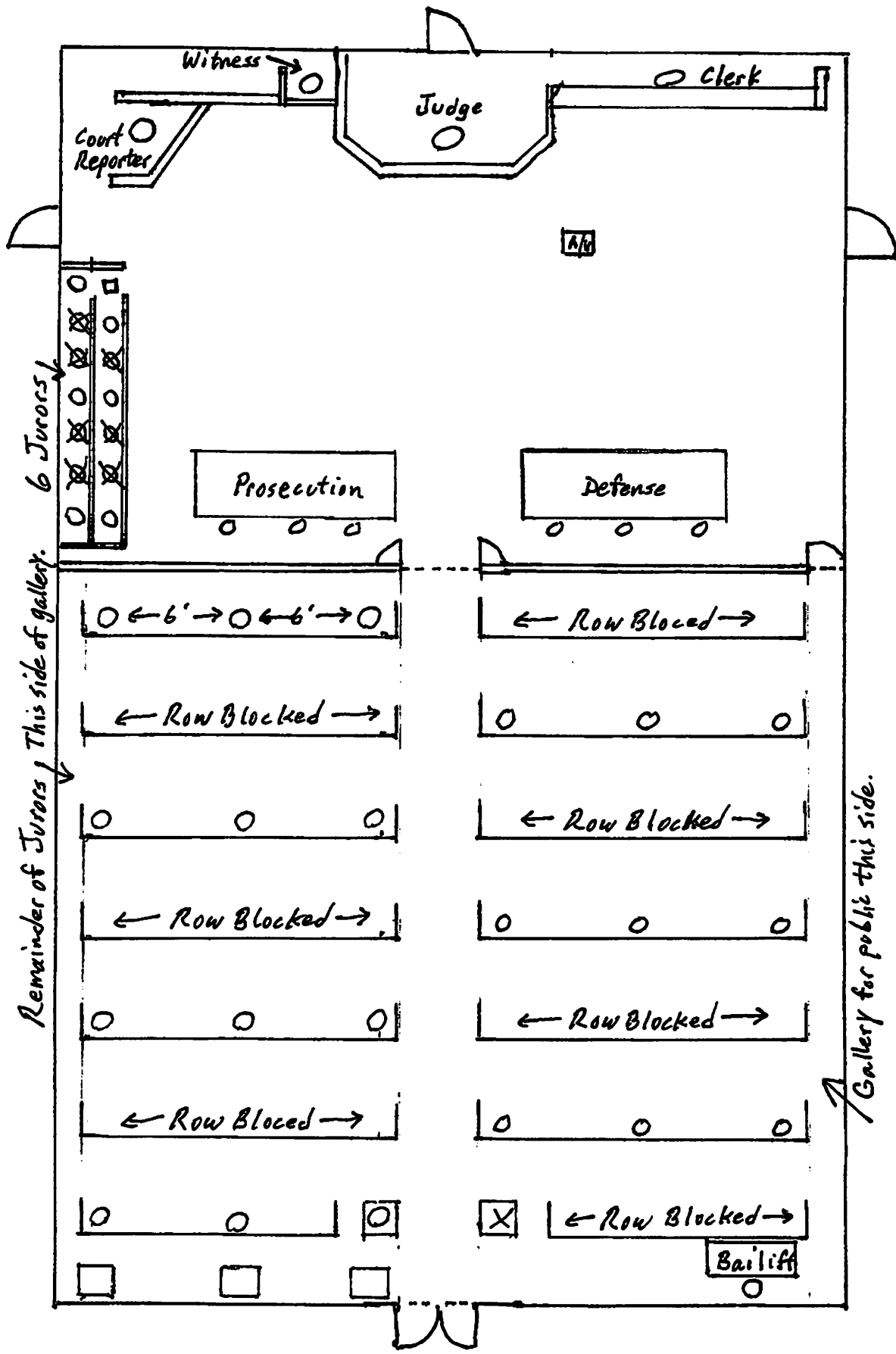
Lake Granbury Conference Center (Jury Room & Voir Dire)



5 Feet

ATTACHMENT E

355th District Courtroom



County Court At Law

