



CIRCUIT COURT FOR HARFORD COUNTY



COVID-19 Court Re-Opening Plan Phase III: July 19 – August 29, 2020 **REVISED: November 13, 2020**

The Circuit Court for Harford County has the responsibility to ensure the health and safety of all individuals entering the Courthouse.¹ This includes Courthouse employees and occupants, attorneys, litigants, and visitors. In light of this responsibility and in accordance with the Fifth Amended Administrative Order Restricting Statewide Judiciary Operations Due to the COVID-19 Emergency issued by Chief Judge Mary Ellen Barbera of the Court of Appeals of Maryland on November 12, 2020 (hereafter “Amended Administrative Order”), this Court will revert to Phase III of the reopening of the Courthouse on November 16, 2020 through December 31, 2020.

GENERAL

All persons entering the building must submit to a temperature check with a no-contact thermometer and must answer screening questions related to COVID-19 symptoms. *See* Attachment A. All persons in the Courthouse must wear a mask/covering to prevent or protect against transmission of the Coronavirus, and must maintain social distancing protocols. Any person who exhibits now known symptoms of the Coronavirus, or who refuses to wear a mask/covering, or does not maintain social distancing protocols, or who does not otherwise follow the safety and security directives of Security Officers will be denied entrance to the Courthouse, or will be required to leave the Courthouse. If, as a result of the screening process a person is denied entry, or is otherwise required to leave the Courthouse, that person will be provided information regarding alternative means to address the purpose of that person’s intended visit to the Court. *See* Attachment B.

On a frequent and ongoing basis, the Courthouse will be sanitized to maintain appropriate hygiene/cleaning standards recommended to prevent transmission of the Coronavirus. All public areas of the Courthouse, including courtrooms, also will be marked to promote social distancing. On a case by case basis a judge or magistrate presiding over a hearing may implement any other appropriate precautions to protect against transmission of the Coronavirus in a courtroom.

COURTHOUSE HOURS, CLERK’S OFFICE AVAILABILITY, and OCCUPANCY

1. Access to the Courthouse by the general public will be limited to the Courtland Street entrance.
2. The Courthouse will be open to the public from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., in a manner necessary to effectuate the mission of the Court. A drop box at the Courtland Street entrance is also available.

¹ This responsibility is not an admission of liability for tort claims or otherwise on the part of the Court or the Maryland Judiciary.

3. Court activities shall proceed with restrictions to limit the concentration of individuals and allow social distancing, consistent with guidance of the CDC or MDH or both.
4. The number of courtrooms used will be kept to the minimum level necessary to maintain court operations.
5. Visitors to the Courthouse are encouraged to not bring children under the age of 16 into the Courthouse. All individuals entering the Courthouse must wear a mask/covering their nose and mouth, submit to no-contact temperature checks, and answer COVID-19 screening questions.
6. The Self-Help Center will continue to be open to the public from 9:00 a.m. until 12:00 p.m. with restrictions to limit the concentration of individuals and allow social distancing, consistent with guidance of the CDC or MDH or both. Virtual consultations will also be available by emailing the Self-Help Center at SelfHelpCtrHarford@mdcourts.gov.

DOCKETING AND SCHEDULING PRIORITIES

During Phase III of the Court reopening process, the Court will resume hearing cases as indicated in the Administrative Order. Accordingly, during Phase III the Court will **not** hear contested cases or those involving witnesses (except in protective order cases). Most cases will be heard remotely to continue to minimize the risks associated with the Coronavirus. Therefore, attorneys and parties will be asked to provide an email address for a remote video hearing for which a computer *with a camera* will be needed. For those without access to the Internet, telephonic participation will be permitted. Below is a schedule of when certain types of cases will be heard.

DRUG COURT

First and third Monday morning of each month

GUARDIANSHIP (alleged disabled adults, minors, Special Immigrant Juvenile Status)

First and third Monday afternoon of each month, unless emergent

CRIMINAL CASES

Status conferences/pretrial matters: Monday, Wednesday, and/or Friday mornings

Motions: 4 cases each on Thursday and Friday at 9 a.m., 10:30 a.m., 1:30 p.m., and 3 p.m.

Non-jury trials: 2nd Tuesday and 2nd Friday only

Bail reviews/arraignments/agreed criminal pleas: Monday to Friday at 1:30 p.m.

Violations of Probation: scheduled on pre-designated days each month for each Judge

Expungement hearings: scheduled on the pre-designated days each month for each Judge

Deferred sentencing hearings: scheduled on pre-designated days each month for each Judge

FAMILY CASES

Motions with and w/o testimony: 2nd and 4th Friday of the month at 9 a.m., 10:30 a.m., 1:30 p.m., and 3 p.m.

Contempt hearings: 2nd and 4th Friday of the month at 9 a.m., 10:30 a.m., 1:30 p.m., and 3 p.m.

PL hearings: scheduled with Family Magistrates

Uncontested divorces: Tuesday mornings (Judge); Friday mornings (Family Magistrate)

Default hearings: Tuesday mornings (Judge)

Exceptions: Thursday mornings
Protective orders: Temporary orders, when filed; Final orders, 7 days later
Peace order appeals and Extreme risk protective order appeals: Thursday mornings
Emergency: upon review only
Scheduling conferences; status conferences, and pendente lite (PL) hearings:
 Magistrate Hart—scheduled throughout the week
 Magistrate Hatem—Mondays and Thursdays, and other days for PL hearings
 Magistrate Walker—Tuesdays and Wednesdays, and other days for PL hearings
IV-D child support establishment agreement/paternity admissions: scheduled with attorneys for the Child Support Administration
Adoptions: scheduled with a Senior Judge

CIVIL CASES (with and without testimony)

On the record appeals: Friday afternoons
Civil motions: 4 cases each on Thursday and Friday at 9 a.m., 10:30 a.m., 1:30 p.m., and 3 p.m.
Civil pretrial conferences and settlement conferences: Thursday afternoons
AGC proceedings: scheduled with judge appointed by Court of Appeals

JUVENILE CASES

Closed hearings scheduled before the Juvenile Magistrate
CINA: all matters and/or types of proceedings scheduled By the Juvenile Magistrate
Delinquency: all matters and/or types of proceeds scheduled by the Juvenile Magistrate

REGISTER OF WILLS

Scheduled 2 days a week; Tuesdays and Thursdays before a Senior Judge

Remote hearings for the following types of cases will continue until Phase IV or Phase V:

Bail review hearings (will remain remote permanently)
Guardianship hearings
Civil motions, pretrial hearings and settlement hearings
Family Law Cases: UCDs, default hearings, exceptions, scheduling conferences
Other matters determined on a case by case basis by a Judge or Magistrate
Any other matters that can be scheduled, heard, or resolved remotely
*****See Tips for Remote Hearings***** *See Attachment C.*

CONCLUSION

The Court will strive to hear all matters during Phase III in a safe and efficient manner. All Courthouse employees and occupants, attorneys, litigants, and visitors, are expected to exhibit the utmost degree of civility and patience appropriate to having matters resolved in this public forum. Anything less dishonors the principles upon which our legal system was founded.

DATE: July 17, 2020
AS AMENDED: November 13, 2020

/S/ ANGELA M. EAVES,
ADMINISTRATIVE JUDGE