



Lisa A. Hall Johnson  
*Administrative Judge*

**DISTRICT COURT OF MARYLAND**  
Fifth District

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April 20, 2020

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

This letter is intended to provide an update regarding existing Administrative Orders of the Court of Appeals. In addition, I am providing further guidance on the scope and method of proceedings that the Prince George's County District Court is able to conduct during this extended COVID-19 emergency.

Pursuant to the Second Amended Administrative Order Expanding and Extending Statewide Judiciary Operations Due to the COVID-19 Emergency, issued by the Court of Appeals on April 14th, 2020, the District Court Clerk's Offices continue to be closed. For your reference, all Administrative Orders can be found at <https://mdcourts.gov/coronavirusorders>.

Today, I issued an Administrative Order Extending and Defining Limited Prince George's County District Court Operations as a Result of COVID-19. In this order, I invoke subsection (s) of the Court of Appeals Order, limiting our operations to only emergency and urgent matters listed in subsections (i), (j), and (k) of the COA Order. Specifically, I am asking your help in filing ONLY emergency matters and prominently identifying them as emergent.

Those who practice throughout the State have experienced the difference in capabilities between MDEC jurisdictions and the 3 remaining, non-MDEC jurisdictions (Baltimore City, Prince George's County & Montgomery County). All pleadings in Prince George's County must be filed on paper and must be individually processed by the Clerk's Office. The purpose of Chief Judge Barbera's order is to facilitate essential functions with essential employees. It is neither safe nor reasonable to ask court staff to touch and process non-emergency documents. As a result, we are only able to process emergency matters as defined in the Court of Appeals Administrative Order referenced above. We have a locked drop box in each courthouse along with an electronic date stamp for this purpose.

Emergency matters are outlined in the above-mentioned Administrative Order. Consistent with the Administrative Order, we are reviewing domestic violence protective orders, peace orders, and extreme risk protective orders daily. Select matters are being scheduled for remote hearings. These orders stay

in effect until we open. However, any litigant may request an expedited hearing by filing an emergency motion.

Emergency matters do not include multiple/follow-up criminal bond reviews (unless there is a specific change in circumstance), expungements, motions for reconsideration, civil new suits and motions, landlord-tenant matters (unless it is an emergency matter), certificates of discovery, summons renewals, post-judgment proceedings, etc. Please consider holding such filings until normal operations (in some fashion) resume.

I have created one exception. Our bail review docket is being conducted daily and remotely. Counsel often enter the same day for these matters. As a result, counsel may file a line for a bail review, fugitive matter, or a preliminary hearing for an incarcerated individual by emailing the [District5Hearings@mdcourts.gov](mailto:District5Hearings@mdcourts.gov) email address no later than 10:00 am the morning of the hearing. The Court checks this email address at 10:00 am each day. This is a hard deadline. No other filings or communications will be accepted electronically. Likewise, many motions for a bail review are being filed and ruled on in an expedited basis. It has come to my attention that the Office of the State's Attorney ("SAO") is not timely receiving their service copies. The SAO has asked me to request that members of the bar provide them with a courtesy copy of these motions by emailing [SAODistCtBondMotions@co.pg.md.us](mailto:SAODistCtBondMotions@co.pg.md.us).

I understand the many concerns regarding the matters that we are unable to address at this time. I share those concerns. COVID-19 has had an unprecedented impact on all aspects of our community. Of course, everyone is also concerned for their personal safety and that of their loved ones. I am trying to balance all concerns while complying with the constitutional and due process rights of everyone, including the need to take every possible measure to preclude exposure and risk.

It is not yet clear what reopening will entail. As you well know, interim and temporary civil orders have a finite life once the Clerk's Office reopens. Thus, it is quite possible that our docket structures will necessarily be modified for a period of time. Of course, as soon as any of these types of decisions are made, I will communicate the plan to you.

I thank you for your continued support, professionalism, and patience. The Court is tremendously respectful of the work that you do and the community that you support. I am confident that with our mutual collaboration we will be able to tackle the challenges that face us when the emergency period has ended. Until that time, I appreciate your understanding of the limited functions we are able to provide.

Please remain vigilant in the protection of your health and those around you. Please follow the CDC guidelines and recommendations for safety and remain well. I thank you for your consideration.

Best,



Lisa A. Hall Johnson