

COVID-19 Operating Plan for the City of West Columbia, Brazoria County 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 courts of City of West Columbia 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 and mayor 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 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. Judge and Court Staff Monitoring Requirements: mask requirements, disinfecting all community areas and maintaining 6 feet of personal distance.
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: No more than 10 defendants permitted in the courtroom at a time. Maintain social distancing while waiting in line outside to enter the courtroom. Chairs have been placed 6 feet apart for people waiting inside. Defendants will use a designated entrance door and exit door to help maintain social distancing. Hand sanitizer is placed at sign-in area, prosecutor table, judge's bench, and clerk desk. Plexi-glass shields have been placed at the prosecutor's table, judge's bench, and clerk desk to provide additional protection for court staff and defendants. Options continue to be available for defendants by phone, email, and drop-box outside of City Hall building.

Scheduling

1. The following court schedules are established to reduce occupancy in the court building:
Only 10 defendants are allowed in the courtroom at one time. We have staggered our court appearance times to 2:30 p.m., 3:30 p.m. and 4:30 p.m. to prevent a large amount of people arriving at one time.

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 (a copy of which is attached).
3. Vulnerable populations who are scheduled for court will be accommodated by allowing them to resolve their citation by phone or email. If they must appear in court they will be allowed to wait in their vehicle, and they will be the first defendant called upon for court hearing.

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. The maximum number of persons permitted in the gallery of the courtroom has been determined and posted. The maximum capacity of the courtroom will be monitored and enforced by court staff.
3. The gallery of the courtroom has been set up for appropriate social distancing in the seating.
4. In the courtroom, the counsel table, judge's bench, and clerk areas have been arranged in such a way to allow for social distancing of at least 6 feet between each space.

Hygiene

1. Hand sanitizer dispensers have been placed throughout the court office and courtroom.
2. Tissues have been placed throughout the court office and courtroom.
3. The Department of State Health Service's "Stop the Spread of Germs Flyer" has been posted in multiple locations throughout the court office and courtroom.

Screening

1. When individuals attempt to enter the court building, the Court bailiff 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, the Court bailiff 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. Staff who are screening individuals entering the court building will be provided personal protective equipment, including face mask, gloves, and hand sanitizer.

Face Coverings

1. All court staff are required to wear face coverings in the courtroom.
2. Individuals will be encouraged to bring cloth face coverings with them.

Cleaning

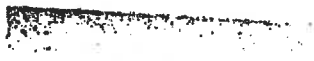
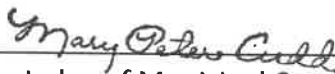
1. Court building cleaning staff will clean the common areas of the court building so that common spaces are cleaned at least every 30 minutes.
2. Court building cleaning staff will clean the courtrooms between every hearing, between morning and afternoon proceedings, and at the end of each day the courtroom is used.
3. Court building cleaning staff have been provided cleaning supplies shown to be effective with this coronavirus.
4. Court building cleaning staff have been trained on proper cleaning techniques and provided appropriate personal protective equipment.

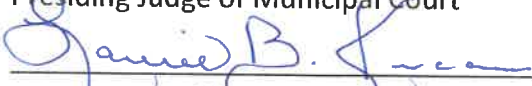
Other

1. In the event this Operating Plan is unworkable or becomes unnecessary for any reason the Presiding Judge reserves the right to amend this Operating Plan and will notify the mayor, court staff, and bailiffs prior to any court proceeding or within 24 hours whichever is the shortest time period.

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 and mayor, 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: 6/5/2020

Presiding Judge of Municipal Court


Mayor, City of West Columbia