

City of Sweeny, Texas
Sweeny Municipal Court
PO Box 248 102 W Ashley Wilson Road
Sweeny, TX 77480
(979)548-3325 Fax (979)548-7745

COVID-19 Operating Plan for the Sweeny Municipal Court City 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 Municipal Court of Sweeny 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 June 8, 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: Judges and court staff will self-monitor in accordance with this operating plan.
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 whenever they are in direct contact with the public and will practice social distancing and appropriate hygiene recommendations at all time.
5. Protective Measures:
 - Masks and hand sanitizer will be provided to court personnel.
 - Seating for court staff and the public will be arranged in such a way to meet social distancing recommendations.
 - Community spaces will be disinfected after each defendant.

Scheduling

The following court schedules are established to reduce occupancy in the court building:

1. The number of dockets will be increased to limit the number of people entering or in the courtroom at any one period of time to no more than the maximum number of people allowed in the building under the recommended guidelines for social distancing.
2. Defendants who do not feel comfortable appearing in person may request a remote hearing by telephone.

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 one of the following:
 - personal phone calls with court staff to resolve their case coupled with mailing/emailing paperwork to complete the disposition of their case;
 - remote appearance by telephone followed up with paperwork by email or mail; and/or
 - a reset to a later date to accommodate improved health conditions.

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.
3. Public common areas, including breakrooms and snackrooms, have been closed to the public.

Gallery

4. 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.
5. The gallery of the courtroom has been marked to identify appropriate social distancing in the seating. Seating is limited to every other row.

Well

6. 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 entrance to the building 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 lobby.
3. The Department of State Health Service's "Stop the Spread of Germs Flyer" has been posted in the court lobby.

Screening

1. When individuals attempt to enter the court building, the bailiff or city/court 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 court building, the bailiff or city/court staff 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, gloves, and sanitizer.

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 prior to each court session 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 conferred with the city manager and court staff 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 all court proceedings in the court building covered by this Operating Plan are conducted consistent with the plan.

Date: 6/3/2020



Robert J. Foster, Presiding Judge of Municipal Court
City of Sweeny
Brazoria County, Texas



Jeff Farley, Mayor
City of Sweeny
Brazoria County, Texas

Vulnerable Population Notice



ARE YOU A VULNERABLE PERSON?

VULNERABLE persons are defined as persons over the age of 65 or persons with one or more of the following conditions:

- Serious underlying health conditions
- High blood pressure
- Chronic lung disease
- Diabetes
- Severe obesity
- Asthma
- Immune Compromised

ALTERNATIVES TO A PERSONAL COURT APPEARANCE ARE AVAILABLE FOR VULNERABLE PERSONS

PHONE THE SWEENEY MUNICIPAL COURT AT
(979) 548-3325

You may phone the court and speak with a clerk for options to resolve your case.

For information on how to request a Driver Safety Course or Deferred Disposition, Submit Proof of Financial Responsibility, enter a plea of not guilty, request a 30 day extension to pay and other options.

REQUEST A FUTURE COURT DATE

A written request for an alternate court date can be requested by mail.