



CIRCUIT COURT FOR HARFORD COUNTY



COVID-19 Court Re-Opening Plan Phase V: April 26, 2021

The Circuit Court for Harford County has a responsibility to ensure the health and safety of all individuals entering the Courthouse.¹ This includes Courthouse employees and occupants, attorneys, litigants, and visitors. In light of this responsibility and in accordance with the Amended Administrative Order Expanding Statewide Judiciary Operations In Light of the COVID-19 Emergency issued by Chief Judge Mary Ellen Barbera of the Court of Appeals of Maryland on February 16, 2021 (hereafter “Amended Administrative Order”), this Court will proceed to Phase V of the reopening of the Courthouse on April 26, 2021.

GENERAL

All persons entering the building must submit to a temperature check with a no-contact thermometer and must answer screening questions related to COVID-19 symptoms. *See* Attachment A. All persons in the Courthouse must wear a mask/covering to prevent or protect against transmission of the Coronavirus and must maintain social distancing protocols. Any person who exhibits now known symptoms of the Coronavirus, or who refuses to wear a mask/covering, or does not maintain social distancing protocols, or who does not otherwise follow the safety and security directives of Security Officers will be denied entrance to the Courthouse, or will be required to leave the Courthouse. If, as a result of the screening process a person is denied entry, or is otherwise required to leave the Courthouse, that person will be provided information regarding alternative means to address the purpose of that person’s intended visit to the Court. *See* Attachment B.

On a frequent and ongoing basis, the Courthouse will be sanitized to maintain appropriate hygiene/cleaning standards recommended to prevent transmission of the Coronavirus. All public areas of the Courthouse, including courtrooms, also will be marked to promote social distancing. On a case by case basis a judge or magistrate presiding over a hearing may implement any other appropriate precautions to protect against transmission of the Coronavirus in a courtroom.

COURTHOUSE HOURS, CLERK’S OFFICE AVAILABILITY, and OCCUPANCY

1. The Courthouse will be open from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., with access by the general public limited to the Courtland Street entrance.
2. The Office of the Clerk will be open to the public with restrictions to limit the concentration of individuals and allow social distancing. A drop box at the Courtland Street entrance is also available.
3. Court activities shall proceed with restrictions to limit the concentration of individuals and allow social distancing, consistent with guidance of the CDC or MDH or both.

¹ This responsibility is not an admission of liability for tort claims or otherwise on the part of the Court or the Maryland Judiciary.

4. The number of courtrooms used will be kept to the minimum level necessary to maintain court operations.
5. Visitors to the Courthouse are encouraged to not bring children under the age of 16 into the Courthouse. All individuals entering the Courthouse must wear a mask/covering their nose and mouth, submit to no-contact temperature checks, and answer COVID-19 screening questions.
6. The Self-Help Center will be open from 9:00 a.m. until 4:00 p.m. for pre-scheduled in-person appointments only. Telephone consultations and virtual conferences will be available from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. The Self-Help Center will continue to monitor telephone messages and will return calls with 24 hours. Contact information: SelfHelpCtrHarford@mdcourts.gov or 410-638-4916.

DOCKETING AND SCHEDULING PRIORITIES

In Phase V, the Court will resume full operations, including scheduling jury trials in criminal and civil case types as indicated in the Administrative Order. In addition, most cases will be heard in-person with precautions taken to minimize the spread of the Coronavirus. Remote hearings will be held in the following types of cases:

- Criminal bail review hearings
- Guardianship hearings
- Civil motions, pretrial hearings and settlement hearings
- Family law cases: uncontested divorces, default hearings, exceptions, scheduling conferences
- Family Law Magistrate hearings
- Other types of case determined on a case by case basis by the assigned Judge
- Any other matters that can be scheduled, heard, or resolved remotely

Requests for in-person hearings in these types of cases will otherwise be decided on a case by case basis. In addition, attorneys and parties must provide an email address for a remote video hearing for which an electronic device (e.g., computer, tablet, smart phone) *with a camera* will be needed. For those without access to the Internet, telephonic participation may be permitted if appropriate. For more information, refer to the Court's Guidelines and Procedures for Remote Hearings. *See Attachment C.*

CONCLUSION

The Court will to strive to hear all matters during Phase V in a safe and efficient manner. All Courthouse employees and occupants, attorneys, litigants, and visitors, are expected to exhibit the utmost degree of civility and patience appropriate to having matters resolved in this public forum.

DATE: May 3, 2021

/S/ ANGELA M. EAVES,
ADMINISTRATIVE JUDGE