

COVID-19 Operating Plan for the Laredo Municipal Court - City 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 courts, the court of City of Laredo 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 presiding judge of the municipal court will maintain regular communication with the local health authority, mayor and city manager and adjust this operating plan as necessary with conditions in the city.
4. Judges will begin setting non-essential in-person proceedings no sooner than July 27, 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: All judges and court staff will be asked 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. Any individual who indicate yes to any of these questions will be asked to immediately contact the Employee Health and Wellness Dept. Court personnel will use an infrared thermometer to determine the temperature of all judges and employees. Individuals whose temperature equals or exceeds 100.0°F will be sent home and asked to immediately contact the Employee Health and Wellness Dept.
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. Judges and court staff will be required to wear face coverings, practice social distancing, and practice appropriate hygiene recommendations at all time.
5. Protective Measures: All office desks are placed so that employees have enough distance between work stations in accordance with social distancing recommendations.

Scheduling

1. The following court schedules are established to reduce occupancy in the court building: Laredo Municipal Court began conducting court via Zoom on April 6, 2020. As of May 14, 2020, we have had a total of 65 court sessions, with almost 1400 participants. We will continue to host virtual sessions to reduce the number of in-person appearances.

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 on the courts' websites and in conspicuous locations around the court building. The court is also working with the Laredo Police Department to add this notice on all citations issued by the department.
3. Vulnerable populations who are scheduled for court will be accommodated by conducting separate hearing for those requesting accommodations with a limited the number of cases per docket to no more than 10 persons. The sessions will be scheduled at a time when no other session is taking place so as to reduce the number of persons present at the courthouse. Also available to them are making their appearance via the virtual sessions.

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. The lobby has twelve total benches, however only six will be used with a maximum of four persons per bench to allow proper social distancing.

Gallery

4. 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. In the two smaller courtrooms, there will be eight persons allowed per courtroom. In the main courtroom, 16 persons will be allowed.
5. The gallery of the courtroom has been marked to identify appropriate social distancing in the seating. Seating is limited to every other row.

Well

6. In each courtroom, the counsel tables, witness stand, judge's bench, and clerk, court reporter, and bailiff seating are 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 entrances to the building, at each service window, outside of each courtroom, outside of bathrooms, and in different areas throughout the lobby.
2. Tissues have been placed at the entrance of the building, near the door of the courtroom, at counsel tables, at the witness stand, on the judges' benches.
3. The Department of State Health Service's "Stop the Spread of Germs Flyer" has been posted in multiple locations of the court building.
4. Outside, before entering the building, a portable handwashing station was placed with proper signage requesting that hands be washed before entering the building.

Screening

1. When individuals attempt to enter the court building, court security personnel stationed at the security desk 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 court building.
2. When individuals attempt to enter the court building, court security personnel will use an infrared thermometer to determine the temperature of the individual. Individuals whose temperature equals or exceeds 100.0°F will be refused admittance to the court building.
3. Currently, inmates make their appearance virtually from the jail. If inmates need to be transported from the jail to the court building, they 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.
4. Staff who are screening individuals entering the court building will be provided personal protective equipment, including gloves and a face mask. The security station is also protected by glass to avoid unnecessary contact. The security station is also disinfected on a continuous basis throughout the day.

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. If the individual does not have a cloth face covering, a disposable face mask will be provided.

Cleaning

1. Court building cleaning staff will clean the common areas of the court building so that common spaces are cleaned at least every two hours.

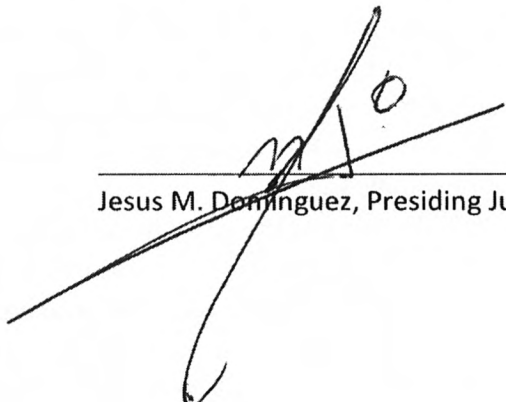
2. Court building cleaning staff will clean the courtrooms between every hearing, between morning and afternoon proceedings, and at the end of each day the courtroom is used.
3. Court building cleaning staff have been provided cleaning supplies shown to be effective with this coronavirus/COVID 19.
4. Court building cleaning staff have been trained on proper cleaning techniques and provided appropriate personal protective equipment.

Other

The local health authority has requested for the courthouse to be inspected for a reverse exhaust air system to the HVAC system that is presently in operation. The inspection will be done two weeks from the effective date of this plan. If one is nonexistent in the building, all reasonable efforts will be made to install one prior to our opening date to the public.

I consulted with the local health authority, Dr. Victor Treviño, mayor Pete Saenz and City Manager Robert Eads on May 15, 2020 documentation of which is attached to this plan. I will ensure that the associate judges in the court building covered by this Operating Plan conduct proceedings consistent with the plan.

Date: 5/20/2020



Jesus M. Dominguez, Presiding Judge of Municipal Court