

Draft Covid-19 Operating Plan – Lampasas County Judiciary

COVID-19 Operating Plan for the Lampasas County Judiciary

In this COVID-19 Operating Plan, the Courts of Lampasas County include the District Court, the County Court, and the Justices of the Peace Courts. The Lampasas County District Court also include the Child Abuse and Neglect Court and the IV-D Child Support 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 Lampasas County 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 district judge will maintain regular communication with the local health authority, the county judge, and the Justices of the Peace 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 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: By coming to work or entering the courtroom, the judge and court staff are affirming that they are symptom free and have not knowingly been in contact with any person diagnosed with or suspected to be infected with COVID-19 within the prior 14 days. The judge or any court staff that suspect that they are infected with or have been exposed to COVID-19 shall immediately report that to the Local Administrative Judge or their department head. Additional screening may be ordered by the Judge or Sheriff and their deputies. For the limited purposes of this plan, "Court Staff" includes employees, interns, and contractors of the court, the clerk's offices, the employees of Lampasas County sheriff and constables, and attorneys employed by the State and their staff.
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 and shall practice social distancing and practice appropriate hygiene recommendations at all time. However, Judges

and staff and witnesses may lower or remove their face coverings when inside the well and court is in session, and while in their individual offices and work stations which allow for social distancing.

5. Protective Measures: Judges and court staff will adhere to the guidelines set by the CDC, DSHS and the Lampasas County Public Health District for social distancing and personal hygiene.

Any one may alert the court or law enforcement officers attending court to any person in the courtroom who appears to be ill or complaining of symptoms. On a regular hourly basis, the Judge and all court staff shall wash their hands or apply hand sanitizer. Disinfectant wipes will be available to wipe surfaces in the working areas of the of the court and all such areas will be wiped down by the person working in that area when they leave the courtroom.

Scheduling

1. The following court schedule directives are established to reduce occupancy in the court building: No docket or court hearing will be scheduled in the courthouse while any other court or meeting is taking place in the courthouse. Hearing and appearances will be scheduled throughout the day with specific times to start. A separate docket will be scheduled for detained person to minimize exposure of inmates and jail staff. To the extent possible, the courts will continue to conduct hearings remotely to bring as few individuals into the courtroom as possible.

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.
3. Vulnerable populations who are scheduled for court will be accommodated by being scheduled as the first setting of the day or the first setting following lunch breaks; and by remote video conference hearings or any other means available .

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 the elevator vestibule or elevator. If more than one individual from the same household is in the elevator vestibule or elevator, no other individuals will be permitted in the elevator vestibule or elevator. Signs will be posted at the vestibules.

3. Each public restroom has the maximum capacity of two (2). Posted on each restroom door.
4. There are no common areas in the district court building. Only the east courtroom door will be used to enter the second-floor courtroom. The west door will be an exit only. Individuals needing to use the elevator will be allowed to exit the east door.
5. No loitering will be permitted in hallways and landings.

Gallery

6. The maximum number of persons permitted in the gallery of the second floor courtroom is 24 and the maximum number of persons permitted in the gallery of the first floor courtroom and each justice of the peace courtrooms is 6. The maximum number is posted. The maximum capacity of the courtroom will be monitored and enforced by court staff.
7. The gallery of the courtroom has been marked to identify appropriate social distancing in the seating. Seating is limited to every other row with seats folded and tied of the unused rows.

Well

8. 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. No loitering in the well of the courtroom will be permitted.

Hygiene

1. Hand sanitizer dispensers have been placed throughout the court building.
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, they will be instructed by signage to self-screen with directions to NOT enter 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.
2. When individuals attempt to enter the courtroom, the Sheriff or his designee (at their discretion will use an infrared thermometer to determine the temperature of the individual. Individuals whose temperature equals or exceeds 100.0°F or declines to submit to having their temperature taken will be directed to leave 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 a facemask and shield, hand sanitizer, and gloves to be used at their discretion.

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, if available.
3. Individuals who will be required to be in the courtroom gallery for over 1 hour will be provided surgical masks and required to wear them while in the courtroom gallery 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 four (4) hours.
2. Court building cleaning staff will clean the courtrooms 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.
5. Attorneys using counsel table will be provided with disinfecting wipes. Attorneys shall use said wipes on the counsel table and chairs after using counsel table and are encouraged to use said wipes on counsel table and chairs before use.

I have attempted to confer with all judges of courts with courtrooms in the court buildings regarding this Operating Plan. In developing the plan, I consulted with the local health authority and county judge, documentation of which is attached to this plan. I will ensure that the judges of the district courts with courtrooms in the court building covered by this Operating Plan conduct proceedings consistent with the plan, and I will request the other judges covered by this Operating Plan also conduct proceedings consistent with this plan.

Date: 05-28-2020



John Gauntt, Local Administrative District Judge