

Travis County Criminal Courts' COVID-19 Scheduling Plan

Phase I

In accordance with the Office of Court Administration Guidelines issued on May 4, 2020, the Criminal Courts have taken necessary steps to ensure the health and safety of those entering the Criminal Justice Center (CJC) court building for court proceedings, and to reassure visitors' health and safety so that they feel safe returning to the courthouse. With the introduction of remote proceedings capability through Zoom, most essential and non-essential proceedings, except for jury trials, will be conducted remotely and reasonable notice and access will be provided to the participants and the public. Please see the court proceedings for district and county court cases:

District Court Proceedings on or after June 15, 2020

1. Each District Court will maintain the same virtual court day as currently assigned (this will include out of jail cases set to begin at a time after the jail docket is done; with no more than the same number of cases allowed for out of jail settings as currently allowed for the jail docket). Magistrate Docket will continue to be held two days per week virtually, for both in jail and out of jail cases.
2. Up to four hours will be available for each virtual docket.
3. Defense attorneys will have the same responsibilities of discussion, paperwork preparation, client communication, and coordination with the clerk's office in ensuring the appropriate paperwork is sent to the Court in adequate time for the docket to begin. Attorneys will be expected to attend a Virtual Court Training with CAPDS prior to appearing on a docket.
4. Defense attorneys via CAPDS and/or ACDLA will train and coordinate with their client the method of contact necessary for the virtual court proceeding; access to phone or computer in order to participate in a zoom process; or, any other acceptable method of participation in the virtual court process.
5. District Clerk staff for each court will coordinate the flow of electronic documents for each docket day with 10 in jail cases set and 10 out of jail cases.
6. Several rooms will be set up on the first floor of the Criminal Justice Center with technology including laptops, printers and scanners. Break out rooms will also be available for attorney/client communication. Assistance will be provided by Criminal Court Administration staff. Use of rooms on the first floor will preclude the public and defendants from having to use elevators, and allow the Sheriff's Office to monitor courthouse activity. This will also allow the Sheriff's Office to ensure compliance with COVID-19 guidelines.

7. Out of jail defendants who dispose of their cases will need to report to the CJC Lobby to provide fingerprints and sign documents. A deputy bailiff will escort them to the appropriate location on the first floor. Documents for all proceedings taking place on the first floor will need to be printed out for defendant signatures. Deputy bailiffs will also take fingerprints. A runner from the District Clerk's Office will pick up documents daily.
8. Each Court's assigned deputy bailiff will be available to assist the Court on their assigned virtual docket day. TCSO will use photo ID's and/or Tiburon to access booking photos to appropriately identify the defendant prior to taking fingerprints.
9. Any exceptional circumstances regarding pending cases should be discussed with the court of jurisdiction.

County Court at Law Proceedings on or after June 15, 2020

1. Each County Court at Law Judge will be assigned to preside over one daily BRD/SPRD/FV afternoon docket. Out of jail virtual hearings will be held by the Court during their scheduled day after completion of the in-jail docket. The same number of cases will be allowed for out of jail cases as in jail, and priority should be given to persons ready to dispose of their cases. Each court will handle their assigned out of jail cases.
2. When possible, pleas will be done in absentia. This process is effective and does not require the defendant's participation in the virtual proceeding.
3. Essential hearings such as protective orders, emergency hearings and mental health hearings may be held in-person, if virtual hearings cannot be accommodated. For all in court proceedings, social distancing personal protective equipment and protocols must be observed by all court personnel.
4. Defense attorneys have the same responsibilities of paperwork preparation, communication with clients and coordination with the County Clerk's Office/County Attorney's Office in ensuring the appropriate paperwork is sent to the Court in adequate time for the docket to begin. Attorneys are required to attend an orientation with CAPDS on virtual court sessions prior to appearing on the docket. Training and coordination would be necessary between the defense bar and the District and County Clerk
5. Attorneys via CAPDS and/or ACDLA will train and coordinate with their client the method of contact necessary for the virtual court proceeding; access to phone or computer in order to allow participation in a zoom process; or, any other acceptable method of participation in the virtual court process.
6. The County Clerk is responsible for document management on the in-jail and out of jail dockets.

7. Several rooms will be set up on the first floor of the Criminal Justice Center with technology including laptops, printers and scanners. Assistance will be provided by Criminal Court Administration staff. Use of rooms on the first floor would preclude the public and defendants from having to use elevators, and allow the Sheriff's Office to monitor courthouse activity. This will also allow the Sheriff's Office to ensure compliance with COVID-19 guidelines.
8. Out of jail defendants that dispose of their cases will need to report to the CJC Lobby to provide fingerprints and sign documents, where a deputy bailiff will escort them to the appropriate location on the first floor. Documents for all proceedings taking place on the first floor will need to be printed out for defendant signatures. Deputy bailiffs will also take fingerprints. A runner from the County Clerk's Office will pick up documents and fingerprints daily.
9. Each Court's assigned deputy bailiff will be available to assist the Court on their assigned virtual docket day. TCSO will use photo ID's and/or Tiburon to access booking photos to appropriately identify the defendant prior to taking fingerprints.