

Cass County Courts



CASS COUNTY COURTS RESTART JURY TRIALS AND REOPEN LAW & COURTS BUILDING

Cassopolis, Michigan, June 21, 2021 –Jury trials restarted June 8, 2021, in the Cass County Courts. The first two felony jury trials since COVID-19 restrictions were put into place occurred in the 43rd Circuit Court with Judge Mark A. Herman presiding during the weeks of June 8th and June 15th. Cass County’s IT Department facilitated the Cass Courts leveraging technology to connect all three Courtrooms so that jurors could be spread out in all three Courtrooms to safely conduct voir dire (jury selection). Court staff also assisted with doing a COVID-19 screen of jurors before they entered the building and went through Security. Many Court staff, Cass County Clerk’s office staff, and other County officials and employees came together to provide for the safe restarting of jury trials. Restarting of jury trials is important since criminal defendants have a constitutional right to an in-person jury trial. While jury trials could not be held, cases became backlogged.

June 1, 2021, the Law & Courts Building in Cassopolis, Michigan, which houses the Cass County Courts and the Cass County Prosecutor’s Office, reopened to the public after months of restricted access due to COVID-19. The Cass County Courts moved to Phase 3 effective June 7, 2021 pursuant to the State Court Administrative Office’s (SCAO’s) Return to Full Capacity Guide found at: <https://courts.michigan.gov/News-Events/covid19-resources/Documents/ReturntoFullCapacityGuide.pdf>). Courts take their guidance on COVID-19 restrictions and requirements from the Michigan Supreme Court on topics such as masks, social distancing, public access, as well as trial administration.

Cass County Courts’ Chief Judge Susan L. Dobrich notes, “Throughout the pandemic, the Cass County Courts remained agile moving from in-person proceedings to Zoom proceedings; moving from mostly in-person filings of pleadings to mostly pleadings filed by email. Our Court staff, the Cass County Clerk’s Office, and Security have continued to adapt and provide the public with excellent customer service. We have kept our Court cases moving and processed in a timely manner with the exception of jury trials which could not be held as a result of restrictions put in place by the Michigan Supreme Court. The Courts have relied on a robust website to provide the public with information that was previously provided more in-person. In addition, Michigan is fortunate to have Michigan Legal Help, one of the best legal websites in the country for persons going to Court without a lawyer.”

Pursuant to the Phase 3 requirements, all three Cass County Courts will continue to conduct the majority of their proceedings virtually via Zoom, to provide timely case administration in a safe manner. The public will not be admitted to Court hearings at this time because of social distancing requirements in Phase 3. However, Court proceedings will continue to be live streamed on the Courts’ YouTube channels to continue providing public access.