

Jury Proceeding Addendum to COVID-19 Operating Plan for the McMullen 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 McMullen County 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 courts, constitutional and statutory county courts, and statutory probate 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 health authority or designee 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 procedures detailed herein and below to obtain approval to proceed with the jury proceeding from the local administrative district judge and Regional Presiding Judge:
Email shall be sent at least seven (7) days in advance with the style of case and date and time you plan on beginning the trial to 343districtcourt@gmail.com and a copy to Judge Sid Harle at Sid.Harle@bexar.org and Judge Jim Teal at judge.teal@mcmullencounty.org.
2. The local administrative district judge will, not more than five days before the jury proceeding, consult with the local health authority to verify that the local health conditions and plan precautions are appropriate for the jury proceeding to proceed with the following procedure:

An email shall be sent to Dr. Emilie Prot at Emilie.prot@dshs.texas.gov for verification of health conditions and plan precautions for jury proceedings.

Hearings on Objections or Motions Related to Proceeding

1. Objections or motions related to proceedings should be filed 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.
3. Attorneys filing objections or motions related to jury proceedings must copy the court via email at districtjudges@gmail.com in order for the presiding judge to schedule a hearing.

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 Attachment "A") 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:** McMullen County Community Center & Pavilion, 2097 Hwy 16 North, Tilden, Texas 78072
 - b. **Voir Dire:** McMullen County Community Center & Pavilion, 2097 Hwy 16 North, Tilden, Texas 78072
 - c. **Trial:** McMullen County Community Center & Pavilion, 2097 Hwy 16 North, Tilden, Texas 78072
Or McMullen County Court House, 501 River Street, Tilden, Texas 78072
 - d. **Jury Deliberation:** McMullen County Community Center, 2097 Hwy 16 North, Tilden, Texas 78072 or McMullen County Court House, 501 River Street, Tilden, Texas 78072
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 or a member of their household has recently had symptoms of COVID-19, 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. The Court discourages neck gaiters, valve masks, and N95 masks.
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 attached drawings details 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, from licensed vendors.

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: 11/6/2020


Local Administrative District Judge

343rd District Judge, Janna Whatley

OFFICIAL JURY SERVICE COVID-19 ADDENDUM



Dear Prospective Juror:

Your health and safety are of the utmost concern to the Court. The following guidelines are to ensure the safety of all jury service participants.

PRIOR TO JURY DUTY:

1. If you or a member of your household has experienced any of the following symptoms within the last 14 days, please call the District Clerk's Office (361)274-3215 and **do not report to jury duty.**
 - Fever (100° F. or higher)
 - Cough
 - Nausea
 - Sore Throat
 - Muscle Aches
 - Malaise
 - Diarrhea
 - Shortness of Breath
 - Vomiting
 - Recent Loss of Taste or Smell
2. If you or a member of your household has experienced any of the following within the last 14 days, please call the District Clerk's Office (361)274-3215 and **do not report to jury duty.**
 - I or a member of my household has been diagnosed with COVID-19 within the past 30 days.
 - 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.
 - I or a member of my household are currently awaiting test results for COVID-19.
3. If you are part of a vulnerable population such as individuals who are 65 years or older, and persons with serious underlying health conditions, such as high blood pressure, chronic lung disease, diabetes, obesity, asthma and those whose immune systems are comprised, such as by chemotherapy for cancer or their conditions requiring such therapy, please call the District Clerk's Office (361)274-3215 and **do not report to jury duty.**

To request an excusal or postponement of your jury service, you must contact the McMullen County District Clerk's Office before reporting to jury duty.

DURING JURY DUTY:

1. Before entering the Courtroom you will be screened by Courthouse Security. If you or a member of your household has experienced any of the aforementioned symptoms within the last 14 days, you will not be allowed entry into the Courtroom.
2. You **must** wear a face covering and maintain 6 feet social distancing at all times while you are in the Courthouse. The court discourages neck gaiters, valve masks, and N95 masks.
3. The Courtroom will be disinfected prior to your arrival and will have several sanitizing stations available.

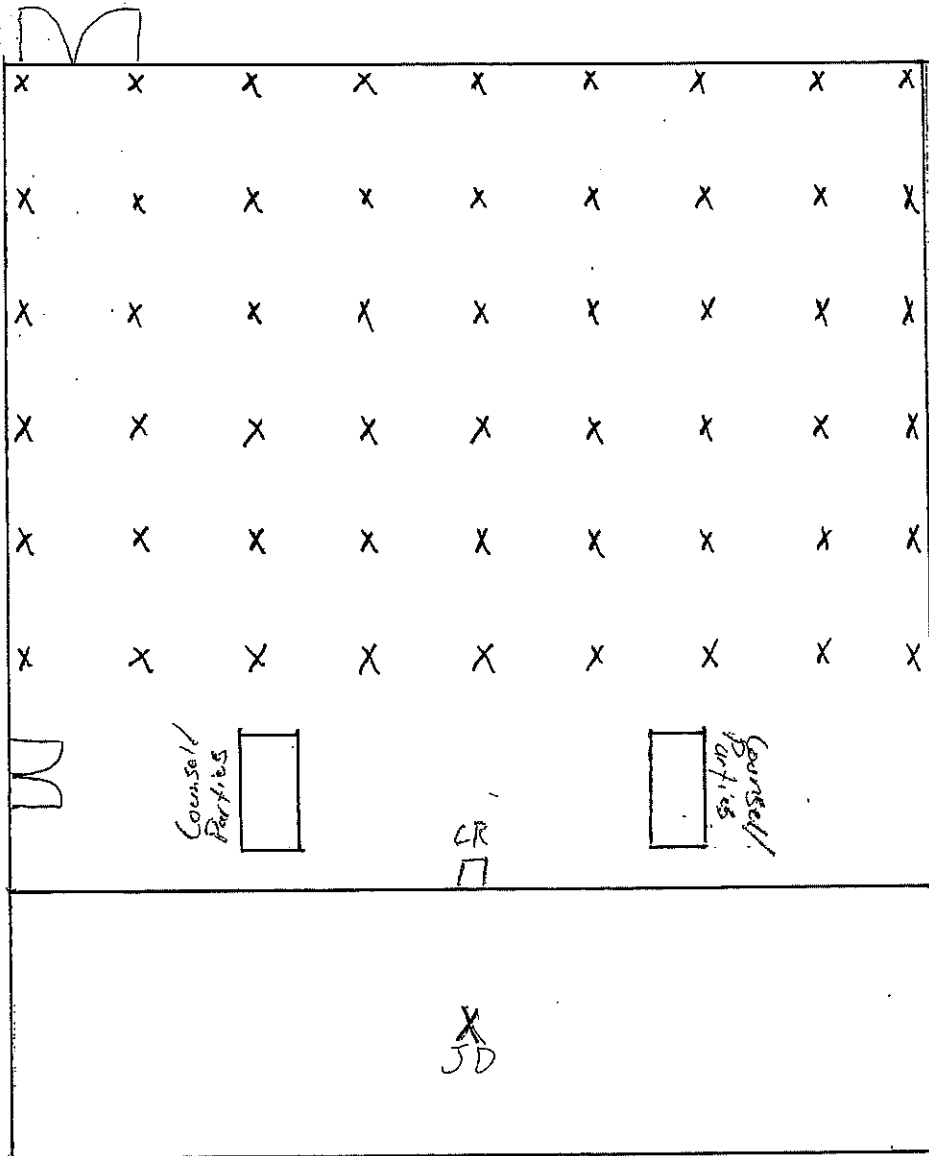
A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Janna Whatley".

Judge Janna K. Whatley

Local Administrative Judge, 343rd District Court

COVID-19 OPERATING PLAN

VOIR DIRE



COMMUNITY CENTER

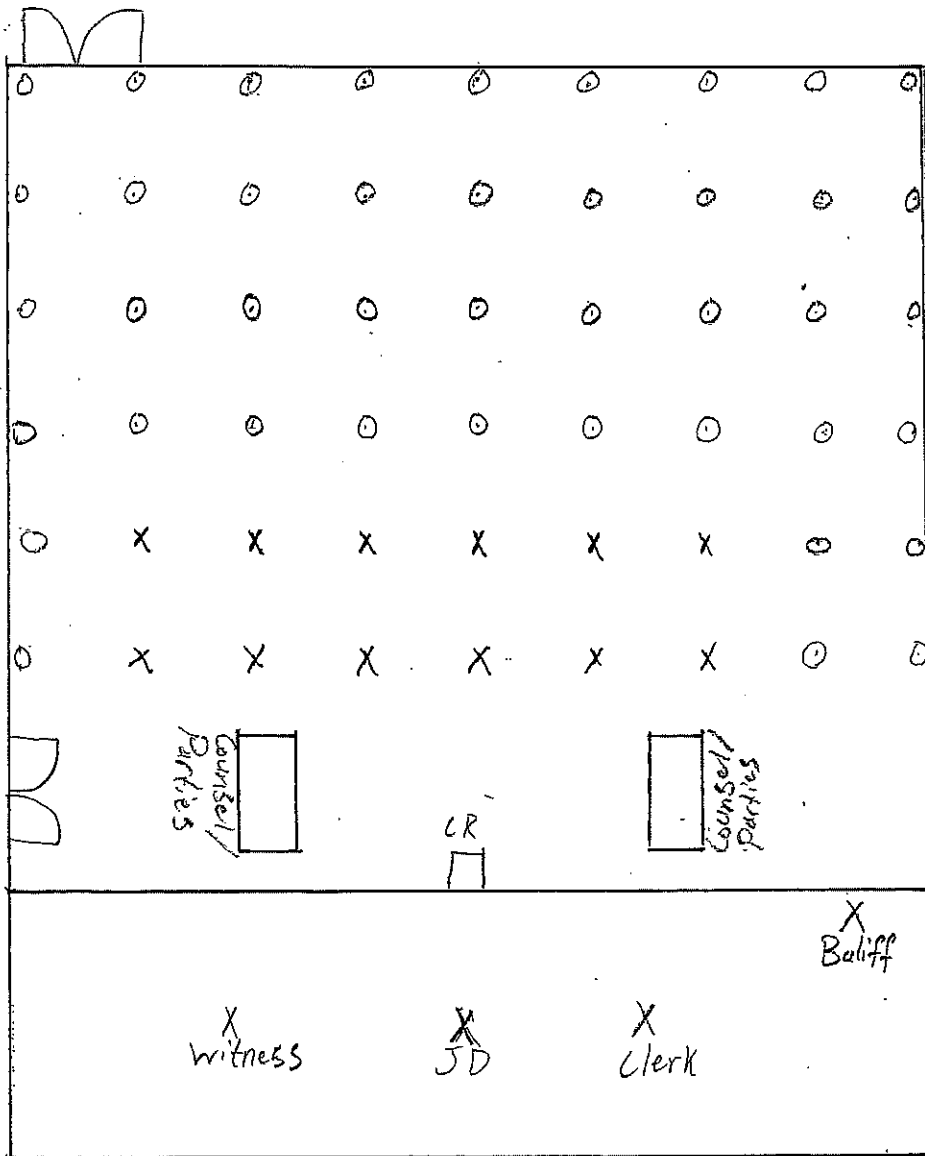
MCMULLEN COUNTY

1 inch = 10 feet

6'-0''

COVID-19 OPERATING PLAN

JURY TRIAL



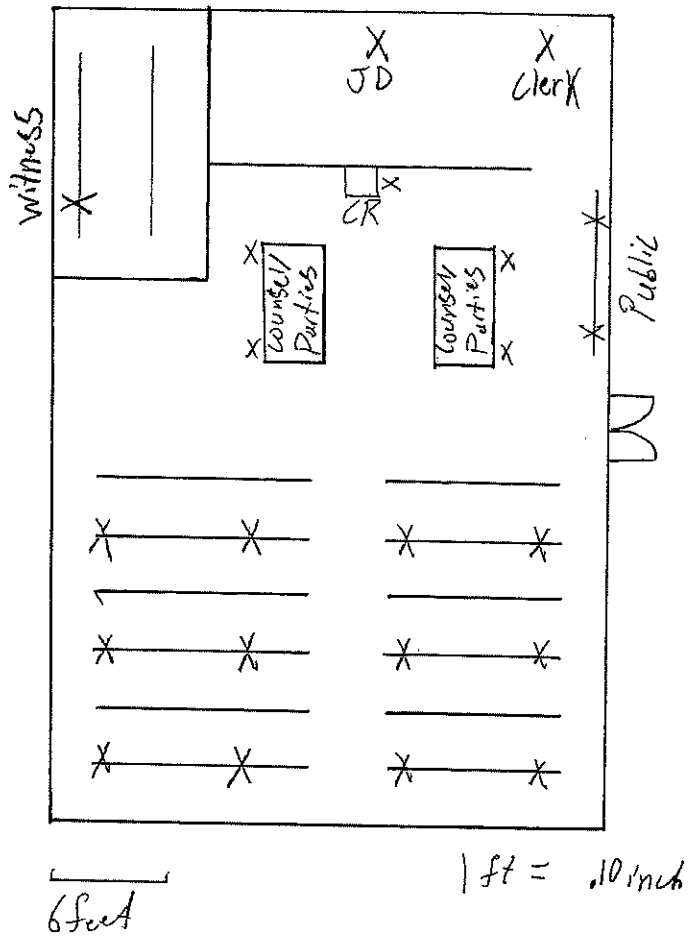
X = Juror (12)
O = Public Seating (42)

COMMUNITY CENTER
MCMULLEN COUNTY

1 inch = 10 feet

6'-0"

DISTRICT COURTROOM
MCMULLEN COUNTY



COVID-19 OPERATING PLAN

JURY TRIAL