

IN THE CIRCUIT COURT OF TENNESSEE
FOR BENTON, CARROLL, DECATUR, HARDIN AND HENRY COUNTIES
TWENTY-FOURTH JUDICIAL DISTRICT

PLAN FOR THE CONDUCT OF IN-PERSON COURT PROCEEDINGS FOR NON-
EMERGENCY MATTERS IN THE 24TH JUDICIAL DISTRICT OF TENNESSEE
REGARDING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Pursuant to Supreme Court Order #ADM2020-00428, the Presiding Judge of the 24th Judicial District, with the cooperation of all Judges, submits the following Master Plan for approval:

I. All Courts will conduct as much business as possible by means other than In-Person Court Proceedings.

II. Best effort will be made to conduct ALL Circuit Courts, Chancery Courts, General Sessions Courts, Juvenile Courts and Municipal Courts in a safe environment to minimize risk from In-Person Court proceedings, including the following:

1. Admissions into a building where a court proceeding is held:

A. The determination of what circumstances or restrictions regarding admittance into any building where a courtroom is located is left to the discretion of local officials.

(1) Security guidelines permitting the entrance that will allow the shortest distance of travel to a courtroom will be used in those buildings that have more than one point of entrance. In all other buildings one entrance will be used. All entrances will be manned.

B. It will be encouraged that, when practical, a health screening, such as temperature check, questioning or observation, be used before a person who is scheduled to attend a court proceeding is allowed into a building to attend a court proceeding.

C. It will be encouraged that the use of a face covering be required before admittance into a building to attend a court proceeding is allowed.

2. Admission into courtrooms:

A. If a health screening is required to enter the building where a courtroom is located an additional health screening shall not be required to enter a space being used as a courtroom located in that building.

B. If a face covering is required to enter the building where a courtroom is located a face covering shall be worn at all times in the courtroom.

C. Face coverings and personal protection equipment will be allowed to be worn in any courtroom by those who choose to wear them.

D. Local officials will determine the safest route to be taken to enter and exit a courtroom.

(1) If practical, the closest points should be used for these routes.

(2) If practical, different entrance and exit points should be used.

3. In-person proceedings:

A. The Incarcerated.

(1) Local jails:

(a) Inmates incarcerated at the local jails are to be transported to attend a court proceeding and shall wear face covering. Those who are incarcerated shall avoid contact with those defendants not incarcerated.

(i) Exceptions can be made at the discretion of the Sheriff.

(ii) Exceptions must be approved by the Presiding Judge.

(2) Tennessee Department of Corrections (TDOC):

(a) Inmates incarcerated at a facility operated by the TDOC may be transported to a courtroom at the discretion and under the guidelines of the TDOC.

(i) A proceeding involving such an inmate shall be scheduled to begin at least 15 minutes after a preceding proceeding has ended and set to end at least 15 minutes before a subsequent proceeding is scheduled to begin.

(ii) Proceedings involving inmates who are transported at the same time and in the same transport vehicle may be scheduled to occur at the same time.

B. Those who may attend court proceedings:

(1) Attendance at in-person court proceedings will be limited to the parties, their counsel, court personnel, and witnesses.

(a) Witnesses shall be kept out of the courtroom until called to testify and then shall immediately exit the courtroom when their testimony ends.

(i) It will be encouraged that witnesses who have no other business to conduct in the building where a courtroom is located be denied entrance into that building until they are called to testify.

(b) Exceptions to those who may attend an individual court proceeding can be made on a case by case basis by the Judge.

(c) A care-giver for a party or witness may accompany the person for whom they provide care to the court proceeding.

(i) Examples include but are not limited to: a parent of a minor child who is a party or witness; or a person who provides medical care or assistance with mobility to a person who is a party or witness.

(d) Signs announcing who will be allowed to attend a court proceeding should be posted outside the building entrance.

C. Number allowed in a courtroom:

(1) The number of people allowed into a courtroom at any one time is limited to 10, excluding the Judge, court personnel, witness and security.

D. Seating:

(1) Seating shall be at locations designated by local officials in accordance with guidelines recommend by the State of Tennessee or the CDC.

E. Social distancing and management in courtroom:

(1) Social distancing distances will be based on the distances recommended by the State of Tennessee or the CDC.

(2) Management of social distancing in the courtroom will be the responsibility of the Judge and security personnel.

F. Court times:

(1) When necessary court times will be staggered to limit the number of people in the courtroom.

(a) Staggering of court times will be at the discretion of each Judge.

(i) If an attorney has multiple cases set on one day every effort will be made to group that attorney's cases into one setting time.

(ii) Parties or attorneys will not be allowed into the courtroom until the time their case is set to be heard.

(iii) A court docket that includes the names of the parties, counsels, and the time set for each case will be provided each day to local officials. This docket is to be used to regulate entrance into the building.

4. Miscellaneous:

A. Any common area in a building where a party to a court proceeding could touch, such as a hand rail, door handle, elevator button, etc. should be cleaned by maintenance crews frequently throughout the day. Common areas in the courtrooms, such as podiums, the parties' tables, door handles, etc., will be cleaned more frequently.

B. Understanding that public access to the court is of utmost importance to the public and our judicial system, one location in every courtroom will be reserved for media, and one member of the media will be allowed into court proceedings on a first come basis. Current media credentials shall be presented before access will be granted.

C. In many instances the buildings where courtrooms are located are used for purposes other than court related proceedings. Thus, management of social distancing guidelines inside those portions of the building will be left to the discretion of local officials.

1. Those attending court proceedings will be immediately ushered into and out of the courtroom and are not to have access to any other parts of the building. Lingering will not be allowed in the areas near the courtrooms and security will oversee these areas to enforce social distancing guidelines and limit lingering.

D. These guidelines will go into effect upon the approval of the Chief Justice of the Tennessee Supreme Court.

E. These guidelines will remain in effect pending further orders of the Court.

F. Hand sanitizer will be stationed at entrances of buildings and in courtrooms when available.

Dated this 6th day of May, 2020.

Donald E. Parish
Presiding Judge