

## COVID-19 Operating Plan for the Hunt County Judiciary

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 **Hunt 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 and county judge and adjust this operating plan as necessary with conditions in the county.
4. Judges will begin conducting CPS trials as soon as the Supreme Court of Texas Emergency Order's in conjunction with the Governor's Emergency Declaration for the State of Texas is lifted but no sooner than June 1, 2020. The Judges recognize that certain pending CPS trials will have to occur within the timeline prescribed by these orders and may necessitate holding a specific CPS trial before August 1, 2020.
5. Judges will begin setting in-person proceedings no sooner than August 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. Judges or court staff who feel feverish or have measured temperatures equal to or greater than 100.0°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 immediately seek medical advice.
3. Judges and court staff will be required to wear face coverings in all public areas of the courthouse. If individuals do not bring their own face coverings that will cover both their mouth and nose, a mask will be provided by Hunt County. The only exception is that a judge who has a plexiglass divider installed on all three sides of their bench may choose not to wear a mask when seated at the bench. If the judge takes their mask off, the area they occupy must be cleaned before another judge uses that space.
4. Judges and court staff will practice social distancing and appropriate hygiene recommendations.

THE FOLLOWING PROVISIONS OF THE PLAN WILL APPLY ONLY AFTER THE COURTHOUSE IS OPEN TO THE PUBLIC.

**Scheduling**

1. The following court schedules are established to reduce occupancy in the court building: court proceedings will be held, as much as possible, from the hours of 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. and 1:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. Monday through Friday.

**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 on a case by case basis as deemed appropriate by the judge.
3. Vulnerable populations who are scheduled for court will be accommodated on a case by case basis and all accommodations require prior approval of the presiding judge. Failure to appear without prior approval will not be excused by the court and may result in the hearing occurring without the input of the individual who chose not to appear. In criminal cases, failure to appear without prior approval of the judge may result in the issuance of a warrant.

**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, snackrooms, and the law library have been closed to the public.
5. Individuals needing access to the law library will be required to schedule access through appointment only with courthouse security. After each use, the individuals must check out with security so the law library can be cleaned before another party may access it.

6. The public will not be allowed to congregate in any area of the courthouse outside the courtrooms.
7. Witnesses will be instructed to remain in their vehicles or outside the courthouse and provide a phone number so that they can be notified by the attorney who is calling them as a witness when it is their turn to testify.

#### *Gallery*

8. 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. Once capacity is reached, the Bailiff will ensure that no one enters to violate the maximum capacity.
9. The gallery of the courtroom has been marked to identify appropriate social distancing in the seating. Individuals will be required to sit in assigned areas. Individuals living in the same household may request permission to sit together.
10. All persons entering the gallery will have entered the courthouse through security screening and be required to wear masks. If individuals do not have a cloth mask of their own that will cover both their nose and mouth, a mask will be provided by Hunt County at screening. Face masks must be worn at all times in the gallery.

#### *Well*

11. In each courtroom, the counsel tables, witness stand, judge's bench, and clerk, court reporter, and bailiff's seating have been arranged in such a way so that there is social distancing of at least 6 feet between each space if possible.

#### **Hygiene**

1. Hand sanitizer dispensers have been placed at the entrances to the building and on each floor.
2. Tissues and trash cans have been placed at the witness stand and on the judges' benches and in the hallways.
3. The Department of State Health Service's "Stop the Spread of Germs Flyer" has been posted on each floor of the court building.

#### **Screening for Judges, Court Staff, and All County Employees**

1. Judges, court staff, county officials and all county employees (hereinafter called "employees") will have access to the building through a separate entrance and will be required to have their temperature taken when they enter the courthouse and will be required to wear a mask upon entry in all public areas. Individuals may wear their own cloth masks that cover both their mouth and nose. If an individual does not have a cloth mask, then masks will be provided by Hunt County at screening.
2. Employees with a temperature exceeding 100.0°F or with identifiable COVID-19 symptoms will be required to stay home and notify their department head by 9:00 a.m. of the symptoms so that arrangements can be made for them to work from home.

3. When employees attempt to enter the court building, security will ask the individuals the same screening questions for all other individuals who enter the courthouse. Individuals who indicate yes to any of these questions will be refused admittance to the court building.
4. Judges, court staff and all county employees are required to submit to the screening requirements once a day upon their initial entry into the courthouse.
5. These conditions are required to protect every person who works within any of the buildings owned by the county that have a courtroom on site.
6. In each office an area will be defined for public access. The other areas of the office are private access and employees will not be required to maintain their mask in a private access area but will have to place the mask back over their mouth and nose upon entering any areas of public access. Public access areas will be clearly identified in each office by the department head.

### **Screening for All Other Individuals who Enter the Courthouse**

1. When individuals attempt to enter the court building, security will ask the individuals if they have symptoms of COVID-19, including if they are are:
  - a.) feeling feverish;
  - b.) have a cough;
  - c.) have shortness of breath, or difficulty breathing;
  - d.) have chills, or repeated shaking with chills;
  - e.) have muscle pain or a headache;
  - f.) have a sore throat;
  - g.) suffer from loss of taste or smell;
  - h.) have diarrhea; or
  - i.) have been in close contact with a person who is confirmed to have COVID-19.
  - j.) 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, security or screening staff will use an infrared thermometer to determine the temperature of the individual. Individuals whose temperature equals or exceeds 100.0°F will be refused admittance to the court building.
3. Security staff will keep a record of any person who is refused admittance by verifying them with photo identification.
4. Any individual refused entry who has a court setting will be identified by security and the officer will notify the court that they were denied admittance so the court can make appropriate arrangements. Security will have the individual provide an email address and phone number where they can be reached by the court with instructions.
5. Inmates being transported from the jail or juvenile detention (or any other individuals in custody of the state) 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. This population will be screened at the lower threshold temperature of 99.6 °F.

6. At the Hunt County Criminal Justice Center, screening will be provided by the Hunt County Constable's Office for Precinct 1.
7. At the Hunt County Justice of the Peace offices for Precincts 2, 3 and 4, the staff will lock the front door and ensure that each person enter individually after being screened one at a time according to the above process for all days when court is not in session.
8. At the Hunt County Justice of the Peace offices for Precincts 2, 3, and 4, the staff will lock the door and have the Constable for that precinct (or his designee) screen each person upon entry according to the above process.
9. Staff who are screening individuals entering the court building will be provided personal protective equipment, including masks and hand sanitizer if they do not have their own personal masks sufficient to cover both their mouth and nose.

### **Face Coverings**

1. All individuals entering the court building must wear face coverings that completely cover both their nose and mouth.
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 remove their masks or refuse to put masks on will be removed from the building and will be deemed to have voluntarily absented themselves from the proceedings.

### **Cleaning**

1. Court building cleaning staff will clean the common areas of the court building so that common spaces are cleaned at least every 2 (two) hours. A designated cleaning sheet will be posted in each common area outlining the method of cleaning required and containing a date and time signature line for the person responsible for cleaning that area every 2 (two) hours.
2. Hunt County will provide services to clean the courtrooms between morning and afternoon proceedings, and at the end of each day the courtroom is used. A designated cleaning sheet will be posted in each courtroom outlining the method of cleaning required and containing a date and time signature line for the person responsible for cleaning the area every 4 (four) hours or after the morning court proceedings end at noon and afternoon proceedings end at 5:00 p.m.. Should a courtroom not have proceedings that day, the presiding judge or designated court staff member will sign the sheet reflecting that no cleaning was necessary as the room was not used after the last cleaning.
3. Hunt County will ensure that the services provided for cleaning have cleaning supplies shown to be effective with this coronavirus.
4. Hunt County will ensure that the persons providing cleaning services have been trained on proper cleaning techniques and provided appropriate personal protective equipment.
5. The court offices, jury room and bathrooms will be cleaned once a day by Hunt County through designated cleaning services. A cleaning sheet will be posted in the primary office for each court outlining the method of cleaning required and containing a date and time signature line for the person responsible for cleaning the area 1 (once) each day.

6. The Hunt County Facilities Director will monitor cleaning requirements to ensure that all of the areas are cleaned at the appropriate time and according to the guidelines provided by the Hunt County Maintenance Department.

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 and county judge, 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 receive a copy of this plan and to the best of my ability work with the other judges to conduct proceedings consistent with the plan. A copy of this plan will be published on the Hunt County website on each court's page. I will also forward a copy of this plan to Judge Alfonso Charles, the Regional Presiding Judge for Region 10.

Date: 5/26/2020



Keli M. Aiken

354<sup>th</sup> Judicial District Court, Presiding Judge

Local Administrative District Judge for Hunt County

As the assigned local health authority representative for Hunt County, Texas, I have reviewed the COVID-19 Operating plan for the Hunt County Judiciary and consulted with Judge Keli M. Aiken regarding the plan and any suggestions I had to provide for the safe operation of the Hunt County Courts.

Date: 5/26/2020.

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Dr. Gina Rushing

Hunt County Local Health Authority

As the Hunt County Judge, I have reviewed the COVID-19 Operating plan for the Hunt County Judiciary and consulted with Judge Keli M. Aiken regarding the plan and any suggestions I had to provide for the safe operation of the Hunt County Courts.

Date: 5/26/2020.

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Bobby Stovall

Hunt County Judge



As members of the Hunt County Judiciary, we have received a copy of the COVID-19 Operating plan for the Hunt County Judiciary and agree to conduct proceedings according to this plan.

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J. Andrew Bench

196<sup>th</sup> Judicial District Court, Presiding Judge

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Keli M. Aiken

354<sup>th</sup> Judicial District Court, Presiding Judge

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Timothy Linden

Hunt County Court at Law #1, Presiding Judge

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F. Duncan Thomas

Hunt County Court at Law #2, Presiding Judge

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Wayne Money

Justice of the Peace, Precinct 1, Place 1

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Sheila Linden

Justice of the Peace, Precinct 1, Place 2

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Kerry Crews

Justice of the Peace, Precinct 2

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Christie Roundtree

Justice of the Peace, Precinct 3

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David McNabb

Justice of the Peace, Precinct 4