

COVID-19 Recertification Operating Plan for City of Farmers Branch 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 court, the City of Farmers Branch will implement the following protective measures at the Municipal Court:

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 presiding judge of the municipal court will communicate with the local health authority to adjust this operating plan as necessary with conditions in the city.
4. Judges will begin setting non-essential in-person proceedings no sooner than February 1, 2021

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:
 - a. Employees are required to notify the court if they are ill and shall follow-up with the employee's primary care physician or urgent care before returning to work.
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 should seek medical advice.
4. Court staff will be required to wear facial coverings, practice social distancing, and practice appropriate hygiene recommendations at all times by the direction of city policy.
5. Court staff is required to practice social distancing, however, where not feasible, for example at the bench, measures such as hand hygiene, cough etiquette, cleanliness, and sanitation will be practiced.
6. Protective Measures: Sanitizing stations placed at entrance of building, no touch soap dispensers installed in all restrooms, routine cleaning and sanitizing performed.

Scheduling

1. The following court schedules are established to reduce occupancy in the court building:
Monday, Friday: 8:00 AM to 4:45 PM
Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday: 7:00 AM to 4:45 PM

Technology

1. The court will utilize a number of tools to allow citizens to handle their citations without a traditional appearance through the use of:
 - A) Zoom
 - B) Matterhorn (eCourt)
 - C) Mail
 - D) Phone payments
 - E) Online Payments
 - F) Email

The court is undergoing an update to the AV system to allow for better coverage of cameras within the Zoom environment which will assist greatly.

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, docket notices, and any 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 courts' website and in conspicuous locations around the court building.
3. Vulnerable populations who are scheduled for court will be accommodated by:
 - a. eCourt availability
 - b. Advanced seating
 - c. Preferential order to see the judge
 - d. Utilization of Zoom

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.

Gallery

2. The maximum number of persons permitted in the gallery of the courtroom has been determined. The maximum capacity of the courtroom will be monitored and enforced by the court bailiff.
3. The gallery of the courtroom has been marked with yellow tape to identify appropriate social distancing in the seating area. Seating is limited to every other row.

Well

4. 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.
5. Partitions have been installed at the Judge's Bench, Clerk and Bailiff

Hygiene

1. Hand sanitizer dispensers have been placed at the entrances to the building which is outside of the courtroom, and outside the restrooms.
2. Tissues have been placed at counsel tables, at the witness stand and on the judges' bench. At least one (1) trash can at the clerks, two trash cans in the well and one trash can in the lobby.
3. The Department of State Health Service's "Stop the Spread of Germs Flyer" has been posted in multiple locations of the court building.

Screening

1. 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 99.6°F will not be transported to the court building.

Face Coverings

1. All individuals entering the court building will be required 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 face mask will be provided, if available.
3. Individuals who will be required to be in the court building for over 1 hour will be provided surgical masks and required to wear them while in the court building if the supply is available.
4. Mask's must be worn in a way to cover both the nose and mouth.

Cleaning

1. Court building cleaning staff will regularly and frequently clean and disinfect the common areas and regularly touched surfaces of the court building. When court is in session, disinfecting wipes will be provided to people entering the courtroom if available.
2. Court building cleaning staff have been provided with EPA – approved disinfectants.
3. Court building cleaning staff have been trained on proper cleaning and disinfecting techniques and provided appropriate personal protective equipment.

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, 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: 12/22/2020



Presiding Judge of Municipal Court