



## **Modification of the COVID-19 Operating Plan for the Harris County Judiciary District Courts, County Courts at Law & Probate Courts To Allow for the Resumption of In-Person Proceedings**

Dated: March 15, 2021

Under the current Thirty-Sixth Emergency Order Regarding the COVID-19 State of Disaster (Misc. Docket No, 21-9026), in-person proceedings may resume upon the Local Administrative Judge's creation of a plan for the resumption of such proceedings.

I have attempted to confer with the judges of the courts with courtrooms in county and I have determined that the following minimum standard health protocols for court proceedings and the public attending court proceedings that will be employed in all courtrooms and throughout all public areas of the court buildings will be used in the setting of in-person proceedings:

### **General**

1. All judges will continue to comply with the Emergency Orders issued by the Supreme Court of Texas and Court of Criminal Appeals.
2. All judges and court staff will continue to comply with the masking, social distancing and safety protocols set out in the COVID-19 Operating Plan for the Harris County District Courts, County Courts at Law & Probate Courts.
3. All judges will continue to use reasonable efforts to conduct proceedings remotely, and to accommodate litigants, lawyers, witnesses and other participants who request to appear remotely.
4. All judges and court staff will continue to comply with public health, county official and Supreme Court mandates concerning masking, social distancing, and health and safety protocols.

5. The local administrative district judge will continue to maintain regular communication with the local health authority to consider adjustments to this operating plan as necessary in light of conditions in Harris County.

### **Judge and Court Staff Health**

1. Judges and court staff who can perform the essential functions of their job remotely will continue to consider teleworking.
2. Judges or court staff who feel feverish or have measured temperatures equal to or greater than 99.6°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 seek medical advice.
3. Unless exempted by a Judge in that Judge's courtroom, judges and court staff will continue to wear face coverings while in the courthouse.
4. Judges and court staff will continue to practice social distancing, and practice appropriate hygiene recommendations.
5. Protective Measures: The sneeze guards installed by the County will remain in place. The County will continue to strive to provide each court with face coverings and gloves for staff and participants who show for in-person matters. The County will, throughout the day, clean "touch points" and will, as able, perform a thorough cleaning of the complex at least once a week.

### **Scheduling**

Each court will strive to reduce its number of in person hearings and will strive to schedule in person hearings in such a way as to maintain proper social distancing within the courtroom itself. As Harris County is a large county with specialized divisions, each division will establish a schedule to stagger dockets to reduce the flow of litigants, witnesses and general public entering the courthouse complex at one time. Each division will have its plan posted on the County website for district, county, probate or justice of the peace courts. Plans already received are attached as Exhibits A-D.

## **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.
2. Elevators, restrooms, courtrooms and hallways will continue to be periodically reviewed for compliance with the most recent social distancing recommendations.

### *Gallery*

3. 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.
4. The gallery of the courtroom has been marked to identify appropriate social distancing in the seating. Seating is limited to every other row.

### *Well*

5. In each courtroom the counsel tables, witness stand, judge's bench, clerk, court reporter, and bailiff seating have been arranged in such a way so that there is appropriate social distancing.

## **Hygiene**

1. Hand sanitizer dispensers have been placed at the entrances to the building, outside of elevators on each floor, outside of each courtroom, and outside of bathrooms.
2. Tissues have been placed near the door of the courtroom, at counsel tables, at the witness stand, 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 in multiple locations on each floor of the court building.

## **Screening**

Screening will continue to ensure that no court participants have tested positive for COVID-19 within the previous 10 days, have had symptoms of COVID-19 within the previous 10 days, or have had recent known exposure to COVID-19 within the previous 14 days.

## Face Coverings

1. Masks will be required to enter the courthouse buildings or any courtroom therein.
2. Courts will have the right to turn away an individual who declines to wear a mask.
3. 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, as long as supplies last.
4. Each court may choose to allow individuals to remove their mask in the courtroom, but masks must still be worn in the general court facilities (clerk's offices, restrooms, hallways, elevators and the like).

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Robert K. Schaffer", is written over a horizontal line.

Local Administrative District Judge

**HARRIS COUNTY CIVIL DISTRICT COURTS SCHEDULE**  
(effective March 15 2021)

<b>1</b>	<b>JUDGE</b>	<b>FLOOR</b>	<b>DOCKET TIMES</b>
11	Kristen Brauchle Hawkins	9 <sup>th</sup>	REMOTE
55	Latosha Lewis Payne	9 <sup>th</sup>	REMOTE
61	Fredericka Phillips	9 <sup>th</sup>	REMOTE
80	Jeralynn Manor	9 <sup>th</sup>	REMOTE
113	Rabeea Sultan Collier	10 <sup>th</sup>	REMOTE
125	Kyle Carter	10 <sup>th</sup>	REMOTE
127	Ravi K. Sandill	10 <sup>th</sup>	REMOTE
129	Michael Gomez	10 <sup>th</sup>	REMOTE
133	Jaclanel McFarland	11 <sup>th</sup>	REMOTE
151	Mike Engelhart	11 <sup>th</sup>	REMOTE
152	Robert Schaffer	11 <sup>th</sup>	REMOTE
157	Tanya Garrison	11 <sup>th</sup>	REMOTE
164	C. Elliott Thornton	12 <sup>th</sup>	REMOTE
165	Ursula A. Hall	12 <sup>th</sup>	REMOTE
189	Scot Dollinger	12 <sup>th</sup>	REMOTE
190	Beau A. Miller	12 <sup>th</sup>	REMOTE
215	Elaine H. Palmer	13 <sup>th</sup>	REMOTE
234	Lauren Reeder	13 <sup>th</sup>	REMOTE
269	Cory Sepolio	13 <sup>th</sup>	REMOTE
270	Dedra Davis	13 <sup>th</sup>	REMOTE
281	Christine Weems	14 <sup>th</sup>	REMOTE
295	Donna Roth	14 <sup>th</sup>	REMOTE

EXHIBIT A

333	Brittanye Morris	14 <sup>th</sup>	REMOTE
334	Dawn Rogers	14 <sup>th</sup>	REMOTE
TAX	Sharon McCally	8 <sup>th</sup>	REMOTE
TAX	Elizabeth Lockett	8 <sup>th</sup>	REMOTE
MDL	Mark Davidson	17 <sup>th</sup>	REMOTE
MDL	Sylvia Matthews	17 <sup>th</sup>	REMOTE

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- REMOTE means that a Court is currently conducting its regularly scheduled oral hearing dockets remotely, but may from time to time conduct in-person hearings as necessary.



Under the current Thirty-Sixth Emergency Order Regarding the COVID-19 State of Disaster (Misc. Docket No, 21-9026) and Executive Order GA34, in-person proceedings may resume.

What does the bar need to know about the family law division?

- 1) All docket calls will remain virtual until further notice. Not all courts hold docket calls, but those that do with continue to hold their docket calls virtually.
- 2) In-person proceedings in the family courts will be set one at a time as preferential settings and as scheduled by the individual courts. Not all courts will begin holding in-person hearings immediately. The decision of when to begin is up to each individual court. Please check with your specific court to determine if in-person hearings are being held.
- 3) Prior to the scheduling of an in-person proceeding, attorneys and pro se parties must provide the court coordinator the number of individuals, including support staff, they desire to bring in-person. The court will review the request and coordinate with the other courts on the same floor. In addition, courts may request information concerning exposure to or symptoms of COVID-19, as required under the Thirty-Sixth Emergency Order Regarding the COVID-19 State of Disaster.
- 4) Each court will ensure compliance with the capacity limits set by the fire marshal and the COVID-19 Operating Plan for the Harris County District Courts, County Courts at Law & Probate Courts, implemented May 21, 2020. All courts will continue to comply with the social distancing and safety protocols set out in the COVID-19 Operating Plan for the Harris County District Courts, County Courts at Law & Probate Courts.
- 5) If the in-person proceeding is a jury trial, the court shall comply with the Jury Proceeding Addendum to COVID-19 Operating Plan for the Harris County Judiciary.

District Court Administration shall post this policy on [www.justex.net](http://www.justex.net)

Signed on this the 12<sup>th</sup> day of March, 2021

/s/ Julia A. Maldonado

Julia A. Maldonado

Administrative Judge – Family Division

Harris County Family District Courts



Under the current Thirty-Sixth Emergency Order Regarding the COVID-19 State of Disaster (Misc. Docket No, 21-9026) and Executive Order GA34, in-person proceedings may resume.

What does the bar need to know about the County Civil Courts at Law?

- 1) All docket calls will remain virtual on Zoom until further notice.
- 2) In-person proceedings will be set one at a time as preferential settings and as scheduled by the individual courts. The decision of when to begin in-person proceedings is up to each individual court. Please check with your specific court to determine if, and under what conditions, in-person hearings are being held.
- 3) Prior to the scheduling of an in-person proceeding, attorneys and *pro se* parties must provide the court coordinator the number of individuals, including support staff, they desire to bring in-person. The court will review the request and coordinate with the other courts on the same floor. In addition, courts may request information concerning exposure to and/or symptoms of COVID-19, as required under the Thirty-Sixth Emergency Order Regarding the COVID-19 State of Disaster.
- 4) Each court will ensure compliance with the capacity limits set by the fire marshal and the COVID-19 Operating Plan for the Harris County District Courts, County Courts at Law & Probate Courts. All courts will continue to comply with the social distancing and safety protocols set out in the COVID-19 Operating Plan for the Harris County District Courts, County Courts at Law & Probate Courts. Face coverings will continue to be strictly required until further notice.
- 5) If the in-person proceeding is a jury trial, the court shall comply with the Jury Proceeding Addendum to COVID-19 Operating Plan for the Harris County Judiciary.

County Civil Courts at Law Administration shall post this policy at [www.ccl.hctx.net](http://www.ccl.hctx.net).

Signed on this the 13th day of March, 2021

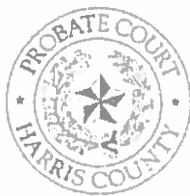
/s/ LaShawn A. Williams

LaShawn A. Williams

Administrative Judge

Harris County Civil Courts at Law





**JASON COX  
JUDGE**

**MAILING ADDRESS**

HARRIS COUNTY PROBATE COURT THREE  
201 CAROLINE, SUITE 740  
HOUSTON, TX 77002  
(832) 927-1403 OFFICE

**STREET ADDRESS**

HARRIS COUNTY CIVIL COURTHOUSE  
201 CAROLINE, SUITE 700  
HOUSTON, TX 77002  
(832) 927-0010 FACSIMILE

March 15, 2021

Dear Judge Schaffer:

Following is the in-person proceeding schedule for the Probate Courts:

- 1) All dockets will remain virtual until further notice.
- 2) In-person proceedings in the probate courts will be set one at a time as preferential settings and as scheduled by the individual courts. Not all courts will begin holding in-person hearings immediately. The decision of when to begin is up to each individual court. Individuals should check with their specific court to determine if in-person hearings are being held.
- 3) Prior to the scheduling of an in-person proceeding, attorneys and pro se parties must provide the court manager the number of individuals, including support staff, they desire to bring in-person. The court will review the request and coordinate with the other courts on the same floor. In addition, courts may request information concerning exposure to or symptoms of COVID-19, as required under the Thirty-Sixth Emergency Order Regarding the COVID-19 State of Disaster.
- 4) Each court will ensure compliance with the capacity limits set by the fire marshal and the COVID-19 Operating Plan for the Harris County District Courts, County Courts at Law & Probate Courts, implemented May 21, 2020. All courts will continue to comply with the social distancing and safety protocols set out in the COVID-19 Operating Plan for the Harris County District Courts, County Courts at Law & Probate Courts.
- 5) If the in-person proceeding is a jury trial, the court shall comply with the Jury Proceeding Addendum to COVID-19 Operating Plan for the Harris County Judiciary.

If you have any questions or need any further information, please feel free to contact me.

Thank you,

Jason Cox, Judge  
Harris County Probate Court #3