

# **COVID-19 Operating Plan for the Howe Municipal Court, Grayson County Judiciary**

Recognizing the need to ensure the health and safety of litigants, attorneys, visitors, court staff, judges, and other individuals entering the buildings housing the courts, the courts of Howe 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. All judges will use all reasonable efforts to conduct proceedings remotely.
3. 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.
4. Judges will begin setting non-essential in-person proceedings no sooner than August 1, 2020

## **Judge and Court Staff Health**

1. Judges and court staff who can perform the essential functions of their job remotely will telework when possible.
2. Judge and Court Staff Monitoring Requirements: daily temperature will be taken of all court personnel entering the court building.
3. Judges or court staff who feel feverish or have measured temperatures equal to or greater than 99.6°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 building and should seek medical advice.
4. Judges and court staff will be required to wear face coverings, practice social distancing, and practice appropriate hygiene recommendations at all time.
5. Protective Measures: Court staff working the customer service window are separated by shatter resistant window. Court staff will be provided with hand sanitizers, sanitizing wipes for all workstations, gloves, and face masks. Hand sanitizer and masks will be provided in the lobby for customer use. Signs will be placed to encourage social distancing while waiting at service window. Options available to handle cases by phone, email, mail, online payment, and a 24 hour drop box will be encouraged to reduce any in-person dealing with court cases. Notices for these options will be posted on the court's website, mailers, and emails. Signatures on court documents will be required only if deemed necessary.

## Scheduling

1. The following court schedules are established to reduce occupancy in the court building: All defendants will be encouraged to call, email, or mail any paperwork and payments in to avoid having in-person contact.
  - a. Window walk-in
    1. Lobby will be open from 7:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday through Thursday and 7:30 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. on Fridays.
    2. Only 1 person will be allowed in the lobby due to the size
    3. If another person was to need to come into the lobby while the first person is already there; the 5 (six) foot spacing will come into play.
    4. Hand sanitizer will be provided for each defendant who enters the lobby.
    5. Signage will be placed on the outside doors as well as inside the lobby regarding the proper distancing and encouragement of wearing masks.
  - b. Hearings before the Judge
    1. In-person hearing will be held on the 1<sup>st</sup> Monday of each month at 1:30 p.m.
    2. Each hearing will consist of no more than 10 (ten) people including the Judge, Prosecutor, Court Clerk, and the Bailiff.
    3. Between each session, a thorough cleaning and sanitizing will be ordered.
    4. Defendants will not be allowed to bring other guests with them unless that person is a witness to the case. The court must have prior acknowledgment of this witness to adjust for the for the 10-person limit.
    5. Juvenile defendants that are required to make an appearance in front of the Judge shall be accompanied by 1 (one) parent/guardian and no other guests including siblings.
    6. Accommodations will be made to comply with the Open Courts Provision but at no time will the Courtroom exceed 25% of normal Courtroom capacity.

## 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 individual hearing when necessary.

### **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. No more than two individuals not from the same household will be permitted in an elevator. If more than one individual from the same household is in an elevator, no other individuals will be permitted in the elevator.
3. 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.
4. Public common areas, including breakrooms and snackrooms, have been closed to the public.

### ***Gallery***

5. 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.
6. The gallery of the courtroom has been marked to identify appropriate social distancing in the seating. Seating is limited to every other row.

### ***Well***

7. 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 99.6°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 face masks and gloves.

Face Coverings

1. All individuals entering the court building will be required to wear face coverings at all times.
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.
3. Individuals who will be required to be in the court building for over 1 hour will be provided surgical masks and required to wear them while in the court building if the supply is available.

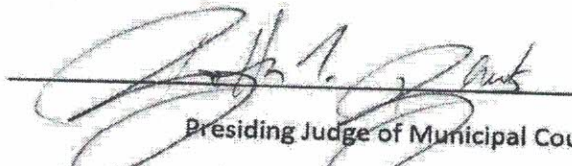
Cleaning



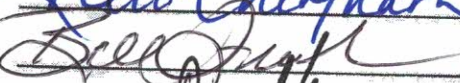

1. Court building cleaning staff will clean the common areas of the court building so that common spaces are cleaned at least every 2 hours.
2. Court building cleaning staff will clean the courtrooms between every hearing, between morning and afternoon proceedings, and at the end of each day the courtroom is used.
3. Court building cleaning staff have been provided cleaning supplies shown to be effective with this coronavirus.
4. Court building cleaning staff have been trained on proper cleaning techniques and provided appropriate personal protective equipment.

Other

I have attempted to confer with all judges of courts with courtrooms in the court building 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 courts with courtrooms in the court building covered by this Operating Plan conduct proceedings consistent with the plan.

Date: 7/1/2020

  
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Presiding Judge of Municipal Court  
Judge Britton Brooks

	Print Name	Signature
Prosecutor	<u>Jeremy Wood</u>	<u></u>
Court Clerk	<u>Kerri Cheatham</u>	<u></u>
Mayor	<u>Bill French</u>	<u></u>
Bailiff	<u>Oscar Martinez</u>	<u></u>