

COVID-19 Operating Plan for Abilene Municipal Court

Recognizing the need to ensure the health and safety of litigants, attorneys, visitors, court staff, judge and other individuals entering the building housing the court, the Abilene Municipal Court will implement the following protective measures:

General

1. The judge 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. The judge 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 of Abilene.
4. Court Administrator is designated to check Texas DSHS website, <https://www.dshs.state.tx.us/coronavirus/opentexas.aspx>, for the latest on opening Texas safely.
5. Judges will begin setting non-essential in-person proceedings no sooner than June 1st, 2020.

Judge and Court Staff Health

1. Judge and Court Staff Monitoring Requirements: All staff will self monitor and will immediately report any symptoms or exposure to his or her supervisor.
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 wear face coverings, practice social distancing, and practice appropriate hygiene recommendations at all times.
4. Protective Measures: Masks and disinfectant wipes and hand sanitizer will be provided to staff.
5. The Presiding Judge and Court Administrator will hold weekly meetings to discuss any issues relating to the operating plan.

Scheduling

1. The following court schedules are established to reduce occupancy in the court building: All hearings will occur remotely and any hearings that are in person will always be within established social distancing guidelines.

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. The 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.
3. Vulnerable populations who are scheduled for court will be accommodated by resetting their hearing until after the pandemic has subsided or by conducting their hearing via 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. The lobby will maintain an occupancy of no more than 10 (ten) people at any given time.
2. The maximum occupancy for the restrooms will be no more than one individual at a time.

Gallery

3. The courtroom will maintain an occupancy of no more than 10 (ten) people at any given time and will be monitored and enforced by court staff.
4. The gallery of the courtroom when open and the front lobby have been marked to identify appropriate social distancing in the seating.

Well

5. In each courtroom, the counsel tables, witness stand, judge's bench 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. Tissues have been placed near the door of the courtroom, at counsel tables, at the witness stand, on the judges' benches, in the hallways, at the entrance to the building and at clerk windows.
2. Hand sanitizer has been placed by the entrance to the building at the Marshals desk.
3. The Department of State Health Services "Stop the Spread of Germs" flyer has been posted at the entrance to the court building.

Screening

1. When individuals attempt to enter the court building, a 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 court building.
2. Staff who are screening individuals entering the court building will be provided personal protective equipment, including mask and gloves.
3. If there is any concern, the court will have the ability to use a thermal thermometer to check anyone's temperature coming into the court in a safe manner.
4. If an inmate is brought to the court from the county jail, his temperature must be checked before he will be allowed into the court facility.

Face Coverings

1. All individuals entering the court building will be required to wear face coverings at all times and their time in the court building will be monitored.

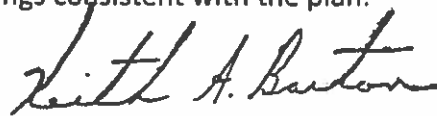
Cleaning

1. Court building cleaning staff will clean the common areas of the court building so that common spaces are cleaned at least everyday.
2. Court building cleaning staff have been provided cleaning supplies shown to be effective with this coronavirus.
3. Court building cleaning staff have been trained on proper cleaning techniques and provided appropriate personal protective equipment.
4. Sanitizing wipes will be available on the court tables to be used to wipe down surfaces after each trial.
5. Court building cleaning staff will clean the courtroom after each hearing that is conducted.

The COVID-19 Operating Plan for the Abilene Municipal Court is hereby adopted, as part of the court's security plan, as a protection against bio-terrorism.

In developing the plan, I consulted with the local health authority and the 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: MAY 27th, 2020



Presiding Judge of Abilene Municipal Court