



District Court of Maryland

2 S. Bond St, Suite 100

Bel Air, MD 21014-3737

(410) 836-4545

Introduction:

Due to the outbreak of the novel coronavirus, COVID-19, and consistent with the guidance issued by the Centers for Disease Control, the Chief Judge of the Court of Appeals ordered all courts in the Maryland Judiciary to adhere to restricted, emergency operations and close to the public with limited exceptions beginning March 17, 2020. On May 22, 2020, the Chief Judge of the Court of Appeals issued an administrative order directing a phased approach to resumption of full judiciary operations to begin June 5, 2020.

To prepare for increased court operations at the District Court for Harford County, Administrative Judge Susan Hazlett institutes the following COVID-19 Response Plan for the progressive resumption of full function of court operations, observing best practices to protect the safety of court employees and the public, and to enable the phased resumption of all court processes.

Procedures established throughout this report may need to be modified due to such future orders from the Chief Judge of the Court of Appeals and/or the Governor of the State of Maryland, as well as federal, state and local health department requirements.

Action Plan for District Court:

The District Court for Harford County will continue to follow recommendations regarding medical screening, social distancing and wearing masks. This plan also addresses issues related to the filing of case documents, courthouse deliveries, wearing gloves, public entrances, and public access to case files. Each item in this plan will be evaluated at each stage of increased operations.

Medical Screening

All persons entering the secured side of the courthouse will be required to answer the screening questions, have his or her temperature taken, and wear a mask.

Automatic temporal thermometer checks will continue as and will be evaluated at each phase of increased court operations.

If an individual is denied access, they will be provided with a contact list to make the appropriate court department aware, and they will have to fill out a form which will be retained by the supervising bailiff.

Any person arriving at court more than fifteen minutes before his or her scheduled hearing time will be asked to remain outside until fifteen minutes before the scheduled start time.

Social Distancing

To the extent reasonably practicable, uniform social distancing of six feet will be instituted in all areas of the courthouse building, including but not limited to, public common areas, elevators, restrooms, conference and meeting rooms, courtrooms, waiting areas, break rooms and kitchens.

Floor markings (tape or decals) will be placed at various locations for social distancing. The courtroom benches and carpet will be marked where litigants may sit or stand while awaiting each case. Directional arrows are also providing instruction for traffic flow inside each courtroom.

It is strongly suggested that only testifying witnesses, parties, and attorneys enter the courthouse. We will not restrict access, but please encourage litigants not to bring unnecessary persons to court. Litigants or witnesses will not be permitted to wait in the hallways or clerk's office.

It is expected that persons will limit their movement in the courthouse as much as possible. If communication is needed with personnel in another courtroom, please use your computer or cellphone while court is in recess.

Wearing Masks

Face masks (**covering both nose and mouth**) continue to be required in all public areas, including, but not limited to the following: when delivering mail throughout the courthouse; during all court proceedings; all bailiffs shall wear masks at the security screening station.

The Court, to the extent available, will provide single-use masks for anyone who must enter the courthouse and who is not in possession of a mask or other nose and mouth covering. If anyone refuses to wear the appropriate face covering, they may be denied entry into and/or removed from the building.

Wearing Gloves

The decision to wear latex gloves will be left to individuals working throughout the courthouse. Gloves may be worn during all court proceedings. However, all evidence must be handled with gloves and handling and exchanging of paper is strongly discouraged. Any evidence on cell phones should be downloaded and prefiled using MDEC if possible. Additionally, frequent handwashing by employees is essential.

There will be disinfectant wipes on each trial table for use as desired by each attorney/litigant. Bailiffs will not be cleaning the trial tables between each case. Attorneys should feel free to do so. Attorneys may bring and use hand sanitizer.

Filing Case Documents

Case documents should be filed electronically utilizing the Maryland Electronic Courts (MDEC) program. If filing electronically is not possible for any litigant, filing should be done through the physical drop box located in the main lobby of the courthouse during operating hours until further notice.

Staff Safety Procedures

It is our goal to ensure that all employees, as well as other inhabitants of the courthouse, work in a safe environment. Courthouse personnel may limit the number of persons in any workspace at any given time. To ensure the safety of employees who directly serve the public, physical barriers have been installed at all front desk locations throughout the courthouse. Additionally, hand sanitizer has been provided.

Case Management Plans for the Resumption of Court Operations:

Any prescheduled plea hearings, and all temporary or final peace and protective order hearings may be held remotely. We will continue to use the drop box which will be checked hourly. We will also move our most frequently requested forms to a display rack outside the scanner. These will be available for public access and can be filled out off premises and filed via MDEC or the drop box. MDEC users are still required to file all documents

electronically. Every pleading filed should have a valid phone number and email address if possible, so that clerical staff may contact the parties to schedule a remote hearing.

Criminal Domestic Violence

- 1) One courtroom will be hearing criminal domestic violence cases both morning and afternoon with three cases scheduled per hour on the docket.

Criminal and Serious Traffic

- 1) One courtroom will hear criminal and serious traffic cases in the morning and afternoon with three cases per hour on the docket.

Civil Domestic Violence

- 1) A third courtroom will be open for walk in civil peace and protective orders, previously scheduled temporary and final protective and peace order hearings, and bail reviews. Two cases will be set every thirty minutes. Remote hearings are strongly suggested whenever possible.

There will be no transferring of cases between courtrooms. Everyone is asked to report to his or her assigned courtroom and remain there until released, with the exception of using the bathroom when necessary. Court personnel reserve the right to briefly limit access to any space in the building in order to comply with social distancing.