

COVID-19 Operating Plan for the Guadalupe County Judiciary Recertification

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 Guadalupe County 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 may conduct proceedings remotely.
3. The local administrative district judge will maintain regular communication with the local health authority and county judge and adjust this operating plan as necessary with conditions in the county.
4. Judges will begin setting non-essential in-person proceedings no sooner than June 1, 2020

Judge and Court Staff Health

1. Vulnerable court staff may perform the essential functions of their job remotely on a case-by-case basis as determined by their supervisor.
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. Court staff will be required to wear face coverings in the courtroom or when interacting with non-judicial persons. Judges and Court Staff should practice social distancing and practice appropriate hygiene recommendations at all time.
4. Protective Measures: Court staff will be provided hand sanitizer and face masks.

Scheduling

1. The following court schedules are established to reduce occupancy in the court building:
The Court Coordinators for each of the Courts will coordinate scheduling. Courts will limit the number of cases set for a specific time, in order to ensure that the number of attendees will be kept at a level which will allow for appropriate social distancing i.e. the Court's dockets will be staggered to limit the number of cases at a particular time and will have hearing times spread out through the day.

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 appearance via teleconferencing or, if necessary, in-person proceedings in a limited access courtroom .

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 have been closed to the general 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, bailiffs 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. 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.
3. Staff who is screening individuals entering the court building will be provided personal protective equipment, including face mask and gloves.

Face Coverings

1. All individuals entering the court building will be required to wear face coverings at all times. Notice that face coverings are required will be provided to litigants through the setting notice and communicated to them or their attorney at the time the hearing is set.

Cleaning

1. Court building cleaning staff will clean the common areas of the court building as is practicable.
2. Court building cleaning staff will clean the courtrooms as is practicable.
3. Court building cleaning staff have been provided cleaning supplies shown to be effective with this coronavirus.

Other

This plan may be amended by the Local Administrative District Judge as deemed appropriate.

I have provided all judges of courts in Guadalupe County a copy of this Operating Plan and requested their input. In developing the plan, I consulted with the local health authority and county judge. I will ensure that the judges of courts in the Guadalupe County have a copy of this plan and request that they conduct proceedings consistent with the plan.

Date: December 28, 2020

/s/ William D. Old, III
Local Administrative District Judge