

COVID-19 OPERATING PLAN

City of Denison Municipal Court

Recognizing the need to ensure the health and safety of litigants, attorneys, visitors, court staff, judges, and other individuals entering the building housing the court, the Municipal Court of the City of Denison 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 Denison Municipal Court will maintain regular communication with the local health authority and the City Manager and adjust this operating plan as necessary with conditions in the Denison Municipal Court.
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 telework when possible.
2. 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 should seek medical advice.
3. Judges and court staff will be required to practice social distancing and practice appropriate hygiene recommendations at all time.
4. Protective Measures: court staff working the service window are separated from the public by a bullet resistant window. Staff are provided hand sanitizer, sanitizing wipes for workstations, gloves and are permitted to wear masks should they choose to. Hand sanitizer is provided in the lobby for customers. Signs and floor stickers have been placed to encourage social distancing while waiting at the service window. Options available to handle cases by phone, email, mail and a 24 hour drop box are being encouraged to reduce any in-person dealings with court cases. Notices for these options have been posted on the court's website and are mentioned to defendants when calling court staff to inquire about handling their citation. Signatures on court documents will be required only if necessary, and can be handled by Adobe Sign, or if required in person at the court window, pens will be provided to keep contact to a minimum. Pens will be separated at the window by containers for clean pens and used pens. Court staff will sanitize the used pens regularly.

Scheduling

1. The following court schedules are established to reduce occupancy in the court building: all non-essential hearings will continue to be held via Zoom teleconference through the month of June, 2020 or longer if this order is amended. Starting June 1, Juvenile hearings and Trials will be held. EACH DOCKET WILL ALLOW NO MORE THAN (10) PERSONS OTHER THAN COURT STAFF IN THE COURTROOM AT A TIME INCLUDING DEFENDANTS AND THE PARENT OF ANY JUVENILE. In between each hearing, thirty (30) minutes will be allowed to properly clean and sanitize. Juvenile defendants shall only be accompanied by one parent/guardian unless the guest/witness is testifying, so that social distancing may be maintained with the occupancy limitations of the Courtroom. Defendants shall promptly notify the bailiff if they have any witnesses attending, so that the Court can promptly invoke the rule to exclude witnesses from the Courtroom except while testifying. Accommodations will be made to comply with the Open Courts Provision, but at no time will the Courtroom exceed 25% normal Courtroom Capacity.

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. COURT STAFF 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 on the court's website and in conspicuous locations around the court building. The notice will contain the following language: ***“COVID-19 NOTICE – Please contact the court to make other arrangements for a hearing if you are over age 65 or have 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.”***
3. Vulnerable populations who are scheduled for court will be accommodated by scheduling a Zoom hearing or telephone conference with the Judge, Prosecutor and Clerk.

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. Public common areas, including breakrooms and snack rooms, have been closed to the public.

Gallery

1. 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.
2. The gallery of the courtroom has been marked to identify appropriate social distancing in the seating. Seating is limited to every other row.

Well

1. In each courtroom, the counsel tables, witness stand, judge's bench, clerk 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 at the entrance to the building, outside of the courtroom, and outside of bathrooms.
2. Tissues have been placed near the door of the courtroom, at counsel tables, at the witness stand, on the judge's bench, and in the hallways.
3. The Department of State Health Service's "Stop the Spread of Germs Flyer" has been posted in multiple locations around the court building.

Screening

1. When individuals attempt to enter the courtroom, the City Marshal 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. Individuals who indicate yes to any of these questions will be refused admittance to the courtroom.
2. Defendants 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. Defendants with symptoms or a temperature equal to or above 99.6°F will not be transported to the court building.
3. Staff who are screening individuals entering the court building will be provided personal protective equipment, including gloves and a face mask, if desired.

Face Coverings

1. Individuals will be encouraged to bring cloth face coverings or disposable face coverings with them. Individual Defendants who do not wear cloth face coverings or disposable face coverings may be rescheduled for a Zoom hearing at the discretion of the Judge. Any Juvenile or parent of Juvenile who is not wearing cloth face coverings or disposable face coverings may be rescheduled after entering a plea for a Zoom hearing at the discretion of the Judge. Court staff is to include this information in notices for Court Hearings.

Cleaning

1. Court staff will clean the common areas of the court building so that common spaces are cleaned at least every 2 hours. In addition, court building cleaning staff will clean and sanitize the

commons spaces, including benches and chairs, stair railings, garbage can tops, door handles and bathrooms every evening.

2. Court staff will clean the courtroom between every hearing, between morning proceedings, and at the end of each day the courtroom is used.
3. Court staff has 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.

In developing the plan, information from the local health authority and the Office of Court Administration Court Guidance was considered. A copy of this order is being provided to the City Secretary to provide to the City Manager. Court Staff and Judges of this Court are being provided with a copy of this Operating Plan and are to conduct proceedings and provide the necessary notices to defendants consistent with the plan.

A rectangular box containing a handwritten signature in black ink. The signature is cursive and appears to read "Donald M. Banman".

Date: May 19, 2020

Donald M. Banman, Presiding Judge
City of Denison Municipal Court