



District Court of Maryland

2 S. Bond St, Suite 100

Bel Air, MD 21014-3737

(410) 836-4545

Introduction:

In response to a surge of COVID 19 cases in recent days, on November 12, 2020 Chief Judge Barbera issued a Fifth Administrative Order Restricting Statewide Judiciary Operations Due to the COVID-19 Emergency.

To prepare for reduced court operations at the District Court for Harford County, Administrative Judge Susan Hazlett institutes the following COVID-19 Response Plan for the Reduced Function of Court Operations, observing best practices to protect the safety of court employees and the public, and to address the ordered reduction of services for 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.

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

- 1) All persons entering the courthouse will be required to answer the screening questions, have his or her temperature taken, and wear a mask.
- 2) Automatic temporal thermometer checks will continue as and will be evaluated at each phase of increased court operations.
- 3) If an individual is denied access, they will be provided with a contact list to make the appropriate court department aware.
- 4) Any person arriving at court more than fifteen minutes before his or her scheduled hearing time will be asked to remain outside until the scheduled time

Social Distancing

- 1) 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, galleries, courtrooms, hearing rooms, waiting areas, break rooms and kitchens.

- 2) 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.

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

- 4) It is encouraged that people 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

- 1) Face masks 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.

- 2) 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.

Filing Case Documents

- 1) 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.

Wearing Gloves

- 1) The decision to wear latex gloves will be left to individuals working throughout the courthouse, and during all court proceedings. Frequent handwashing by employees is essential. However, all evidence must be handled with gloves and handling and exchanging of paper is strongly discouraged.
- 2) 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 and gloves as he or she wishes to do so.

Staff Safety Procedures

It is the goal 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 Reduction of Court Operations:

Any prescheduled plea hearings, and all temporary or final peace and protective order hearings may be held remotely. Any civil proceeding may be scheduled and heard remotely.

Please contact the clerk's office or file a request for remote hearing through MDEC. We will continue to use the dropbox 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.

Criminal and Serious Traffic

- 1) One courtroom will be hearing criminal and serious traffic cases both morning and afternoon, with four contested cases set per hour on the docket. Agreed pleas can be heard remotely. Please file CC-DC 110 Motion For Remote Proceedings

Civil Domestic Violence

- 1) A second courtroom will be open for 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. Walk in requests for protection will be heard as promptly as possible.

There will be an additional judge or two available to hear remote matters (guilty pleas, civil trials, traffic waiver hearings, etc.) from a remote location. Please contact the clerk's office for instructions on how to schedule a remote matter. Also, please see CC-DC 110 Motion for Remote Proceedings.