

GENERAL ORDER:

**COURT OPERATIONS IN WILLIAMSON COUNTY
CRIMINAL MISDEMEANOR COURTS UNDER THE 2020 STATE OF DISASTER
COVID-19 AND RELATED CORONAVIRUS**

This General Order is issued in response to the Local State of Disaster that has been declared by the County Judge of Williamson County, as well as the declarations by the Governor of the State of Texas, and by the President of the United States, and in conformance with *First Emergency Order Regarding the COVID-19 State of Disaster* issued by the Supreme Court of Texas and the Court of Criminal Appeals¹.

The Courts of Williamson County are open, “and every person...shall have remedy by due course of law.” (Tx. Const. Art. I Sec. 13). The Court finds that the State of Disaster requires certain steps to be taken in order to mitigate risk to the health and safety of the public, parties, and employees of the Court, and so it is therefore ORDERED that, effective March 19, 2020 and continuing until May 11, 2020, unless extended by further orders:

1. Due to the limitations on mass gatherings limiting the Courts’ ability to impanel juries, all jury trials in ALL MISDEMEANOR matters scheduled through May 11, 2020 are CONTINUED without prejudice to either party and, consistent with the directive of the Supreme Court of Texas and the Court of Criminal Appeals, this Court finds that the ends of justice are served by this continuance.
2. Magistration of Defendants taken into custody shall continue as it takes place at present, as a critical function of the Courts.
3. All misdemeanor criminal matters *with the exception of jail dockets* scheduled for an in-court appearance before any County Court at Law Judge in Williamson County, between March 19, 2020 and May 11, 2020, including any associated deadlines are CONTINUED and will be reset, subject to the restrictions set out below. This General Order shall be extended beyond May 11, 2020 commensurate with disaster declarations issued by federal, state and local authorities.
 - A. The Court Administrator of each court shall notify Counsel and/or the Defendant in each case of the new Court Date, once set.
 - B. With respect to cases where the Defendant is held in the custody of the Sheriff of Williamson County, Defense Counsel shall contact the Court Administrator.
 - C. The County Courts at Law hearing misdemeanor matters will remain open for emergency hearings and plea and sentencing hearings with preference given to in custody cases.

¹ Misc. Docket No. 20-9042 (Tex.) Misc. Docket No. 20-007 (Tex. Crim. App.), accessed at <https://www.txcourts.gov/media/1446056/209042.pdf>

4. During this period, the parties are strongly encouraged to continue to conference in order to resolve cases, where appropriate.
 - A. With respect to cases where the defendant is held in the custody of the Sheriff of Williamson County, defense counsel and the state are ORDERED to conference (in person, telephonically, or via other means) within 7 days of this order, or as soon as is practicable, to confer regarding: the status of the case, any request concerning bond, discovery and any recommendation to resolve the case.
 - B. Thereafter, defense counsel shall contact their client (in person, telephonically, or via other means) within 3 days to advise their client of the progress of the case.
5. Counsel shall notify the Courts through each Court Administrator of all necessary requests for hearings, or entry of a plea.
 - A. Under no circumstances should a person appear in Court who is experiencing symptoms of any illness.
 - B. The Court will have the capability to conduct hearings in person, telephonically, and electronically.
 - C. Each court has the availability to conduct hearings through a virtual courtroom. Please contact each court for their availability to conduct a virtual/electronic hearing. These platforms include CourtCall and Microsoft Teams.
 - D. Attorneys shall confer regarding preparation of paperwork prior to the setting and must appear on time.

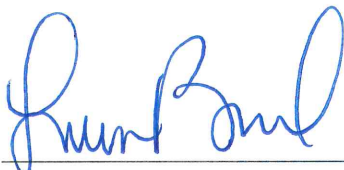
The Court reminds counsel and the public that all necessary steps will be taken to ensure that the County Courts at Law function effectively and efficiently during this disaster period. As this situation continues to evolve, this order may be modified or extended. We take seriously our obligation to balance the interest of justice and the health and safety of our courthouse community and the community at large. All are requested to exercise patience in this unprecedented situation.

This order shall be filed with the Williamson County Clerk and shall be published on each County Court at Law webpage.

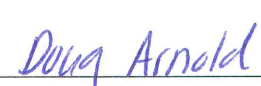
IT IS SO ORDERED THIS 19th DAY OF MARCH 2020.




 Brandy Hallford
 Judge, County Court at Law No. 1



 Laura Barker
 Judge, County Court at Law No. 2



 Doug Arnold *by B.H.*
 Judge, County Court at Law No. 3

FILED
 at 10:57'clock **A M**
MAR 19 2020 *BW*

 County Clerk, Williamson Co., TX

IN THE SUPREME COURT OF TEXAS

Misc. Docket No. 20-9042

IN THE COURT OF CRIMINAL APPEALS OF TEXAS

Misc. Docket No. 20-007

FIRST EMERGENCY ORDER REGARDING THE COVID-19 STATE OF DISASTER

ORDERED that:

1. Governor Abbott has declared a state of disaster in all 254 counties in the State of Texas in response to the imminent threat of the COVID-19 pandemic. This order is issued pursuant to Section 22.0035(b) of the Texas Government Code.

2. Subject only to constitutional limitations, all courts in Texas may in any case, civil or criminal—and must to avoid risk to court staff, parties, attorneys, jurors, and the public—without a participant’s consent:

a. Modify or suspend any and all deadlines and procedures, whether prescribed by statute, rule, or order, for a stated period ending no later than 30 days after the Governor’s state of disaster has been lifted;

b. Allow or require anyone involved in any hearing, deposition, or other proceeding of any kind—including but not limited to a party, attorney, witness, or court reporter, but not including a juror—to participate remotely, such as by teleconferencing, videoconferencing, or other means;

c. Consider as evidence sworn statements made out of court or sworn testimony given remotely, out of court, such as by teleconferencing, videoconferencing, or other means;

d. Conduct proceedings away from the court's usual location, but in the county of venue, and only with reasonable notice and access to the participants and the public;

e. Require every participant in a proceeding to alert the court if the participant has, or knows of another participant who has, COVID-19 or flu-like symptoms, or a fever, cough or sneezing;

f. Take any other reasonable action to avoid exposing court proceedings to the threat of COVID-19.

3. All courts in Texas may extend the statute of limitations in any civil case for a stated period ending no later than 30 days after the Governor's state of disaster has been lifted.

4. This Order is effective as of March 13, 2020, and expires May 8, 2020, unless extended by the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court.

5. The Clerk of the Supreme Court is directed to:

a. post a copy of this Order on www.txcourts.gov;

b. file a copy of this Order with the Secretary of State; and

c. send a copy of this Order to the Governor, the Attorney General, and each member of the Legislature.

6. The State Bar of Texas is directed to take all reasonable steps to notify members of the Texas bar of this Order.

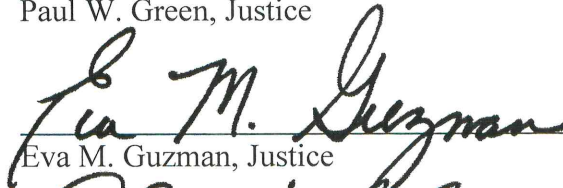
Dated: March 13, 2020



Nathan L. Hecht, Chief Justice



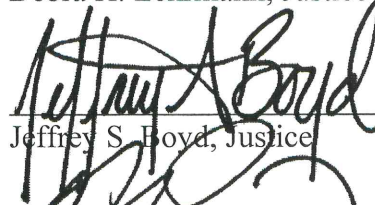
Paul W. Green, Justice



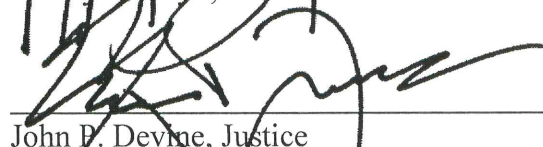
Eva M. Guzman, Justice



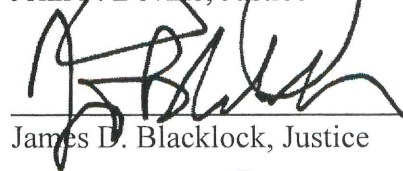
Debra H. Lehrmann, Justice



Jeffrey S. Boyd, Justice



John P. Devine, Justice



James D. Blacklock, Justice




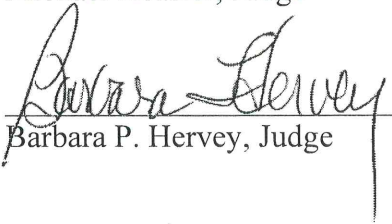
J. Brett Busby, Justice



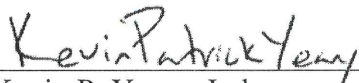
Jane N. Bland, Justice


Sharon Keller, Presiding Judge

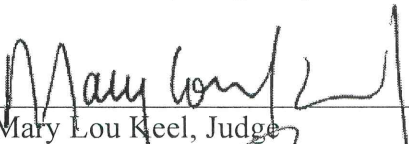

Michael Keasler, Judge



Barbara P. Hervey, Judge

Bert Richardson, Judge


Kevin P. Yeary, Judge


David Newell, Judge


Mary Lou Keel, Judge


Scott Walker, Judge


Michelle M. Slaughter, Judge