



Lisa A. Hall Johnson
Administrative Judge

DISTRICT COURT OF MARYLAND
Fifth District

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March 3, 2021

Members of the Bar:

On February 16, 2021 Chief Judge Barbera issued five revised Administrative Orders regarding the COVID-19 public health emergency and its impact Judiciary operations. Pursuant to these Orders, on March 15, 2021, the Judiciary will move directly to Phase 4. Phase 5 will resume on April 26, 2021.

For those who are apprehensive about appearing in person, I acknowledge your concern. The Prince George's County District Court intends to continue to use remote technology, where appropriate. In addition, we have worked extremely hard to implement COVID-19 protocols with the assistance of the County Health Department. These protocols will continue through Phase 5. As a reminder:

- Anyone that enters a courthouse must submit to screening questions, and no one should enter if they have been exposed or are experiencing COVID-19 symptoms.
- Those seeking to enter the courthouses must also submit to a temperature check and will not be permitted to enter if they have a fever.
- Masks and social distancing are required in both courthouses, regardless of vaccination status.
- The Court has carefully placed social distancing decals.
- Hand sanitizer and/or sanitizing wipes are available.
- Courtrooms have been equipped with plexiglass.
- In-person dockets are small and have staggered times to limit the amount of people in the courtrooms at any time.

These steps have been taken to minimize the risk of exposure and transmission.

For more information about Phase 4 and Phase 5, please join the Prince George's County District Court for a Virtual Town Hall on April 7th at 3:30. Registration information will be provided by the Prince George's County Bar Association. The J. Franklyn Bourne Bar Association and the Maryland State Bar Association have also agreed to join as co-sponsors. I appreciate the help and support of these bar associations, and I look forward to seeing you on Zoom on April 7th. Many of the increased operations will not impact our dockets until April. In the meantime, I am providing the below information.

District Court Clerk's Office

The Prince George's County District Court Clerk's Office will remain open to the public. No appointment is necessary. However, capacity is limited. You may be asked to wait outside of the courthouse if we reach capacity. You can still send filings by mail or place them in the drop boxes. The Clerk's Office will continue to process paperwork in the order that it was received, and priority will be given to emergency motions. Emergency Motions must be filed at the Clerk's Office counters so that these filings can be easily identified and quickly processed.

District Court Commissioner's Office

The District Court Commissioner's Office has been operating through the COVID-19 health emergency. They will continue to be fully operational.

Criminal, Traffic, and Civil Citations

Preliminary Hearings and bail review will continue to be remote. Criminal trials will remain in person. Criminal cases where the defendant is *incarcerated when the trial date is scheduled* will be set on separate, in-person dockets. The remainder of the criminal, traffic, and civil citation matters will be set as limited, staggered, in-person dockets.

Civil

Large and small claims civil matters continue to be remote, unless otherwise notified. The Clerk's Office will continue to issue summonses in the order in which they were received. We are permitted to rule on affidavit judgments after March 15th.

Domestic Violence

Currently, hearings on domestic violence protective orders, peace orders, extreme risk protective orders, and petitions for emergency violations are being held remotely. Petitioners who file during business hours will have an in-person hearing on the temporary order, but the final hearing will be remote.

Landlord Tenant

Rent escrow, breach of lease, wrongful detainer, and tenant holding over actions will be set for hearings. On March 25th the Court will begin to hear failure to pay rent cases. The Clerk's Office will process all case types and warrants of restitution, as appropriate, as well. These dockets will be set as limited, staggered, in-person dockets.

Problem-Solving Courts

Our Mental Health Court and our Adult Drug Court will continue to conduct remote hearings. Any changes will be communicated to the litigants and stakeholders.

Conclusion

As we progress through the next Phases, I again ask for your continued patience. There is a backlog of cases to be processed and to be heard. We are not an MDEC jurisdiction, so each process requires employees to handle files and move about the space. The Court is required to maintain social distancing and other COVID-19 protocols. These precautions do impact efficiency. Also, I simply will not pack our courtrooms to pre-pandemic levels. I will continue to monitor our operations and may make any necessary adjustments, and I will continue to communicate with you so that you are aware of any changes. Please continue to stay safe and stay well.

Best,

Lisa A. Hall Johnson