

COVID-19 Operating Plan for the Howard County Judiciary and the City of Big Spring Municipal Court

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 Howard County and the Municipal Court of the City of Big Spring will implement the following protective measures:

General

- 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.
- All judges will use all reasonable efforts to conduct proceedings remotely.
- The local administrative judge will maintain regular communication with the local health authority and county judge and mayor, and adjust this operating plan as necessary with conditions in the city and county.
- Judges will begin setting non-essential in-person proceedings no sooner than June 1, 2020.

Judge and Court Staff Health

- Judges and court staff who can perform the essential functions of their job remotely will telework when possible.
- Judge and Court Staff Monitoring Requirements:

Judges and court staff will self-monitor continuously to determine whether they are having any symptoms which might or could possibly be related to COVID-19. 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. Each judge has authority to send any staff member to seek medical advice or to quarantine at home.

- Judges and court staff will practice social distancing as well as appropriate hygiene recommendations at all times. Judges and court staff will wear protective masks when it is impossible to maintain social distancing.
- Protective Measures: Protective measures include social distancing, wearing of protective masks, allowing remote telework when possible, and constant cleaning and

disinfecting.

Scheduling

- The following court schedules are established to reduce occupancy in the court building:

For any courts located in the same building, those courts will coordinate with each other in regard to the scheduling of hearings to avoid multiple courts scheduling multiple hearings at the same time. If at all possible, courts in the same building will avoid scheduling hearings at the same time that hearings are scheduled in another court.

Each individual court will avoid scheduling multiple hearings at the same time such as docket calls, pretrial hearings, etc...if the result of the scheduling will be that social distancing cannot easily occur. Each judge is to calculate the maximum number of persons who can easily maintain social distancing in their respective courtroom, including the judge and court staff. Hearings will not be scheduled where the number of persons expected to attend will approach or exceed the capacity of the courtroom.

Vulnerable Populations

- 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.
- Each judge will make all reasonable efforts to notify 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).
- Vulnerable populations who are scheduled for court will be accommodated by allowing such persons to appear remotely if at all possible; by segregating the individual into a separate space where the risks of infection are more easily controlled; and/or by rescheduling hearings involving such individuals to a date and time when contact with others is minimal.

Social Distancing

- 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.
- No more than two individuals not from the same household will be permitted in an elevator. If more than one individual from the same household is in an elevator, no other individuals will be permitted in the elevator.
- 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.

- Public common areas, including breakrooms and snackrooms, have been closed to the public.

Gallery

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

Well

- In each courtroom, the counsel tables, witness stand, judge's bench, and clerk, court reporter, 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

- Hand sanitizer dispensers have been placed throughout the courthouse and in the courtroom.
- Tissues have been placed near the door of the courtroom, at counsel tables, at the witness stand, and on the judges' benches.
- The Department of State Health Service's "Stop the Spread of Germs Flyer" has been posted in multiple locations on each floor of the court building.

Screening

- When individuals attempt to enter the court building, they will be instructed by signage that they are not allowed admittance into the building 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.

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 will be provided upon request by anyone entering the building.

Face Coverings

- All individuals entering the court building will be encouraged by signage to wear face coverings at all times.
- If the individual does not have a cloth face covering, a disposable face mask will be provided.

Cleaning

- Court building cleaning staff will clean the common areas of the court building so that common spaces are cleaned at least every eight hours.
- Court building cleaning staff will clean the courtrooms between every hearing.
- Court building cleaning staff have been provided cleaning supplies shown to be effective with this coronavirus.
- Court building cleaning staff have been trained on proper cleaning techniques and provided appropriate personal protective equipment.

Other

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, the County Judge and the Mayor of Big Spring, 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: _____
