

## **COVID-19 Operating Plan for the City of Columbus Municipal 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 courts, the court of the City of Columbus Municipal 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 when reasonably possible.
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 Columbus.
4. Judges will begin setting non-essential in person proceedings to be heard no sooner than June 16, 2020. No jury trials will be scheduled to be conducted before August 1, 2020.

### Judge and Court Staff

1. Judges and court staff who can perform the essential functions of their job remotely will work remotely when reasonably possible.
2. Judge and Court Staff Monitoring Requirements: self monitor for symptoms, COVID-19 screening questions, and temperature checks.
3. Judge or court staff who feel feverish or have measured temperatures equal to or greater than 99.6 degrees 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 are encouraged to wear face coverings, and will be required to practice social distancing and appropriate hygiene recommendations (such as frequent hand washing) at all times.
5. Protective Measures: face masks, gloves, hand sanitizer, and hand soap will be available for court staff. In the lobby and court room hand sanitizer will be available for customers.

### Scheduling

1. The following court schedules are established to reduce occupancy in the court building: each hearing shall consist of no more than one (1) defendant at the bench at one time. Defendants will not be allowed to bring other guests with them to a hearing, subject to the requirements of the open courts doctrine. Juvenile defendants shall only be accompanied by not more than two (2) parents or guardians, and no other guests, including but not limited to siblings, unless the siblings are witnesses. Accommodations will be made to comply with the Open Courts doctrine, but at no time will the Courtroom exceed fifty percent (50%) of the normal Courtroom capacity. All jury and bench trials will be rescheduled to a date after August 1, 2020. Alternative options for resolving cases will be made available to citizens and non-citizens including, but not limited to, online, mail, drop box, telephone, and email.

### 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, docket 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 court's web site and in a conspicuous location at the court building.
3. Vulnerable populations who are scheduled for court will be accommodated by being given alternative solutions to resolving cases including, but not limited to, appointment based scheduling, teleconference, online payment options, mail, and usage of drop box.

### 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 six (6) feet.
2. No more than four (4) individuals not from the same household will be permitted in the courtroom lobby at the same time.
3. Each restroom adjacent to the courtroom will be limited to no more than one person at a time.
4. Public common areas adjacent to the courtroom have been closed to the public, other than to travel through such common areas to access the restrooms.

### Gallery

5. The maximum number of persons permitted in the gallery of the courtroom will be monitored by the bailiff and court staff.
6. Seating in the gallery will be set up and/or marked to maintain appropriate social distancing. Seating is limited to every other row.

### Well

7. In the courtroom, the counsel tables, witness chair, judge's bench, and clerk and bailiff station will be arranged so that there is appropriate social distancing of at least six (6) feet between each space.

### Hygiene

1. Hand sanitizer will be placed at the entrance to the courtroom and in or near the restrooms.
2. Tissues will be placed near the door of the courtroom, at counsel tables, at the judge's bench, and at the clerk's station.
3. The Department of State Health Service's "Stop the Spread of Germs" flyer will be posted in the courtroom when/if the flyer is available to court staff.

### Screening

1. When individuals enter the court building, court staff (preferably 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, court staff (preferably bailiff) will use an infrared thermometer to determine the temperature of the individual. Individuals whose temperature equals or exceeds 99.6 degrees F will be refused admittance to the court building.
3. Court staff, including bailiffs, who are screening individuals entering the court building will be provided personal protective equipment as desired/requested to include face masks, gloves, hand sanitizer, and sanitizing wipes/spray.

### Face Coverings

1. All individuals entering the courtroom are encouraged to wear a face covering.

2. Individuals entering the courtroom who do not have a face covering, but request a face covering, will be provided a disposable face mask to the extent court staff has disposable face masks available.


#### Cleaning

1. Court building cleaning staff will clean the common areas of the courtroom between court dockets, or every two (2) hours if a court docket exceeds 2 hours.
2. Court building cleaning staff will clean the courtroom between every court docket, and at the end of each day the courtroom is in use.
3. Court building cleaning staff will be provided with cleaning supplies known to be effective with the coronavirus.
4. Court building cleaning staff will be trained on proper cleaning techniques and provided with appropriate personal protective equipment.

#### Other


The court will continue to evaluate the effectiveness of this plan and adjust as needed with continuing collaboration with the mayor and the local health authority.

I have conferred with Municipal Court personnel (clerk) regarding this Plan. This Plan is being provided to the local health authority and mayor for review, input, and approval. I will ensure that all court proceedings that occur in the court building covered by this Plan are conducted consistently with this Plan.

  
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Presiding Judge Leonard E. Peters  
City of Columbus Municipal Court

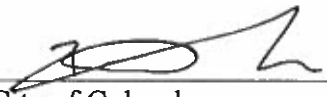
Date: 6/01/2020

Reviewed and Approved by:

  
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Hon. Lori Gobert  
Mayor, City of Columbus

Date: 6/1/2020

Reviewed and Approved by:

  
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Dr. Bart Klaus, City of Columbus  
Health Authority

Date: 6/2/20

# **Columbus Municipal Court in the City of Columbus**

## **NOTICE TO VULNERABLE POPULATIONS**

The following notice shall be posted on the Court's website, at the entrance to City Hall and at the Court Clerk's window, and in all orders setting hearing, docket notices, and other communications:

### **Notice to Vulnerable Populations**

The following are considered to be member of 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.

Any person who is in a Vulnerable Population category may to contact the court to identify themselves as a vulnerable individual and receive accommodations, which will include the ability to participate in electronics or telephonic proceedings. If you do not have the technology to appear electronically or by telephone, the Court will make accommodations for you at City Hall that will include the ability to so participate using equipment that will be sanitized between users. If you appear in person at City Hall, you will be encouraged to wear a face covering and one will be provided to you if you do not have one.

Any person who is in a Vulnerable populations who is scheduled for court will be accommodated by being given alternative solutions to resolving cases including, but not limited to, appointment based scheduling, teleconference, online payment options, mail and usage of drop box.

SIGNED and ORDERED this 2<sup>nd</sup> day of JUNE 2020.



Judge LEONARD E. PETERS