

**INFORMATION REGARDING PHASE III OF MONTGOMERY COUNTY CIRCUIT COURT REOPENING
(7/20/20)**

The Circuit Court for Montgomery County will enter Phase III of the statewide judiciary reopening on Monday, July 20. The court's Reopening Protocol Committee recently met to establish guidelines for this phase. It is recommended that the reader first familiarize him or herself with the "Montgomery County Circuit Court Reopening Plan," previously published on the court's website at montgomerycountymd.gov/cct.

While there has generally been a downward trend in Covid-19 cases in Montgomery County in recent weeks, concerns remain regarding national trends and conditions in nearby states. Accordingly, it should be emphasized that it is the policy of this court to proceed cautiously as it looks towards the next phases of reopening. Remote hearings are still encouraged, whenever practicable, and efforts will continue to depopulate the courthouse to the greatest extent possible.

The following supplemental information is provided for litigants, attorneys, and members of the public regarding Phase III. The term "hearing" includes trials and other proceedings conducted in a courtroom.

COURTHOUSE ENTRY

- The Maryland Avenue and Monroe Street Entrances to the courthouse will be open to the public and employees, subject to the restrictions set forth below. The Terrace Level entrance, opposite Jefferson Street, will remain closed until further notice. All normal screening will continue, including questions regarding a court entrant's health, and there will continue to be temporal thermometer checks. All persons must wear a mask covering their mouth and nose. The wearing of masks with valves, while not prohibited, is strongly discouraged, as those masks permit exhalation of the user's breath into the surrounding environment.

PUBLIC AREAS

- All persons in the building are required whenever possible to maintain social distancing of at least six feet. Stairwells are marked for "up" or "down" traffic only, and elevators may contain a maximum of four persons. No more than 20 persons are permitted in the spectator gallery of any courtroom, and no more than 10 persons are permitted in the spectator gallery of any hearing room. Appropriate signs will be posted outside of those rooms regarding capacity.
- Drinking fountains remain inoperable, and no more than four persons may occupy a public restroom. Lobby area seating has been largely eliminated.
- Judges and magistrates are encouraged to stagger "in-person" hearing times, so as to avoid having persons sitting in the court or hearing rooms, and attorneys, litigants, and witnesses are discouraged from arriving more than 15 minutes before their scheduled hearing time.
- The assigned judge's or magistrate's staff will notify attorneys and self-represented persons with respect to the time they are required to be in court for a particular hearing, which may differ from the information contained in any court notice. Such notification will occur no later than the previous day. In the event counsel or the self-

represented litigant has not heard from the judge's or magistrate's staff, those persons should contact chambers for instructions by the close of business on the previous day.

COURTROOM/HEARING ROOM PROCEDURES

- Counsel are encouraged to pre-submit documentary evidence to the assigned hearing judge or magistrate. Documents shall be faxed or emailed pursuant to the judge's or magistrate's direction, but no later than the day before the hearing. All evidence shall be pre-marked by the clerk before the start of the hearing, to minimize the handling of paper or other items.
- All court participants are required to wear masks, but attorneys and testifying witnesses may be permitted to remove them so they can be better understood and the audio record of the proceeding will be clearer.
- Hearing participants should provide their own pens, pencils, and pads and remove them at the end of the hearing.
- Where appropriate, in the discretion of the hearing judge or magistrate, counsel may socially distance him or herself from clients in the courtroom, and attorney and client may communicate with each other during the hearing via an electronic device such as a phone or laptop computer.
- The presiding judge or magistrate is free to impose any additional restrictions or protocol warranted under the circumstances of a particular hearing, in order to enhance the safety of the occupants of the courtroom.

PEDESTRIAN TRAFFIC IN THE BUILDING

- While the courthouse is nominally "open to the public," there will not be open access to the building by any non-employee. For cases that require "in-person" hearings, only the litigants, attorneys, and testifying witnesses will be permitted. Other persons associated with the case will be permitted entry if their presence has been authorized, no later than the previous business day, by the judge or magistrate who is hearing the matter. The Sheriff will be provided with a list of persons authorized to attend the hearing, and no other persons shall be admitted if they are not on that list.
- Courthouse visitors or casual observers of "in-person" proceedings will not be admitted to the building, but will be provided with a dial-in number so that they can hear proceedings remotely. This exclusion does not apply to members of the press, who shall be admitted to observe any court proceeding upon presentation of appropriate credentials to the Sheriff or his deputy.
- Courthouse offices, such as the Register of Wills and State's Attorney's Office, will need to provide to the Sheriff's Office the name of persons entering the courthouse to visit their respective offices. Such notification must be provided no later than the day before entry.

COURTHOUSE SERVICES

- Applications for marriage licenses shall be deposited by dropbox or first-class mail, and no in-person applications will be accepted. Marriage ceremonies in the courthouse are suspended until further notice.

- The Law Library remains closed to the public, with limited access only to Senior Judges conducting settlement conferences with litigants and attorneys.
- The Family Law Self-Help Center will continue to assist litigants remotely, with eight in-person interviews scheduled throughout the day by appointment only.
- Supervised visitation shall continue remotely, as will the Co-Parenting Skills Enhancement Program and the Child Custody and Access Mediation Program.
- Access to case files for attorneys, probation officers, the press, and members of the public shall be by appointment only. Appointments will be scheduled during non-rush hour times.
- Notary services will continue to be available remotely.
- More information about how to request each of these services will be made available on the court's website, no later than July 17, 2020.

The court appreciates the cooperation it has received from members of the bar since the closure on March 16. We will continue to work collaboratively, serving your clients and the citizens of Montgomery County, as we look towards a complete court reopening on October 5.

Robert A. Greenberg, Administrative Judge