

EFFECTIVE 6/23/2021**GUIDELINES FOR PUBLIC ACCESS TO LAW & COURTS BUILDING
&
PLAN TO RETURN OPERATIONS TO FULL CAPACITY, PHASE 4**

1. The Law & Courts Building remains open to the public.
2. Per direction from the Michigan Supreme Court and the State Court Administrative Office effective June 21, 2021, the Cass County Courts, along with all other Courts in the state of Michigan, moved to Phase 4 of the Michigan Supreme Court's Plan to Return Operations to Full Capacity ([see Memo moving all Michigan Courts to Phase 4 dated June 21, 2021](#)).
3. Proceedings in the Cass County Courts will continue to be conducted virtually via Zoom to the maximum extent possible, consistent with Administrative Order No. 2020-6 (extended by AO No. 2020-12) to provide timely case administration in a safe manner (see paragraphs 10-13 below for additional details).
4. In-person court proceedings, including in-person jury trials, shall be allowed at the discretion of the presiding Judge subject to the requirements set forth herein and specifically in paragraphs 7-9 below.
5. Persons entering the Law & Courts Building shall no longer be subject to COVID screening.
6. The wearing of masks shall no longer be required in the Law & Courts Building except as indicated in paragraph 7-9 below due to the downward trend of positive COVID cases in Cass County and other local COVID metrics.
7. Masks shall be worn in the Courtrooms by all persons during all in-person Court proceedings and jury trials, including during voir dire, and face shields shall be worn by testifying witnesses, except as specifically directed otherwise by the presiding Judge who shall have discretion to make decisions and give directives about the wearing of masks and matters related to COVID balancing applicable considerations including public safety, fairness, and due process of law as well as considering special factors which may be present for cases involving persons who are at an increased risk of severe illness from COVID-19.¹

¹ According to the CDC, individuals who are fully vaccinated are not considered to be at risk for severe illness from COVID-19. There is limited information regarding vaccine protection in people who are immunocompromised or suffer from immunocompromising conditions, and thus, these individuals may still be at high risk for severe illness from COVID-19 once vaccinated. Individuals who are not fully vaccinated and who are considered to be at high-risk for severe illness from COVID-19 include: older adults, individuals who are pregnant, and adults of any age with cancer, chronic kidney disease, chronic lung diseases, dementia or other neurological conditions, diabetes (Type 1 and Type 2), Down

8. Masks shall be worn in the area where jury deliberations occur unless jurors are able to social distance by at least 6 feet or more.
9. Any person, including employees or the public, desiring to wear a mask, in any area of the Law & Courts Building, shall be allowed to do so.
10. With regard to Court proceedings being held virtually, via Zoom:
 - a. Probate matters shall continue to be held via Zoom until further notice.
 - b. Circuit Civil matters, with the exception of jury trials, shall continue to be held via Zoom until further notice.
 - c. Child protective proceedings, with the exception of jury trials, shall continue to be held via Zoom until further notice.
 - d. Juvenile delinquency proceedings shall continue to be held via Zoom until further notice.
 - e. Family and Domestic relations trials shall continue to be held via Zoom.
 - f. District Court proceedings other than criminal matters including landlord tenant, civil, and small claims shall continue to be held via Zoom.
 - g. All family and domestic relations hearings scheduled in front of the Friend of the Court Attorney Referee shall continue to be held via Zoom until further notice.
 - h. Problem-Solving/Treatment Court proceedings shall continue to be held via Zoom unless the Court is notified that a participant would substantially benefit from being in person at which time the Court will make a determination as to whether or not that participant's proceeding should be in person rather than via Zoom.
11. Objection to a Zoom hearing: If an attorney or party objects to a Court proceeding occurring via Zoom or wants to make a demand for an in-person Court proceeding or trial, a written objection/demand needs to be filed with the Clerk articulating the specific reasons why proceeding via Zoom is not appropriate after which the assigned Judge or Attorney Referee will make a decision as to whether or not the matter should proceed in person, subject to the approval of the Chief Judge.
12. Zoom hearing reminder: All parties and attorneys are reminded that Zoom hearings are still Court proceedings and require the same demeanor as in person Court hearings— Attorneys shall advise their clients prior to Zoom hearings of this information.
 - a. Parties and attorneys shall be on time.
 - b. Parties and attorneys shall be dressed appropriately.
 - c. Parties and attorneys shall be in an appropriate area (not in the restroom, etc.).
 - d. Parties and attorneys shall not engage in inappropriate activity (eating, etc.).

syndrome, heart conditions, HIV infection, immunocompromised state (weakened immune system), liver disease, overweight and obesity (body mass index [BMI] of 25 kg/m² or higher), sickle cell disease or thalassemia, smoking (current or former), solid organ or blood stem cell transplant, stroke or cerebrovascular disease, and substance use disorders.

- e. Exhibits submitted prior to a Zoom hearing are not “admitted” – the process to admit exhibits at the actual Zoom hearing shall be in compliance with the Michigan Rules of Evidence (MRE).
 - f. Lengthy exhibits, 15 pages and over, need to be submitted in a hard copy for the Judge in addition to submission by email.
13. Hearings already scheduled and noticed out to occur via Zoom shall occur via Zoom unless otherwise notified by the Court.
14. Live Court feeds for virtual hearings shall continue to be available as follows:
 - a. Circuit & Probate Courts: [Cass County Courts 2, Cassopolis, Michigan - YouTube](#)
 - b. District Court: [Cass County Courts 1, Cassopolis, Michigan - YouTube](#)
15. Vulnerable persons may request to attend in-person hearings by Zoom by contacting Court Administrator Carol Montavon Bealor by email at carolb@cassco.org or phone at 269-445-4482.
16. Persons requiring special accommodations in Court proceedings because of disabilities may contact the Court’s ADA Coordinator, Court Administrator Carol Montavon Bealor by email at carolb@cassco.org or phone at 269-445-4482.
17. Filings in all of the Cass County Courts shall continue to be allowed via email in addition to filings in person and by mail.
18. Contact information for questions about Phase 4 with respect to Court proceedings in each Court is provided below:
 - a. Circuit Criminal & Family Court File Room, 269-445-4416, x3120, ccfileroom@cassco.org
 - b. District Court File Room, 269-445-4424, fourthdc@cassco.org
 - c. Juvenile Court, 269-445-4444, x3233, clairec@cassco.org
 - d. Friend of the Court, 269-445-4436, foc@cassco.org
 - e. Probate Court, 269-445-4454, x 3282, kellej@cassco.org
 - f. Judge Dobrich’s office, 269-445-4452, option 1, valeriec@cassco.org
 - g. Judge Herman’s office, 269-445-4412, option 1, julias@cassco.org
 - h. Judge Rentfrow’s office, 269-445-4424, x3212, audras@cassco.org
 - i. ADA Coordinator/Language Access Coordinator/Other Court Administration Issues, 269-445-4482, carolb@cassco.org
19. Updates, Court Case lookup, forms, and other information may be found on the Courts’ website at: <https://casscourtsmi.org>.

20. The Chief Judge of the Cass County Courts has full discretion to protect Court staff and Court users, consistent with local health guidance and MIOSHA guidelines such that the Chief Judge shall remain vigilant and adopt additional mitigation measures as necessary to keep members of the public, litigants, and judiciary personnel safe.
21. Pursuant to MCR 8.110(C), members of the public or employees who are unable to adhere to mitigation procedures established by the Cass County Courts may be asked to leave the Law & Courts Building. Any member of the public who is asked to leave the Law & Courts Building shall be offered an opportunity to conduct court business virtually, attend court proceedings virtually, file documents in an alternative manner, or confer with court administration to determine alternate arrangements for accessing the court.
22. Upon a local resurgence of COVID-19 cases, the Cass County Courts may be required to implement additional COVID-19 mitigation measures.
23. Updates from the State Court Administrative Office and the Michigan Supreme Court can be found on their website at: <https://courts.michigan.gov/News-Events/covid19-resources/Pages/RTFC.aspx>

Effective 6/23/21

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Susan L. Dobrich". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underneath the name.

Susan L. Dobrich, Chief Judge, Cass County Courts