

# **COVID-19 Operating Plan for the Travis County Probate Court**

Recognizing the need to ensure the health and safety of litigants, attorneys, visitors, court staff, judges, and other individuals entering the building housing the Travis County Probate Court, the Travis County Probate Court 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 local administrative judge for the Probate Court will maintain regular communication with the local health authority and county judge and adjust this operating plan as necessary with conditions in the county.
4. Judges will begin setting non-essential in-person proceedings no sooner than July 31, 2020 unless the Emergency Order issued by the Texas Supreme Court is extended.

## **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: Law enforcement officers or other staff will monitor the health of anyone who enters the court building at security screening.
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 while away from their work station, practice social distancing, and practice appropriate hygiene recommendations at all time.
5. Protective Measures: The protected measures will be in compliance with the Travis County Local Health Authority's recommendations such as social distancing, wearing masks for added protection for judge and staff who regularly interact with others. Each work station is provided with hand sanitizer. Protective Plexiglass shields have been installed in the courtroom to create physical separation.

## **Scheduling**

1. The following court schedules are established to reduce occupancy in the court building: Employees are encouraged to telecommute when possible.

Hearings shall continue to be conducted remotely via phone or video conferencing. If an in-person hearing is required, the Court will schedule it at least 30 minutes between any other in-person hearing to prevent overlap between cases and to minimize the time parties must wait in the courtroom area.

Only essential participants to the hearing will be allowed to attend the hearing. They will practice social distancing and shall sit in spots that are sufficiently marked.

### **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. Vulnerable populations who are scheduled for court will be accommodated by the hearing being scheduled remotely.

### **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. 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.
3. 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.
4. Public common areas, including breakrooms and snackrooms, have been closed to the public.
5. 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.
6. The gallery of the courtroom has been marked to identify appropriate social distancing in the seating. Seating is limited to every other row.
7. In each courtroom, the counsel tables, witness stand, judge's bench, and clerk and court reporter seating have been arranged in such a way so that there is social distancing of at least 6 feet between each space, or if 6 feet separation is not possible, then a Plexiglass shield has been installed to create physical separation.

### **Hygiene**

1. Hand sanitizer dispensers have been placed at the entrances to the building, outside of elevators on each floor, outside of each courtroom, and outside of bathrooms.
2. Tissues have been placed near the door of the courtroom, at counsel tables, at the witness stand, and on the judges' benches.
3. 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**

1. When individuals attempt to enter the court building, law enforcement officers or other staff 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, law enforcement officers or other staff will use an infrared thermometer to determine the temperature of the individual. Individuals whose temperature equals or exceeds 99.6°F will be refused admittance to the court building.
3. 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.
4. Staff who are screening individuals entering the court building will be provided personal protective equipment, including facemasks, gloves, and Plexiglass or acrylic safety shields.

### **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.
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.

### **Cleaning**

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

Not applicable.

I have conferred with the local administrative district judge of Travis County regarding this Operating Plan. This operating plan was submitted to the local health authority and county judge. I will ensure that court staff and 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



Judge Guy Herman  
Presiding Judge and Local Administrative Judge  
Travis County Probate Court