

IN THE CIRCUIT COURT FOR CHARLES COUNTY, MARYLAND

ADMINISTRATIVE ORDER NO. 22-03

WHEREAS, due to the outbreak of the novel coronavirus, COVID-19, an emergency exists; and

WHEREAS, the administration of justice necessarily has been affected by the pandemic and will continue to require the professionalism, courtesy, and cooperation of the members of the bench, the bar, and the public in navigating the changes to practices and procedures; and

WHEREAS, Remote hearings have proved to be useful and effective in facilitating the courts' performance of core functions during the COVID-19 emergency and may continue; and

WHEREAS, COVID-19 continues to require the Judiciary to monitor the current phase of operations in the phased approach, moving toward full operational functions, while employing safety measures and monitoring local health conditions to continue to support the health and safety of Maryland residents and Judiciary personnel; and

WHEREAS, The Court of Appeals *Amended Administrative Order on the Progressive Resumption of Full Function of Judiciary Operations Previously Restricted Due to the COVID-19 Emergency*, filed June 3, 2020, created five phases of a progressive return to operations; and

WHEREAS, the emergence of the highly infectious Omicron variant and in the latter part of 2021 required a return to modified Phase III operations; and

WHEREAS, jury trials that were scheduled to commence between November 16, 2020, through April 23, 2021, and between December 29, 2021, through March 6, 2022, by previous orders that were postponed and rescheduled in accordance with the date established by the Court of Appeals *Sixth Amended Administrative Order on Lifting the Statewide Suspension of Jury Trials and Maintaining Grand Juries*, filed March 1, 2022; and

WHEREAS, infection rates have now fallen allowing the return to Phase V operations, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention having issued revised protocols on the wearing of masks on February 25, 2022, and the majority of local jurisdictions having emerged or emerging from mandatory health mandates related to the surge in COVID-19 infections due to the Omicron variant; and

WHEREAS, Chief Judge of the Court of Appeals, Joseph M. Getty has issued the *Fifth Amended Administrative Order Expanding Statewide Judiciary Operations in Light of the*

COVID-19 Emergency (dated March 2, 2022) authorizing all courts, effective March 7, 2022 to return to normal operations; and under certain circumstances as defined in said Order; and

WHEREAS, after consultation with the Charles County Chief Health Officer and other local county officials in conjunction with the continued falling infection rates in Charles County, this Court has determined it is no longer necessary to mandate the wearing of masks and/or social distancing subject to limitations contained in this Order, and under consideration of the above and for good cause shown,

It is this 4th day of March, 2022, hereby

ORDERED, that effective March 7, 2022, the wearing of masks is voluntary for all judges, magistrates, judiciary personnel and all other persons entering the courthouse except during the jury selection process in both criminal and civil jury trials and any other proceeding wherein masking or social distancing may become necessary as determined by the presiding judicial officer with approval of the Circuit Court Administrative Judge; and it is further,

ORDERED, that no person who has been diagnosed with, and remains ill, with COVID-19, or who has not been fully vaccinated and is aware of having been exposed to a person infected with COVID-19 and is within the applicable quarantine period, may enter a Judicial Branch facility; and it is further,

ORDERED, that no persons who have been advised by a doctor, hospital, or local health department to self-quarantine or ordered to quarantine may enter a Judicial Branch facility during their applicable quarantine period; and it is further,

ORDERED, that any such persons and their attorneys who are not authorized to be present for their scheduled proceedings, events, or services must contact the appropriate office regarding their status; and it is further,

ORDERED, that unvaccinated employees and visitors are encouraged to wear masks; and, it is further,

ORDERED, that the Charles County Sheriff's Office at the discretion of the Administrative Judge of the Circuit Court for Charles County may restrict access to and may screen all individuals entering the Courthouse located at 200 Charles Street, LaPlata, Maryland, 20646, and may **DENY** entry to any individual whose screening results require refusal of entry to the Courthouse for the health and safety of all individuals in the Courthouse; and it is further,

ORDERED, when conducting the screening protocol, as established by the Administrative Judge for Charles County, upon any individual seeking entry to the Courthouse,

the Charles County Sheriff's Office, may DENY entry to any individual with an affirmative response to said screening inquiry in consultation with the Administrative Judge and provide said individual with information regarding alternative means to address the purpose of that person's intended visit to the Court; and, it is further,

ORDERED, that any person who does not comply with this emergency order or local administrative orders shall be subject to removal from the courthouse or judicial facility and disciplinary action as appropriate; and it is further,

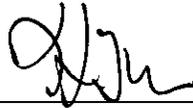
ORDERED, that the Administrative Judge and/or presiding Judge may limit the number of people that may be present in a Courtroom at any given time; and, it is further,

ORDERED, to achieve social distancing for large congregate settings, the administrative judges may limit, temporarily, the number of people entering the courthouse or a courtroom. The courts shall be open to the public, and no appointment shall be necessary for access; and it is further,

ORDERED, that this Administrative Order shall be posted at the entrance of the Courthouse, on the website for the Circuit Court for Charles County, and provided to the Charles County Bar Association for distribution to its members; and it is further,

ORDERED, that this Order supersedes any previously issued Administrative Orders that restrict access to the Courthouse; and it is further,

ORDERED, that this Order shall become effective on **March 7, 2022**, and shall remain in effect until further Order of this Court.



H. JAMES WEST
ADMINISTRATIVE JUDGE
CIRCUIT COURT FOR CHARLES COUNTY

Copies to:
Sharon L. Hancock, Clerk of the Court
Court Administration
Anthony B. Covington, State's Attorney for Charles County, MD
Office of the Public Defender
Sheriff Troy Berry, Charles County Sheriff's Office
Charles County Bar Association