

IN THE TWENTY SEVENTH JUDICIAL DISTRICT OF TENNESSEE

IN RE: * STANDING ORDER: 2020-02
COVID-19 PANDEMIC *

MODIFICATION FOR IN-PERSON COURT HEARINGS

In Response to the COVID-19 pandemic the Tennessee Supreme Court on March 13, 2020 and as Amended on March 25, 2020, SUSPENDED “in-person” court proceedings, except under limited conditions. The restriction applied to trial courts of record, general sessions, juvenile courts, and municipal courts.

In accordance with the Tennessee Supreme Court order filed on April 24, 2020, the 27th Judicial District here by establishes the following protocols for implanting the gradual controlled return to “in-person” proceedings .

A. PERSONS PERMITTED TO APPEAR DURING “IN-PERSON” PROCEEDINGS

1. GENERALLY

Subject to the safety protocols identified below, the Court will permit only the following persons to be present in the Courtroom during “in-person” proceedings:

- the immediate parties to the action and their counsel;
- persons allowed to attend by virtue of Tennessee Constitution Art. 1, §35 (c) - Victims of Criminal Offenses;
- permitted media as approved below; and
- personnel essential to the functions of the Court

2. MEDIA REQUESTS

Members of the media may attend any “in-person” court proceeding consistent with Tennessee Supreme Court Rule 30, under the Court’s “safety protocols”:

B. SAFETY PROTOCOLS TO BE FOLLOWED DURING “IN-PERSON” HEARINGS

During “in-person” proceedings, the Courts will adhere to the following public-safety protocols:

1. ADVANCED SCREENING OF ALL PERSONS ENTERING THE COURTHOUSE

In conjunction with the Sheriff’s staff and municipal police departments, all persons will be screened prior to entry to help ensure that symptoms are not currently present or manifesting, and to help ensure that other risk factors are not present. Each person shall be asked to report on the information below, and no person will be allowed admittance that answers affirmatively to any category of information.

Each Courthouse will be a single access entry. Each will utilize their respective entrance on the south side of the Courthouse to accommodate the ADA compliant ramps.

The Court recognizes and takes these measures in an attempt to identify and avoid risks that may be detectable, therefore, effective immediately and until further notice, no person, including courthouse staff, counsel, parties, media, and citizens requesting access who fall into any one of the listed categories below shall enter the courthouse, any courtroom, judicial assembly room, or courthouse office space:

- Persons who presently or who have exhibited health conditions in the previous twenty-four (24) hours involving a fever over 100.4, a persistent cough, any shortness of breath, any persistent chest pain, or bluish lips or face.
- Persons who have been diagnosed with, or have had contact with, anyone who has been diagnosed with Covid-19 within the past fourteen (14) days.
- Persons who have been asked to self-quarantine by any doctor, hospital, or health agency.
- Persons who have had a recent onset of loss of taste or smell.

2. USE OF SOCIAL DISTANCING IN THE COURTROOMS

The Courts will instruct on and enforce social distancing within the Courtroom. The Courts will require at least 6 feet distance between those allowed to be present in the courtroom or waiting area, absent a need to communicate more closely in person. Those participants, who meet the criteria, to be present in the Courtroom will sit in designated spaces. Attorneys and clients will sit at opposite ends of counsel tables (to confer as necessary within the safety conditions and protocols). Others who are allowed within the gallery of the courtroom will sit in marked locations with no more than two persons per row and keeping one row empty between. In any Courtroom, regardless of size, number of litigants/defendants and attorneys shall not exceed 10. The Judge, court personnel and Court security are not included in this number.

Witnesses must remain outside the Courthouse. The attorney calling the witness for any hearing or bench trial will be responsible for accessing that witness's appearance in Court when needed by telephone

or other means. Once a witness has completed his/her testimony they must immediately leave the building. Child witnesses will not be permitted absent prior approval of the Judge presiding over the case. Courthouse security personnel will ensure that all visitors in the hallways and common areas within the courthouse are abiding by the social distancing guidelines.

3. AVAILABILITY OF PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT AND SUPPLIES

The Court will include reminders as to proper coughing and sneezing procedures. The Court will strongly encourage the use of face masks and disposable gloves by those entering the Courthouse facilities, and when available will provide face masks, and will require the use of hand sanitizer, tissues, and no-touch trash receptacles. Signage will be placed throughout the Courthouse to remind visitors of social distancing guidelines.

4. SANITATION OF FACILITIES

The courtroom facilities will be sanitized prior to their use, at regular intervals during the day when in use; and at the conclusion of the day. Sanitation measures will include the wiping of all surfaces with disposal wipes and/or proper disinfectants.

C. SPECIFIC SCHEDULES

Although, the Courts will continue to utilize and encourage the use of telephone and video conference hearings, the following court schedules will be followed for any in-person court proceedings.

A. CHANCERY COURT:

Counsel and/or pro-se litigants shall schedule hearings with the Court's scheduling clerk at (731) 364-3276. Each case scheduled shall be set for a specific time by the scheduling clerk. Only one case will be scheduled at a specific time and cases will be staggered accordingly.

B. CIRCUIT COURT:

There will be no jury trials through July 3, 2020. Bench Trials and Motion hearings will be scheduled individually with the scheduling clerk at (731) 599-5038. Only one case will be scheduled at any specific time and cases will be staggered accordingly.

C. WEAKLEY COUNTY GENERAL SESSIONS COURT:

The Court will utilize the Circuit Courtroom on each Wednesday in May and June for specific settings, and at other times as necessary in accordance with the above guidelines. All hearing shall be scheduled with the Clerk at (731) 364-3455.

D. OBION COUNTY GENERAL SESSIONS COURT:

The Court will utilize the Circuit Courtroom on Wednesdays (civil hearings) and Thursdays (criminal hearings) in May and June for specific settings, and at other times as necessary. All hearing shall be scheduled with the Deputy Clerk, Cammie Thompson at (731) 885-1811.

E. WEAKLEY COUNTY JUVENILE COURT:

The Juvenile Court will utilize the Circuit Courtroom on each Tuesday in May and June. For any special setting on Tuesday May 26, such shall begin after 11:00 a.m. All hearing shall be scheduled with the Juvenile Court Officer, Keith Jones, at (731) 364-2285.

F. OBION COUNTY JUVENILE COURT:

Counsel and/or pro-se litigants shall schedule hearings with the Court's scheduling clerk, Regina Whaley, at (731) 885-4550. Each case scheduled shall be set for a specific time by the scheduling clerk. Only one case will be scheduled at a specific time and cases will be staggered accordingly.

G. DRESDEN AND GLEASON MUNICIPAL COURTS will convene every Tuesday in May and June under the strict social distancing criteria set forth above. The Court will limit entry into City Hall and/or the courtroom to ensure proper social distancing.

H. MARTIN MUNICIPAL COURT will convene on June 9 and 25 under the strict social distancing criteria set forth above. The Court will limit entry into City Hall and/or the courtroom to ensure proper social distancing. The Court will limit entry into City Hall and/or the courtroom to ensure proper social distancing.

I. GREENFIELD MUNICIPAL COURT will convene on June 8 and 22 under the strict social distancing criteria set forth above. The Court will limit entry into City Hall and/or the courtroom to ensure proper social distancing.

J. SHARON MUNICIPAL COURT will not convene in the months of May and June but will reconvene on July 13 and 27. The Court will limit entry into City Hall and/or the courtroom to ensure proper social distancing.

K. UNION CITY MUNICIPAL COURT will convene each Monday beginning May 11, through June 29 under the strict social distancing criteria set forth above. The Court will limit entry into City Hall and/or the courtroom to ensure proper social distancing.

- L. **SOUTH FULTON MUNICIPAL COURT** will convene on June 12 under the strict social distancing criteria set forth above. The Court will limit entry into City Hall and/or the courtroom to ensure proper social distancing.
- M. **TROY MUNICIPAL COURT** will convene on Tuesday May 19, and June 2 and 16 under the strict social distancing criteria set forth above. The Court will limit entry into City Hall and/or the courtroom to ensure proper social distancing.
- N. **SAMBURG MUNICIPAL COURT** will convene on May 12 and June 9 under the strict social distancing criteria set forth above. The Court will limit entry into City Hall and/or the courtroom to ensure proper social distancing.
- O. **HORNBEAK MUNICIPAL COURT** will convene on May 26 under the strict social distancing criteria set forth above. The Court will limit entry into City Hall and/or the courtroom to ensure proper social distancing.

The Court has been advised that the Child Support Enforcement Agency does not intend to file or seek in-person hearings or the enforcement of child support matters, including contempt petitions. The Enforcement Agency will continue to pursue these matters on an administrative basis. They will seek review of this at the end of 30 days.

All municipalities are ordered to follow the safety protocols set forth above.

The guidelines, schedules and protocols are subject to modification by the Supreme Court, or the Presiding Judge of the Twenty Seventh Judicial District of Tennessee.

This Order was done in conjunction with the input of the Chancery, Circuit, General Sessions, Juvenile, and Municipal Judges.

IT IS SO ORDERED.

Entered this ____ day of April, 2020.

Jeff Parham, Presiding Judge
CIRCUIT JUDGE