

## COVID-19 Operating Plan for the Huntsville City Judiciary

Recognizing the need to ensure the health and safety of defendants, attorneys, visitors, court staff, judges, and other individuals entering the building housing the court, the **City of Huntsville Municipal Court** will implement the following protective measures:

### General

1. The Judge 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 Judge 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 will adjust this operating plan as necessary with conditions in the city.
4. The Judge will begin setting non-essential in-person proceedings no sooner than June 1, 2020

### Judge and Court Staff Health

1. The Judge and court staff who can perform the essential functions of their job remotely will telework when possible.
2. The Judge and Court Staff Monitoring Requirements: Personnel will be instructed to not report for duty and notify their supervisor immediately if they should experience symptoms described in item 3 immediately following. During the work day, should any personnel begin experiencing the described symptoms, they will notify their supervisor immediately so they may be allowed to leave the work place.
3. The Judge or court staff who feel unwell, feverish or have measured temperatures equal to or greater than 100.0°F, or have new or worsening signs or symptoms of COVID-19 such as cough, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, chills, muscle pain, headache, sore throat, loss of taste or smell, diarrhea, or having close contact with a person who is confirmed to have COVID-19 will not be permitted to enter the building. In this instance, the Judge or court staff member will not be permitted to return to the building without clearance from a medical physician or an agent of a medical physician to do so.
4. The Judge and court staff are encouraged to wear face coverings, practice social distancing, and practice appropriate hygiene recommendations at all time.
5. Protective Measures: Court staff are separated from the general public by a locked door and glass service windows. Staff are provided with hand sanitizer, spray sanitizer, sanitizing wipes for work stations, and masks. Hand sanitizer is provided in the lobby for customers. Signs and floor markings are placed in the lobby area and service windows

to encourage social distancing while defendants wait to be assisted in the lobby. Lobby customer service counter and transaction trays are disinfected a minimum of 3 times per day. Defendants are allowed to exercise their available options via phone, fax, email, and regular mail in lieu of coming to the office in person. Plexiglass shields are installed on the Bench in the courtroom to protect the Judge, clerk, and bailiff.

### **Scheduling**

1. The following court schedules are established to reduce occupancy in the court building: No in-person hearings or trials will be scheduled until after June 1, 2020. During the month of June 2020, hearings will be held via Zoom video conferencing and in person. During in-person hearings, social distancing will be practiced, allowing no more than 16 defendants in the courtroom at one time with current social distance recommendations. Should these distancing recommendations change, the number of persons allowed in the courtroom will change accordingly. Bench trials will not be held prior to August 1, 2020. Between hearings and trials, courtroom surfaces will be cleaned with disinfectant. Defendants will not be allowed to bring other guests with them to a hearing. Juvenile defendants shall only be accompanied by one parent/guardian and no other guests, including siblings. Accommodations will be made to comply with the Open Courts provision, but at no time will the courtroom exceed 25% of its normal courtroom capacity. Jury trial scheduling will be dependant on orders and guidance issued by the Supreme Court of Texas, Court of Criminal Appeals, and the Office of Court Administration.

### **Vulnerable Populations**

1. Individuals who are over age 65 years of age 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. The 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 court's website 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 scheduling them for virtual appearances via Zoom video conferencing or allowing them to reset their hearing or trial until such time that they can safely appear in person.

### **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 the courtroom has been determined and posted. The maximum capacity of the courtroom will be monitored and enforced by court staff.
4. Seating in the gallery of the courtroom has been modified to space chairs 6' apart.

#### *Well*

5. In the courtroom, the counsel tables, witness stand, judge's bench, and clerk and bailiff seating are arranged in such a way so that there is social distancing of at least 6 feet between each space or protected by a plexiglass barrier.

#### Hygiene

1. A hand sanitizer dispenser is located in the court building lobby and outside of bathrooms.
2. Tissues have been placed near the door of the courtroom, at counsel tables, at the witness stand, on the judge's bench, and in the lobby.
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 enter the court building, they will be advised that if they are feeling unwell, have a temperature of 100.0°F, have a new or worsening cough, shortness of breath, or difficulty breathing, or have been in close contact with a person who is confirmed to have COVID-19, they will be required to leave the court building.
2. 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.

#### Face Coverings

1. Individuals entering the court building will be encouraged to wear face coverings, but will not be required to wear face coverings. Individuals who wish to wear a face covering but do not have one will be provided a disposable face mask.

#### Cleaning

1. Court building cleaning staff will clean the common areas of the court building daily, at the start of the work day.
2. Court building cleaning staff have been trained on proper cleaning techniques and provided appropriate personal protective equipment.
3. Court staff will clean the courtroom between every hearing.
4. Court staff have been provided cleaning supplies shown to be effective with this coronavirus.

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: 6/15/2020



John R. Gaines,  
Presiding Judge of Municipal Court

*Allen Anderson* June 15, 2020



CITY OF HUNTSVILLE

# Municipal Court

Incorporated in 1845 under the Republic of Texas

May 18, 2020

Please inform the court if you are a **Vulnerable Individual**:

- Over 65 years of age;
- Have serious underlying health conditions such as
  - High blood pressure
  - Chronic lung disease
  - Diabetes
  - Obesity
  - Asthma
  - Compromised immune system