

# COVID-19 Operating Plan for the Fate Municipal Court of Record

Recognizing the need to ensure the health and safety of litigants, attorneys, visitors, court staff, judges, and other individuals entering the courtroom while court is in session, the Municipal Court of Fate, Rockwall County, Texas will implement the following protective measures:

## General

1. All judges will comply with the Emergency Orders issued by the Supreme Court of Texas and Court of Criminal Appeals, including conducting in-person proceedings according to the guidance issued by the Office of Court Administration regarding social distancing, maximum group size, and other restrictions and precautions.
2. The presiding judge of the municipal court will maintain regular communication with the local health authority and mayor and adjust this operating plan as necessary with conditions in the city.
3. Judges will begin setting non-essential in-person proceedings no sooner than June 1, 2020

## Judge and Court Staff Health

1. Judge and Court Staff Monitoring Requirements: On the day of in person court proceedings, the judge and court staff will measure their temperatures and self-assess for COVID-19 related symptoms.
2. Judges or court staff who feel feverish or have measured temperatures equal to or greater than 100.0°F, or with new or worsening signs or symptoms of COVID-19 such as cough, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, chills, repeated shaking with chills, muscle pain, headache, sore throat, loss of taste or smell, diarrhea, or having known close contact with a person who is confirmed to have COVID-19 will not be permitted to enter the courtroom and should seek medical advice.
3. Judges and court staff will be required to wear face coverings, practice social distancing, and practice appropriate hygiene recommendations during court hearings.
4. Protective Measures: the judge and court staff shall practice appropriate hand washing and face masks will be available to the judge and court staff.

## Scheduling

1. The following court schedules are established to reduce occupancy in the court building: Dockets will be scheduled in thirty-minute increments with a maximum of ten cases per docket. If the capacity of the courtroom reaches ten individuals, then parties and/or their attorney must provide a phone number when checking in with the Bailiff and then must wait in their car or outside the courthouse until they are called by the Bailiff.

## Vulnerable Populations

1. Individuals who are over age 65 and individuals with serious underlying health conditions, such as high blood pressure, chronic lung disease, diabetes, obesity, asthma, and those whose

immune systems are compromised such as by chemotherapy for cancer or other conditions requiring such therapy are considered to be vulnerable populations.

2. Each judge will include information on orders setting hearings, dockets notices, and in other communications notifying individuals who are in vulnerable populations of the ability to contact the court to identify themselves as a vulnerable individual and receive accommodations. A notice with this information will be posted on the courts' websites and in conspicuous locations around the court building (a copy of which is attached).
3. Vulnerable populations who are scheduled for court will be accommodated by having the option to handle their case telephonically or being reset to a later date and time.

### **Social Distancing**

1. All persons not from the same household who are permitted in the court building will be required to maintain adequate social distancing of at least 6 feet.
2. Each restroom has been evaluated to determine the appropriate capacity to ensure social distancing and the maximum capacity has been posted on each restroom door.

### ***Gallery***

3. The maximum number of persons permitted in the gallery of each courtroom has been determined and posted. The maximum capacity of the courtroom will be monitored and enforced by court staff.
4. The gallery of the courtroom has been marked to identify appropriate social distancing in the seating. Seating is limited to every other row.

### ***Well***

5. In each courtroom, the counsel tables, witness stand, judge's bench, and clerk, court reporter, and bailiff seating have been arranged in such a way so that there is social distancing of at least 6 feet between each space.

### **Hygiene**

1. Hand sanitizer dispensers have been placed at the entrances to the building, outside of elevators on each floor, outside of each courtroom, and outside of bathrooms.
2. Tissues have been placed near the door of the courtroom, at counsel tables, at the witness stand, on the judges' benches, and in the hallways.
3. The Department of State Health Service's "Stop the Spread of Germs Flyer" has been posted in multiple locations on each floor of the court building.

### **Screening**

1. When individuals attempt to enter the court building, the bailiff will ask the individuals if they are feeling feverish; have a cough, shortness of breath, or difficulty breathing; or have been in close contact with a person who is confirmed to have COVID-19. Individuals who indicate yes to any of these questions will be refused admittance to the court building.

2. When individuals attempt to enter the court building, the bailiff will use an infrared thermometer to determine the temperature of the individual. Individuals whose temperature equals or exceeds 100.0°F will be refused admittance to the court building.
3. Inmates being transported from the jail to the court building will be screened for symptoms of COVID-19 and have their temperature taken prior to transport. Inmates with symptoms or a temperature equal to or above 100.0°F will not be transported to the court building.
4. Staff who are screening individuals entering the court building will be provided personal protective equipment, including a mask and gloves.

#### **Face Coverings**

1. All individuals entering the courtroom while court is in session will be required to wear face coverings. However, if plexiglass barriers are installed in front of a person including the judge, prosecutor, court staff and/or witness, then that person may not be required to wear face coverings.
2. Individuals will be encouraged to bring cloth face coverings with them, but if the individual does not have a cloth face covering, a disposable face mask will be provided.

#### **Cleaning**

1. Court building cleaning staff will clean the common areas of the court building so that common spaces are cleaned at least every 24 hours.
2. Court building cleaning staff have been provided cleaning supplies shown to be effective with this coronavirus.
3. Court building cleaning staff have been trained on proper cleaning techniques and provided appropriate personal protective equipment.

I have conferred with all judges of the Fate Municipal Court of Record regarding this Operating Plan. In developing the plan, I consulted with the local health authority and mayor, documentation of which is attached to this plan. I will ensure that the judges of the Fate Municipal Court of Record covered by this Operating Plan shall conduct proceedings consistent with the plan.

Date: 5/14/2020



Presiding Judge of Municipal Court

Acknowledgment

State of Texas

County of Rockwall

Fate Municipal Court of Record

I hereby acknowledge having received a copy of the COVID-19 Operating Plan for City of Fate Municipal Court of Record and OCA's Guidance to Courts Regarding All Court Proceedings documentation. I understand that Courts have a responsibility to take steps to ensure the health and safety of those entering a court building for court proceedings, and any and all visitors' health and safety entering the courthouse or city building where court is held.

To my knowledge the City of Fate Municipal Court staff and city officials, has taken all the necessary steps to ensure the health and safety according to the guidelines listed on the COVID-19 Operating Plan. I will also make sure to uphold the guidelines of the Office of Court Administration to ensure that all non-essential in-person proceedings of any size must be delayed until on or after June 1<sup>st</sup>, 2020.

I certify under PENALTY OF PERJURY under the laws of the State of Texas that the foregoing paragraphs are true and correct.

WITNESS my hand and official seal.



Mayor Pro Tem -David Billings

