



CIRCUIT COURT FOR HARFORD COUNTY



COVID-19 Interim Court Operations Plan Phase III: December 29, 2021 – February 8, 2022

The Circuit Court for Harford County has the responsibility to ensure the health and safety of all individuals entering the Courthouse.¹ This includes Courthouse employees and occupants, attorneys, litigants, and visitors. In accordance with the Interim Administrative Order of December 27, 2021 Restricting Statewide Judiciary Operations in Light of the Omicron Variant of the COVID-19 Emergency issued by Chief Judge Joseph M. Getty of the Court of Appeals of Maryland on December 27, 2021 (hereafter “Interim Administrative Order”), this Court will revert to Phase III of the reopening of the Courthouse from December 29, 2021 through February 8, 2022. See mdcourts.gov/coronavirusorders.

GENERAL

All persons entering the building must submit to a temperature check with a no-contact thermometer and must answer screening questions related to COVID-19 symptoms. All persons in the Courthouse must wear a mask/covering to prevent or protect against transmission of the Coronavirus and must maintain social distancing protocols. Any person who exhibits now known symptoms of the Coronavirus, or who refuses to wear a mask/covering, or does not maintain social distancing protocols, or who does not otherwise follow the safety and security directives of Security Officers will be denied entrance to the Courthouse or will be required to leave the Courthouse. If as a result of the screening process a person is denied entry, or is otherwise required to leave the Courthouse, that person will be provided information regarding alternative means to address the purpose of that person’s intended visit to the Court.

On a frequent and ongoing basis, the Courthouse will be sanitized to maintain appropriate hygiene/cleaning standards recommended to prevent transmission of the Coronavirus. All public areas of the Courthouse, including courtrooms, also will be marked to promote social distancing. On a case-by- case basis a judge or magistrate presiding over a hearing may implement any other appropriate precautions to protect against transmission of the Coronavirus in a courtroom.

COURTHOUSE HOURS, CLERK’S OFFICE AVAILABILITY, and OCCUPANCY

1. Access to the Courthouse by the public will be limited to the Courtland Street entrance.
2. The Courthouse will be open to the public from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., in a manner necessary to effectuate the mission of the Court. A drop box at the Courtland Street entrance is also available.
3. Court activities shall proceed with restrictions to limit the concentration of individuals and allow social distancing, consistent with guidance of the CDC or MDH or both.

¹ This responsibility is not an admission of liability for tort claims or otherwise on the part of the Court or the Maryland Judiciary.

4. The number of courtrooms used will be kept to the minimum level necessary to maintain court operations.
5. Visitors to the Courthouse are encouraged to not bring children under the age of 16 into the Courthouse. All individuals entering the Courthouse must wear a mask/covering their nose and mouth, submit to no-contact temperature checks, and answer COVID-19 screening questions.
6. The Self-Help Center will continue to be open to the public, with appointments only from 9:00 a.m. until 12:00 p.m. with restrictions to limit the concentration of individuals and allow social distancing, consistent with guidance of the CDC or MDH or both. Virtual consultations and telephone consultations will also be available from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Self-Help Center contact information: SelfHelpCtrHarford@mdcourts.gov or 410-638-4916.

DOCKETING AND SCHEDULING PRIORITIES

During Phase III of the Court reopening process, the Court will hear cases as indicated in the Phase III exhibit appended to Interim Administrative Order. Accordingly, during Phase III the Circuit Court for Harford County will hear cases in accordance with the attached schedule. Most cases will be heard remotely to minimize the risks associated with the Coronavirus. Therefore, attorneys and parties will be asked to provide an email address for a remote video hearing for which a computer or other electronic device *with a camera* will be needed. For those without access to the Internet, telephonic participation will be permitted.

CIVIL: All contested merits trials will be converted to remote pretrial conferences. Any matters that may be settled by consent will be handled at the time of the conference. Other matters listed below will be held *remotely* unless a compelling reason to hold an in person proceeding exists.

1. Emergency evaluation petitions
2. Quarantine and isolation petitions
3. Emergency Habeas Corpus petitions
4. Body attachments
5. Temporary restraining orders
6. Scheduling conferences
7. Status conferences
8. On the record appeals
9. Motions requiring witness testimony
10. Settlement hearings
11. Attorney discipline proceedings
12. Any other matters that can be handled remotely or without testimony or both

CRIMINAL: All pending jury trials are hereby suspended and converted to status conferences at the times currently set. Dispositions of nolle prosequi, stet, and guilty pleas will be taken. Court trials will also be held *in person* at the times currently scheduled depending on the availability of a judge. Other matters listed below will be held *remotely unless otherwise noted* during Phase III in accordance with the current case management process.

1. Bail reviews, bail reconsiderations, and bench warrants including matters involving locally incarcerated defendants, consistent with the *Administrative Order Guiding the Response of the Trial Courts of Maryland to the COVID-19 Emergency as it Relates to Those Persons who are Incarcerated or Imprisoned*, filed April 14, 2020. See mdcourts.gov/coronavirusorders.
2. Arraignments for detained defendants
3. Extradition cases
4. Matters addressing competency; criminal responsibility issues not requiring witness testimony status; and discovery and *Hicks* issues
5. Plea agreements without recommendations for sentences of incarceration
6. Motions
7. Expungements
8. Violation of probation hearings (incarceration not an available sanction, otherwise postponed)
9. Non-jury trials (*in person*)
10. Sentencings previously deferred
11. Any other matters that can be handled remotely or without testimony or both

FAMILY: All contested merits trials will be converted to remote pretrial conferences at the times currently scheduled for trial. Any matters that may be settled by consent will be handled at the time of the conference. Other matters listed below will be held *remotely* unless a compelling reason to hold an in person proceeding exists, or as otherwise noted below.

1. Scheduling conferences
2. Status conferences
3. Uncontested divorces and other uncontested family law matters
4. Domestic violence protective orders
5. Domestic violence, peace, and extreme risk protective order appeals
6. Family law emergencies that have been determined to require an expedited hearing, including time urgent matters related to special juvenile immigrant status (*in person walk-in self-represented litigants*)
7. Emergency issues in guardianship matters
8. Temporary restraining orders
9. Default hearings
10. Exceptions hearings not requiring witness testimony (uncontested or consented to or requiring legal argument only)
11. Temporary protective order petitions during court hours
12. Motions requiring witness testimony
13. Pendente lite hearings
14. Contempt proceedings
15. Adoptions
16. Guardianship – non-emergency
17. Child support matters; establishment; paternity not requiring a hearing
18. Settlement hearings
19. Court-ordered mediations
20. Any other matters that can be handled remotely or without testimony or both

JUVENILE COURT: CINA (DEPENDENCY) These matters will be heard remotely by the Juvenile Magistrate (or a Judge in the Juvenile Magistrate's absence) unless a compelling reason exists to hear the matter in person.

1. Shelter care hearings
2. CINA matters, including, if not contested and/or by proffer, adjudications, dispositions, permanency plan, and permanency plan reviews
3. Termination of parental rights (TPR) by consent and/or by proffer
4. Exceptions hearings (uncontested or consented to or requiring legal argument only)
5. Family Treatment/Recovery Court review hearings
6. Guardianships under juvenile causes
7. Adoptions concerning CINA and TPR juveniles
8. Motions that are contested and/or requiring testimony
9. Exceptions hearings requiring witness testimony
10. Contested TPR proceedings
11. Any other matters that can be handled remotely or without testimony or both

JUVENILE (DELINQUENCY), with priority scheduling for those juveniles: turning 21 within 90 days of the beginning of Phase III; returning from placement; with issues with permanency plans; closures of cases; and possible placement on the juvenile and/or adult sex offender registries. These matters will be heard remotely by the Juvenile Magistrate (or a Judge in the Juvenile Magistrate's absence) unless a compelling reason exists to hear the matter in person.

1. Juvenile detention hearings
2. Peace order petitions (juvenile respondents only)
3. Arraignments and first appearances
4. Emergency delinquency hearings, including motions related to juveniles who are detained, committed pending placement, or committed, consistent with the *Administrative Order Guiding the Response of the Circuit Courts Sitting a Juvenile Courts to the COVID-19 Emergency as it Relates to Those Juveniles who are Detained, Committed Pending Placement or in Commitments*, filed April 13, 2020. See mdcourts.gov/coronavirusorders.
5. Adjudication with agreed to-plea and/or by proffer
6. Disposition with consent and/or by proffer
7. Disposition reviews
8. Delinquency juvenile treatment plans and reviews
9. Closure of probation and jurisdiction of Juvenile Court not requiring testimony
10. Juvenile expungements
11. Juvenile permanency plans and reviews, if not contested or by proffer or both
12. Exceptions hearings
13. All matters that are contested and/or requiring testimony
14. Motions
15. Juvenile and adult sex offender registration matters
16. Waiver hearings, including to and from Juvenile Court
17. Any other matters that can be handled remotely or without testimony or both

PROBLEM-SOLVING COURTS, including drug, mental health, family/dependency recovery, DUI, veterans', juvenile drug, and truancy courts.

Any other matters that can be scheduled, heard, or resolved with this Interim Administrative Order are encouraged to be addressed by the circuit courts during Phase III.

REGISTER OF WILLS: Scheduled 2 days a week; Tuesdays and Thursdays before a Senior Judge. These matters will be held *in person* at the discretion of the Senior Judges.

Remote hearings will be held in most cases, particularly those listed below:

Bail review hearings (will remain remote permanently)

Guardianship hearings

Child support establishment and paternity

Civil motions, pretrial hearings and settlement hearings

Family Law Cases: UCDs, default hearings, exceptions, scheduling conferences

Other matters determined on a case-by- case basis by a Judge or Magistrate

Any other matters that can be scheduled, heard, or resolved remotely

See Tips for Remote Hearings on web page for Harford County Circuit Court at www.mdcourts.gov/courts/circuitcourts.

CONCLUSION

The Court will strive to hear all matters during Phase III in a safe and efficient manner. All Courthouse employees and occupants, attorneys, litigants, and visitors, are expected to exhibit the utmost degree of civility and patience appropriate to having matters resolved in this public forum. Anything less dishonors the principles upon which our legal system was founded.

DATE: December 29, 2021

/S/ ANGELA M. EAVES,
ADMINISTRATIVE JUDGE