COVID-19 Operating Plan for the Dallas County Judiciary

George Allen Courts Building

Recognizing the need to ensure the health and safety of all individuals who enter the George Allen Courts Building, and a public health emergency having been declared by state and federal government officials relative to COVID-19, the Dallas County Judiciary, in accordance with the applicable Texas Supreme Court Emergency Orders, Misc. Docket NO. 20-9042, consistent with the Texas Office of Court Administration Guidelines, have adopted this COVID-19 Operating Plan and will implement the following protective measures:

General

1. All judges will comply with the Emergency Orders issued by the Supreme Court of Texas, and will conduct in-person proceedings according to the guidance issued by the Office of Court Administration regarding social distancing, maximum group size, and other restrictions and precautions.
2. All judges will use reasonable efforts to conduct proceedings remotely when possible and appropriate.
3. Judge Carter Thompson, the Local Administrative District Judge, will maintain regular communication with the Dallas County Local Health Authority and County Judge Clay Jenkins, and will adjust the Operating Plan as necessary to accommodate changing circumstances in Dallas County.
4. No sooner than July 6, 2020, judges will begin setting non-essential in-person proceedings in compliance with the local heath authority and CDC guidelines.

Health of Judges and Court Staff

1. When possible, judges and court staff who can perform the essential functions of their jobs remotely will telework.
2. The Dallas County Judges and court staff will self-monitor symptoms and signs of COVID-19 before reporting to work and will stay home if he or she exhibits any symptoms of Covid-19. Specifically, the Dallas County Judges and court staff will not enter the court building, will self-monitor, and will seek medical advice as recommended by the health authority if he or she feels feverish or has a measured temperature equal to or greater than 99.6°F, suffers from a cough, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, chills, repeated shaking with chills, muscle pain, headache, sore throat, loss of taste or smell, diarrhea, or has had a known close contact with a person who is confirmed to have COVID-19.
3. If a judge or a judge's court staff tests positive for COVID-19, the judge will notify his/her court staff. The judge will also report a positive test result to Health and Human Services and Human Resources, and coordinate cleaning of the areas with facilities management.
4. All judges and court staff are expected to wear face coverings when within 6 feet distance of another person and/or when walking or congregating in the public spaces.
5. All judges and court staff will practice social distancing and appropriate hygiene as recommended by the Dallas County Public Health Department.

6. Where 6 feet of social distancing is not possible, Dallas County will install protective plexi-glass barriers in the courtrooms if requested by the judge.
7. Dallas County will provide the judges and court staff with face coverings, gloves, hand sanitizer, and disinfecting solution.

Scheduling

The presiding judges of each court will work together to coordinate their dockets by days and times to reduce the flow of attorneys, litigants, witnesses and the public entering the court building at one time. The courts will schedule in-person hearings in a way that ensures proper social distancing in the public areas of the court building and in each courtroom.

Vulnerable Populations

1. Individuals who are over age 65 and individuals with serious underlying health conditions, such as high blood pressure, chronic lung disease, diabetes, obesity, asthma, and those whose immune systems are compromised such as by chemotherapy for cancer or other conditions requiring such therapy are considered to be vulnerable populations.
2. Each judge will include information on orders setting hearings, dockets notices, and in other communications that notifies individuals who are in vulnerable populations of the ability to contact the court to identify themselves as a vulnerable individual and receive accommodations. A notice with this information will be posted on the courts' websites and in conspicuous locations around the court building.
3. Vulnerable populations who are scheduled to appear in court will be accommodated in a manner that the judge determines is appropriate.

Social Distancing

1. All persons not from the same household will be required to maintain adequate social distancing of at least 6 feet while in the court building, excluding courtrooms.
2. No more than four individuals not from the same household will be permitted in an elevator at the same time.
3. Each restroom has been evaluated to determine the appropriate capacity to ensure social distancing.
4. Public common areas, including the cafeteria, have been temporarily closed.
5. The Dallas County Fire Marshal and Dallas County Administration have met with the presiding judges of each court to determine the maximum number of persons who can congregate in each courtroom, including the number of individuals who can sit in the jury box and the gallery of each courtroom. The gallery of the courtroom should be marked to identify appropriate social distancing in the seating.
6. In each courtroom, the counsel tables, witness stand, court reporter, and bailiff seating should be arranged in such a way so that there is social distancing of at least 6 feet between each space.

Hygiene

1. Hand sanitizer dispensers will be placed at the entrances to the building, outside of elevators on each floor, outside of each courtroom, and outside of restrooms.
2. CDC signage related to COVID-19 will be posted in multiple locations on each floor of the court building and available for review on the County's website.

Screening

1. Courts will include directives on all correspondence and summons forms, and Dallas County will post on its website directives to self-check for any of the following symptoms: feeling feverish, have a cough, shortness of breath, or difficulty breathing; or have been in close contact with a person who is confirmed to have COVID-19. Individuals who indicate or have exhibited any of these symptoms, or who have been exposed, will be strongly encouraged not to visit the court building and, based on the determination of the presiding judge, may not be able to enter a particular courtroom.
2. When individuals attempt to enter the court building, they will form a line outside the building and remain in order, 6 feet apart, and be allowed into the lobby as capacity permits and flow through the security checkpoint.
3. County health authorities are not recommending to perform temperature readings on individuals entering the court building at this time. However, presiding judges may require temperature screenings before individuals may enter the courtroom.
4. Parkland Hospital has a unit embedded in the County jail, and all inmates being transported from the jail to the court building will be screened for symptoms of COVID-19 and have their temperatures taken prior to transport. Inmates with symptoms or a temperature will not be transported to the court building.
5. Staff who are screening individuals entering the court building will be provided personal protective equipment, including masks and gloves, as available supply permits. Dallas County will make all reasonable efforts to provide personal protective equipment to screening staff.

Face Coverings

1. All individuals who enter the court building will be strongly advised to wear face coverings at all times. Individuals will be encouraged to bring face coverings with them, but if the individual does not have a face covering, a disposable face mask may be provided, if supply permits.
2. Presiding judges may require individuals to wear face coverings before entering the courtroom.

Cleaning

1. Court building cleaning staff will clean the common areas of the court building so that common spaces are cleaned regularly throughout the day.
2. Between all court hearings, the presiding judges will require the seats, microphones, and other courtroom equipment that is touched to be disinfected.
3. Additional cleaning staff has been contracted to clean and disinfect all high-touch and common space areas to ensure the health and safety of the staff and public.
4. Dallas County has contracted vendors to perform electrostatic cleaning of the court building at least once per week.
5. Court building cleaning staff has been provided cleaning supplies shown to be effective with this COVID-19 virus.
6. Court building cleaning staff has been trained on proper cleaning techniques and provided appropriate personal protective equipment.

Dallas County
Fire Marshal's Office
600 Commerce Street RM-B-15 Dallas Texas 75202
Main: 214.653.7970 Fax: 214.653.6372

Dallas County Fire Marshal Re-Open Assessment Report
Dallas County Judiciary
George Allen Courts Building
600 Commerce St, Dallas Texas

Dallas County Fire Marshal's Office, as authority having jurisdiction; conducted a reopening assessment of the above listed building and courts to ensure social distancing standards were applied to common areas and verification of exit egress pathways were not altered or blocked.

COURT OCCUPANCY REDUCTION:
Each court was assessed and occupancy reduced to 25% original occupancy load, social distancing standard was applied and final hard count occupancy number provided to each court and court administration. Adjusted occupancy loads will be enforced by the Dallas County Fire Marshal's Office and court bailiff.

PROTECTIVE SCREENING COURT BENCH:
Each court bench was evaluated and plexiglass screening standard applied, the witness box, court reporter, bailiff desk, and the judge's bench were determined to be areas where the protective screening would be applied. Dallas County Facilities is in process of installation for the identified areas.

PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT (PPE):
PPE supply needs have been assessed for each court to ensure 30 day supply standard is available, Court Administration has ordered PPE in bulk to address the need of each court. PPE will be issued to each court from that control point.

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COURT WORK AREA SANITIZING:
Each court will be responsible for sanitizing between court proceedings. The court bailiff will be responsible for ensuring this sanitizing occurs.

ENHANCED SECURITY IN COMMON AREAS:
Dallas county Marshal's Service will supplement extra security personnel in the common areas of the buildings to ensure pedestrian flow and conformance with social distancing practices.

CLEANING AND SANITIZING IN COMMON AREAS:
Dallas County Facilities will utilize a 3rd party vendor to supplement our existing janitorial services to increase the frequency of cleaning of high touch commons areas, to include door handles, escalator rails, elevator buttons, and restrooms. We will also be installing plexiglass at various areas where staff interact with the public to provide additional protection.

Dallas County Fire Marshal's Office:

Dallas County Facilities Office:

Dallas County Health and Human Services: