

24th Judicial District Court

Parish of Jefferson

State of Louisiana

ORDER 2020 – 015

JURY TRIALS

Acting in accordance with Louisiana Constitution Article V, Section 1; pursuant to LSA RS. 1:55; due to the COVID-19 emergency as detailed in Governor John Bel Edwards's Declarations of Public Health Emergency, Jefferson Parish President Cynthia Lee Sheng's Declaration of State of Emergency, and the emergency orders of the Louisiana Supreme Court, and in accordance with the inherent powers of this court, and in consideration of ongoing public health recommendations to reduce the risk of exposure to the virus and slowing the spread of the disease while balancing the need to protect the constitutional rights and public safety of the citizens of the state by maintaining access to Louisiana courts, the Chief Judge, acting on behalf of the Judges of the 24th Judicial District Court, respecting jury trials **HEREBY ORDERS THAT:**

1.

Criminal and civil jury trials may recommence Monday, **September 14, 2020.**

2.

Jury selection should proceed in the Honorable Henry G. Sullivan Jury Assembly Room with one venire of 50 prospective jurors each day, Monday through Thursday only. Jury selection may also proceed in the Council Chambers of the General Government Building or in a division courtroom. Social distancing of not less than 6 feet should be observed at all times.

3.

Jury trials scheduled in a division shall be placed on the 24th JDC online jury calendar for prioritization. Determination as to which trial will proceed on any given date shall be made 30 days prior to the scheduled trial date in accordance with the prioritization procedure established by the judges en banc. The first case on the prioritization schedule shall proceed with voir dire on the Monday of the trial week. The second case on the prioritization schedule should proceed on the day following completion of voir dire in the first trial. For example, if jury selection in the first case is completed on Monday, voir dire in the second case should proceed on Tuesday. In the event the first case is resolved, the second case on the prioritization schedule should be

notified and should proceed on the Monday of the trial week. In that instance, the third case on the prioritization schedule should proceed on the day following completion of voir dire in the second case.

4.

Social distancing of not less than 6 feet should be observed at all times. Prospective jurors shall be required to wear masks. Once selected, jurors shall be provided face shields to wear during trial but may continue to wear facial coverings.

5.

Trials may be conducted in the division courtrooms in the Thomas F. Donelon Building, observing recommended and appropriate social distancing. Jurors shall be seated in the jury box, gallery and other locations around the courtroom best situated to provide a clear view of the witness stand, podium and bench.

Trials may also be conducted in Council Chambers of the General Government Building, in any Second Parish Court courtroom, or the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals Courtroom A. Deliberations may take place in the courtroom or other location approved by the judge where social distancing can be observed. Meals shall be brought in for jurors. In addition to the courtroom, the en banc room on the 2nd floor and attorney lounge on the 5th floor in the Thomas F. Donelon Building are available for use by the jurors during lunch breaks and recesses of the court.

6.

Witnesses may be instructed by the judge to remove masks or other facial covering only if the witness stand is shielded by plexi-glass and social distancing is observed. Attorneys should utilize the document camera, laptops, and other technology whenever possible.

7.

The courtroom shall be limited to the jurors, counsel of record, the defendant(s) in criminal cases, one party representative of each plaintiff and defendant in civil cases, one witness, and judge's staff consisting of the law clerk, court reporter, minute clerk and court security.

Witnesses shall be required to wait in the attorney/client rooms adjacent to the courtroom immediately prior to being called to testify. Otherwise, witnesses may wait in the atrium of the Thomas F. Donelon Building. In other approved venues, witnesses shall wait in areas

preapproved by the Court. SinePro should be utilized to the fullest extent possible to ensure social distancing and capacity restrictions are observed.

8.

Public access to trials shall be available through Zoom in accordance with local rule, in another courtroom or designated location in the Thomas F. Donelon Building.

9.

Jury summons shall include the instruction that prospective jurors experiencing symptoms or who have tested positive for Covid-19 within the past 14 days and those with exposure who are required to quarantine under Center for Disease Control guidelines, shall **not** report to the Thomas F. Donelon Building, but are to contact the jury room for a new date.

10.

During trial, any jurors, witnesses, attorneys or parties experiencing symptoms, testing positive or with exposure requiring quarantine under Center for Disease Control guidelines shall not report to court but are ordered to contact the division for further instructions.

11.

This Order is effective at 8:00 a.m. on Thursday, **October 15, 2020** and will remain in effect until further notice. All provisions of this Court's prior orders shall remain in place except as expressly modified herein. Adjustments to this Order, if necessary, will be posted on the Court's website (www.courtonline.us or www.24jdc.us), the Louisiana Supreme Court website (www.lasc.org), and in the news media.

Gretna, Louisiana this 15th day of October, 2020.

For the 24th Judicial District Court


Ellen Shirer Kovach
Chief Judge