

**COVID-19 OPERATING PLAN**  
FOR THE CITY OF PALMHURST  
MUNICIPAL COURT OF RECORD  
IN HIDALGO COUNTY

*Presiding Judge*  
Horacio Peña Jr.

*City Prosecutor*  
Darrell Davis

*Municipal Court Coordinator*  
Richard Garcia

Recognizing the need to ensure the health and safety of attorneys, visitors, court staff, judges, and other individuals entering the building housing the court, the Palmhurst Municipal Court will implement the following protective measures.

## **GENERAL**

1. The presiding judge of the municipal court 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 use all reasonable efforts to conduct proceedings remotely.
3. The presiding judge of the municipal court will maintain regular communication with the local health authorities and mayor to adjust this operating plan as necessary with conditions in the county.
4. The judge will begin setting non-essential in-person proceedings no sooner than October 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. 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
3. Judges and all court staff will be required to wear face coverings, practice social distancing, and practice appropriate hygiene recommendations at all time.
4. Protective Measures: Plexiglas has been installed in the courtroom; Face masks, gloves, disinfecting spray and hand sanitizer will be provided to all staff.

## **SCHEDULING**

1. The Court will use all reasonable efforts to conduct proceedings remotely through ZOOM. However, if hearings must be held in-person, the court will have a limit of 10 persons per docket. Defendants scheduled for court will remain in their vehicles and check in by calling the court. Only one defendant at a time may be present in order to keep the number of persons in the courtroom at five.

## **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. The Court will use every mean possible to notify 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.

3. Vulnerable populations who are scheduled for court will be given the opportunity to participate via telephone, virtually through ZOOM, or in-person.

### **SOCIAL DISTANCING**

1. All persons not from the same household who are permitted in the court building will be required to maintain an adequate social distance of at least six (6) feet.
2. Signs and floor markings have been posted in the entire building indicating adequate distance.
3. Public common areas are closed to the public.

### **IN THE COURTROOM**

4. The counsel table, witness stand, judge's bench, and clerk's seating have been arranged in such a way so that there is social distancing of at least 6 feet between each space.
5. The maximum number of persons permitted in the courtroom has been determined and posted. The maximum capacity of the courtroom will be monitored and enforced by court staff.
6. The courtroom has been marked to identify appropriate social distancing in the seating. Seating is limited to every other row.

### **HYGIENE**

1. Hand sanitizers have been placed at the entrances to the building.
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 CDC's "Stop the Spread of Germs Flyer" has been posted in multiple locations inside and outside of the building.

### **SCREENING**

1. When individuals attempt to enter the building, trained court or city staff 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 building, trained court or city staff will use an infrared thermometer to determine the temperature of the individual. Individuals whose temperature equals or exceeds 99.6°F will be refused admittance to the building.
3. Staff who are screening individuals entering the court building will be provided personal protective equipment, including gloves, masks, hand sanitizer, disinfectant spray and wipes.

**FACE COVERINGS**


1. All individuals entering the court building will always be required to wear face coverings including the nose area.
2. Any individual who does not have a cloth face covering, will be refused admittance to the building.

**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, Monday through Friday.
2. Court building cleaning staff will clean the courtrooms between every hearing, 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.


In developing the plan, I consulted with the local health authorities, City Manager and Mayor, documentation of which is attached to this plan. I ensure that I will conduct proceedings consistent with the plan.

Signed this 1st day of October, 2020.



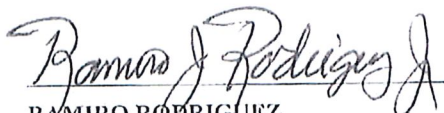
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JUDGE HORACIO PENA  
MUNICIPAL COURT JUDGE  
CITY OF PALMHURST



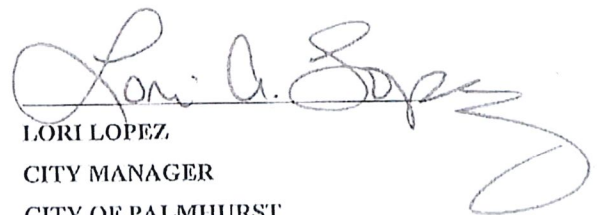
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EDDIE OLIVAREZ  
CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER  
HIDALGO COUNTY



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RAMIRO RODRIGUEZ  
MAYOR  
CITY OF PALMHURST



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LORI LOPEZ  
CITY MANAGER  
CITY OF PALMHURST