



Lisa A. Hall Johnson
Administrative Judge

DISTRICT COURT OF MARYLAND
Fifth District

Courthouse, Suite 345B
Upper Marlboro, Maryland 20772
(301) 298-4081

Hyattsville District Court Building
4990 Rhode Island Avenue, Suite 250
Hyattsville, Maryland 20781
(301) 298-4220

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COVID-19 UPDATE FROM THE DISTRICT COURT FOR PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY

As many of you are aware, on May 22nd, the Court of Appeals issued Administrative Orders outlining a phased approach to resuming operations. In Addition, an *Amended Administrative Order on the Progressive Resumption of Full Function of Judiciary Operations Previously Restricted Due to the COVID-19 Emergency* (the "Order") was issued on June 3, 2020. The District Court of Prince George's County has worked to create a comprehensive implementation plan to ensure our compliance with the phased approach. I have simultaneously worked to ensure that the members of our bar are informed regarding what to expect on June 8, 2020. I am grateful for the opportunities that have been extended to me and my colleagues to address the bar on recent Zoom meetings, and I am open to continuing these conversations as we progress through Phase 2 and beyond.

I share the concerns that many of you have regarding the matters that the District Court has been unable to address. COVID-19 has had an unprecedented impact on all aspects of our community. I am also concerned for the health and safety of the District Court staff, members of the bar, and for the public. We have attempted to balance all concerns while complying with constitutional and statutory obligations.

For your reference, all Administrative Orders can be found at <https://mdcourts.gov/coronavirusorders>. Also, the District Court is working to post daily dockets on a new tab on www.mdcourts.gov. Once this is finalized, I will provide more details. For your convenience, I have attached a one-page summary of all of the phases, and one-page summary outlining the District 5 implementation plan.

Initially in Phase 2, we will continue to conduct only remote hearings. Prince George's County exceeds 16,000 COVID-19 positive cases. We must ensure that our procedures take into account how the virus is moving through our community. We are awaiting receipt, inventory, dissemination, and installation of the necessary protective equipment essential to safely allow further access to the courthouses. As a result, the courthouses will remain closed to the public until Phase 3. The Commissioner's Office will continue to accept interim filings during the day, in addition to their other Phase 1 and Phase 2 functions.

On April 20th, I requested that only emergency matters be filed. This allowed our staff to easily identify emergency matters during Phase 1. Thank you for complying with this request. Beginning on June 8th, we will accept and process all filings.

We have created a process for evidence to be submitted for domestic violence protective orders, peace orders, and extreme risk protective orders. Evidence may be provided either by email District5DV@mdcourts.gov, or by providing a copy in the District Court drop box at the location where the remote hearing will occur by 7:00 am the day of the hearing. The subject line should include the date of the hearing, parties, and case number. We will conduct remote hearings on all of these orders at 9:00 and 1:15 each day. Specific instructions will be provided to the litigants, and to counsel if you are entered.

The District Court will conduct status conferences in criminal cases during Phase 2 so that we can assess the progress of these matters. Priority will be given to incarcerated individuals. Our Mental Health Court and Our Adult Drug Court will continue their work and incorporate additional contacts with participants. We will continue to conduct the bail review docket remotely. Your entry of appearance, for a bail review, fugitive matters, or a preliminary hearing for an incarcerated individual can still be submitted by emailing the District5Hearings@mdcourts.gov email address no later than 10:00 am the morning of the hearing. No other filings or communications will be accepted at this email address. Please continue to provide a courtesy copy of your entry of appearance and any motions filed in criminal cases to the Office of the State's Attorney ("SAO") by emailing SAODistCtBondMotions@co.pg.md.us.

In Phase 2 we are permitted to review and hear certain emergency landlord and tenant motions. We will begin to process and schedule civil matters for later phases. We will also look for opportunities to do more than what is minimally required by the Orders.

I thank each of you for your professionalism and patience. I respect the work that you do, and I acknowledge how difficult this time has been for you personally and professionally. I am committed to return to full operations as quickly and safely as possible. I have been impressed that through this difficult time, we have completed a substantial amount of work. There is still so much more to do. I am confident that with our mutual collaboration we will tackle the challenge that COVID-19 has presented. I look forward to continuing our very important work.

Best,


Lisa A. Hall Johnson