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SUFFOLK COUNTY
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ANDREW A. CRECCA
District Administrative Judge
Suffolk County

WARREN G. CLARK, ESQ.
District Executive

MEMORANDUM

TO: Suffolk County Legal Community

FROM: Hon. Andrew A. Crecca, District Administrative Judge 

DATE: December 8, 2020

RE: **10th Judicial District, Suffolk County Updated Operating Protocols**
Effective December 9, 2020

For the past many months, the Unified Court System has permitted in-person proceedings in accordance with the Governor's un-PAUSE New York plan. Foot traffic in the courthouses was gradually increased to correspond with an improvement in the metrics measuring the spread of the Coronavirus. Recently, the metrics have indicated the need to once again reduce foot traffic in the courthouses to protect the health and safety of litigants, lawyers, court staff and judges. It is critical that the Courts immediately decrease in-person proceedings in order to protect the health and safety of all court users, court staff and judges and to further reduce the community spread of the Coronavirus. These protocols are intended to create an environment where the "normal" is a virtual appearance and in-person appearances are rare.

The Administrative Judge may, based upon local conditions, enact more restrictive operational protocols deemed appropriate by the Administrative Judge.

This Plan should be considered an update to the Return to In-Person Operations Plan effective October 19, 2020, Judge Marks' Memorandum "Revised Pandemic Procedures in the Trial Courts", dated November 13, 2020, and the Updated Operating Protocols, dated November 18, 2020 (effective November 23, 2020). Commencing December 9, 2020, all court operations in the 10th Judicial District of the State of New York, Suffolk County, shall be conducted pursuant to this Plan.

I. Courthouse Operations

A. Scheduling

1. Calendar times shall be staggered so that different courts (e.g., Family, Criminal, etc.) in the same building start at different times.
2. A Judge may not hold in-person proceedings more than one day per week, unless an exception is requested and granted by the District Administrative Judge. Scheduling of matters shall be coordinated by Supervising Judges and the Chief or Deputy Chief Clerks to assure appropriate limiting of foot traffic.
3. **In each court, there shall be a maximum of 5 cases or proceedings scheduled in-person per hour.**

- B. Occupancy of all courtrooms shall be limited to the lesser of 10 people or one-half the posted room occupancy per code. An exception shall be granted for grand juries (in those instances, occupancy shall be limited to the lesser of 30 people or one-half the posted room occupancy per code). Any exceptions that were previously granted to the occupancy limits are rescinded until further notice.
- C. The number of non-judicial staff reporting to the courthouse shall be reduced in the discretion of the Administrative Judge to the minimum number necessary to ensure safe operation. In-person staffing at these reduced levels should be scheduled in a manner that limits the likelihood and adverse consequence of a positive COVID transmission in the workplace. All staff not reporting to the courthouse shall work remotely. Under no circumstance shall the number of non-judicial staff reporting to the courthouse exceed between 25% and 40% of normal pre-COVID staffing.
- D. All current safety measures and protocols will continue. Court managers and PPE Compliance Coordinators shall take steps to enhance monitoring and compliance with all safety measures including social distancing at all times.

II. Court Proceedings

- A. No new prospective trial jurors (criminal or civil) will be summoned for jury service until further notice. Pending criminal and civil jury trials will continue to conclusion.
- B. No new prospective grand jurors will be summoned to report for grand jury service unless authorized by appropriate administrative order. Existing grand juries, pursuant to Section 190.15 of the Criminal Procedure Law, may continue as a matter of law, or upon application of the appropriate district attorney to the Administrative Judge.
- C. Notwithstanding any other provision herein, no adult in custody in the Suffolk County Correctional Facility in the 10th Judicial District, Suffolk County, shall be produced to any Court (Supreme, County, Family, City, Town or Village) unless the Administrative Judge grants permission for an in-person appearance. Where an in-person proceeding involves an adult housed at a correctional facility other than one located in the 10th Judicial District, Suffolk County, that individual shall appear virtually utilizing electronic means unless the presiding judge orders otherwise after appropriate application is made.
- D. The following enumerated matters **may** be heard in-person (or a hybrid of in-person and virtual) **PROVIDED THAT THE PRESIDING JUDGE FIRST MAKES A FINDING THAT IT IS UNLAWFUL TO CONDUCT THE PROCEEDING VIRTUALLY, OR THAT IT IS IMPRACTICAL TO CONDUCT THE PROCEEDING VIRTUALLY AND CRITICAL THAT THE MATTER PROCEED IMMEDIATELY:**
1. Matters as designated in Exhibit A
 2. Family Court Act Article 10 evidentiary hearings

3. Permanency Hearings
 4. Criminal Preliminary Hearings
 5. Pleas and Sentences
 6. Arraignments of in-custody defendants
 7. Arraignments where the Court is notified of a request for an arraignment by either the prosecution or the defense.
 8. Surrogate's Court Citations
 9. Treatment Court and Judicial Diversion appearances where the presiding judge determines, in consultation with Supervising Judge, that an appearance in an acute case is necessary to protect the health and safety of a defendant/respondent.
 10. Any proceeding involving a self-represented litigant(s) where the presiding judge determines that holding the proceeding via Microsoft Teams denies the self-represented litigant(s) meaningful access to the proceeding and where the presiding judge determines that the matter can be heard in-person consistent with all OCA safety protocols.
- E. ALL other matters MUST be heard virtually using Microsoft Teams video conferencing, or telephone, including but not limited to:
1. Bench Trials in Civil and Criminal cases, except for compelling reasons, the presiding judge may forward a request for permission to conduct a bench trial in-person to the Administrative Judge. If deemed appropriate, the Administrative Judge will forward the request to the Deputy Chief Administrative Judge, whose permission is required if the matter is to be held in-person.
 2. Evidentiary Hearings in Civil and Criminal cases, except for compelling reasons, the presiding judge may forward a request for permission to conduct a hearing in-person to the Administrative Judge. If deemed appropriate, the Administrative Judge will forward the request to the Deputy Chief Administrative Judge, whose permission is required if the matter is to be held in-person.
 3. Motion arguments
 4. Mental Hygiene Law Proceedings pertaining to a hospitalized adult (Chief Administrative Judge Lawrence Marks' Administrative Order AO/72/20)
 5. ADR where both parties are represented by counsel and counsel will be present.
 6. Arbitrations pursuant to the Part 137 Attorney-Client Fee Dispute Resolution Program
 7. Small Claims Assessment Review proceedings
 8. Desk Appearance Tickets
 9. Conferences
 10. Arbitrations
 11. Other routine court matters not expressly included in Paragraph II(D)

III. Town and Village Court Protocols

Updated operating protocols for Town and Village Courts in the 10th Judicial District, Suffolk County are set forth in an attachment hereto.

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Exhibit A

- A. Criminal matters
 - 1. arraignments
 - 2. bail applications, reviews and writs
 - 3. temporary orders of protection
 - 4. resentencing of retained and incarcerated defendants
 - 5. essential sex offender registration act (SORA) matters
- B. Family Court
 - 1. child protection intake cases involving removal applications
 - 2. juvenile delinquency cases involving remand placement applications, or modification thereof
 - 3. emergency family offense petitions/temporary orders of protection
 - 4. orders to show cause
- C. Supreme Court
 - 1. MHL applications for an assisted outpatient treatment (AOT) plan
 - 2. emergency applications in guardianship matters
 - 3. temporary orders of protection (including but not limited to matters involving domestic violence)
 - 4. emergency applications related to the coronavirus
 - 5. emergency Election Law applications
 - 6. extreme risk protection orders (ERPO)
- D. Civil/Housing matters
 - 1. applications addressing landlord lockouts (including reductions in essential services)
 - 2. applications addressing serious code violations
 - 3. applications addressing serious repair orders
 - 4. applications for post-eviction relief
- E. Surrogate's Court - Any matter involving an individual who passed away due to COVID-related causes.

Updated Operating Protocols
Town and Village Courts
10th Judicial District, Suffolk County
Effective December 9, 2020

For the past many months, the Unified Court System has permitted in-person proceedings in accordance with the Governor's un-PAUSE New York plan. Foot traffic in the courthouses was gradually increased to correspond with an improvement in the metrics measuring the spread of the Coronavirus. Recently, the metrics have indicated the need to once again reduce foot traffic in the courthouses to protect the health and safety of litigants, lawyers, court staff and judges. Chief Administrative Judge Lawrence Marks' Memorandum "Revised Pandemic Procedures in the Trial Courts", dated November 13, 2020, and the Updated Operating Protocols, dated November 18, 2020 (effective November 23, 2020) are incorporated herein and this document is intended to update those protocols and provide enhanced guidance thereto.

Commencing December 9, 2020, all Town and Village Court operations in the 10th Judicial District of the State of New York, Suffolk County, shall be conducted pursuant to this Plan. **If a matter is not specifically mentioned below, the Court MAY NOT hear the matter in-person.**

I. Courthouse Operations

- A. Occupancy of all courtrooms shall be limited to the lesser of 10 people or 25% of the posted room occupancy per code.
- B. All current safety measures and protocols will continue.

II. Court Proceedings

- A. No new prospective trial jurors (criminal or civil) will be summoned for jury service until further notice. Commenced criminal and civil jury trials will continue to conclusion.
- B. No new bench trials and hearings in civil and criminal cases will be conducted. Bench trials and hearings may only be conducted after a request is made to the Administrative Judge and Deputy Chief Administrative Judge. Exception: Preliminary Hearings in Criminal Court may be heard in-person pursuant to the Updated Operating Protocols (effective November 23, 2020).
- C. Judges may conduct in-person off-hour arraignments. In counties with a CAP, the arraignments shall occur with the Judge presiding at the CAP; where there is a VAP, virtual arraignments shall continue. In all other counties, necessary arraignments shall occur at the Town or Village Court.
- D. Judges may conduct arraignments of in-custody defendants.
- E. Judges may conduct arraignments where the Court is notified of a request for an arraignment by either the prosecution or the defense.
- F. Judges are encouraged to more robustly conference criminal matters virtually/telephonically and if acceptable disposition is reached, plea affidavits are strongly encouraged. Please work with your ADA and defense counsel on procedure. These matters may not be handled in person.
- G. Judges are encouraged to use a mail-in plea bargaining disposition process that would allow a defendant charged with a VTL infraction to proceed without a personal appearance. Please work with your ADA and defense counsel on procedure.
- H. While there is no Executive Order nor statutory directive that would excuse a failure to appear or prevent a judge from suspending a motorist's license for failing to appear at a court session, Judges are encouraged to utilize their judicial discretion when considering the suspension of a motorist's license for failing to appear.