



PRESS RELEASE

FROM: Eleventh Judicial Circuit Court
Chief Judge Mark Fellheimer
Bloomington, IL 61701

Date of Release: November 17, 2020
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

11th Judicial Circuit Courthouses Remain Open with Continued Precautions

Chief Judge Mark A. Fellheimer announced reinforced precautions are in place for court operations in the 11th Judicial Circuit that includes McLean, Livingston, Ford, Woodford and Logan counties to allow the courts to safely remain open during the recent surge in Covid-19 cases.

From the middle of March, 2020 until June 1, 11th Circuit Courts were open only for emergency matters. On June 1st, Courts began hearing both emergency and non-emergency matters with many courtrooms returning with remote hearings via Zoom. Those remote hearings continue until today. Other Judges continue the migration to remote hearings for cases conducive to being conducted remotely such as status hearings, temporary relief hearings and the like; however, not all cases can be conducted remotely.

In McLean County, approximately one-half of the courtrooms are now being conducted remotely for a wide variety of matters to avoid unnecessary in-person interactions to allow Courts to still conduct court business during these unprecedented times. This effort has let to a drastic reduction in courthouse populations so that people are able to social distance when in the courthouses and to avoid bottlenecks that could put individuals at risk.

In-person hearings will continue to be held on a limited basis with the following precautions remaining in effect as were instituted previously:

1. Case limits per hour for each courtroom to limit the number of persons in the courthouses.
2. All those that enter the Courthouses must wear a face-covering and maintain social distancing.
3. Entry is denied for anyone that is exhibiting Covid-19 like symptoms with screening procedures at the courthouse entrances.
4. The reallocation of courtrooms to eliminate congregations of people in the courthouses.
5. Elimination of lines for the Circuit Clerk's Office to eliminate congregations of people in the hallways.

6. Litigants are strongly discouraged from bringing others with them to the courthouse.

Additional steps now instituted immediately are as follows:

1. Jury trials have been halted for the month of November, 2020. A decision regarding December, 2020 jury trials will be made soon.
2. Expansion of remote hearings when possible.

Arrangements have been made for cases to be continued in certain circumstances or to be held remotely. Therefore, for litigants that have an attorney, they are strongly encouraged to contact their lawyer before coming to court to see if their case can be held remotely or if it has been continued. Attorneys and self-represented litigants are urged to contact the McLean County Circuit Clerk's Office and/or the Judge's Office assigned to their case to inquire if their case can be heard remotely or be continued. The contact information can be obtained on the McLean County Circuit Clerk's website.

Please do not arrive more than 15 minutes prior to your scheduled court time if you have an in-person hearing. All in-person hearings are conducted with participants wearing face coverings and maintaining social distancing.

Throughout the pandemic, 11th Circuit Courts have, and will continue to, operate by providing essential services to the public while adhering to recommended best health practices in reducing the spread of the coronavirus when conducting court business.

Please review Administrative Order #2020-19 "Resumption of Court Operations" entered May 26, 2020 that is attached hereto and remains in full, force and effect.

Please contact Trial Court Administrator Will Scanlon at: william.scanlon@mcleancountyil.gov for any questions or concerns regarding these policies.

**ELEVENTH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT COURT
(FORD, LIVINGSTON, LOGAN, McLEAN AND WOODFORD COUNTIES)**

**ADMINISTRATIVE ORDER 2020 – 19
RESUMPTION OF COURT OPERATIONS—COVID-19**

Effective June 1, 2020 and until further Order of the Court

WHEREAS, the 11th Judicial Circuit Court of Illinois, by way of Chief Judge Mark A. Fellheimer, entered pandemic-related *Administrative Orders* in response to the Covid-19 pandemic with the reasons and rationale set forth within those Orders that caused the Courts to modify its operations; and

WHEREAS, the Illinois Supreme Court also entered Covid-19 pandemic-related Orders in *In re: Illinois Courts Response to COVID-19 Emergency, M.R. 30370*, the latest on May 20, 2020 authorizing each circuit court to return to hearing court matters on June 1, 2020, whether in person or remotely, according to a schedule to be adopted for each county by the Chief Judge in each circuit; and

WHEREAS, the Supreme Court, in its May 20, 2020 Order, directed Chief Judges to consider many factors and to consider the *Supreme Court Guidelines for Resuming Illinois Judicial Branch Operations During Covid-19 Pandemic* (“Guidelines”) for resuming court operations. Chief Judge Fellheimer, in consultation with the McLean County Presiding Judges and the Resident Circuit Judges of Ford, Livingston, Logan, and Woodford counties, has considered those factors and the Guidelines in determining the schedule for each county within the 11th Judicial Circuit; and

THEREFORE, Chief Judge Fellheimer hereby suspends 11th Circuit Administrative Order 2020-06 and all of its Supplements effective June 1, 2020; and pursuant to the authority granted by the Supreme Court, hereby orders, authorizes and directs that all 11th Judicial Circuit courts begin hearing all matters, whether in person or remotely, effective June 1, 2020 with the provisions and conditions set forth below:

1. **Policies and Procedures in Ford, Livingston, Logan and Woodford counties.** In consultation with, and approval from, the Chief Judge of the 11th Judicial Circuit, consistent with the Supreme Court Order, each of the Resident Circuit Judges of Ford, Livingston, Logan and Woodford County are each authorized and directed to enact policies and procedures effective deemed necessary to resume court operations to effectuate the intent and terms of this Order and the corresponding Supreme Court Order on which it is based. The policies and procedures shall be tailored to each individual County’s needs in consideration of available resources and physical limitations.
2. **Policies and procedures in McLean County.** In consultation with, and approval from, the Chief Judge of the 11th Judicial Circuit, consistent with the Supreme Court Order, the Presiding Judges of McLean County, as well as the Judges of the Juvenile Delinquency and Juvenile Abuse and Neglect court, are each authorized and directed to enact policies and procedures deemed necessary to resume court operations to effectuate the intent and terms of this Order and the corresponding Supreme Court Order on which it is based. The policies and procedures shall be tailored to each individual division’s

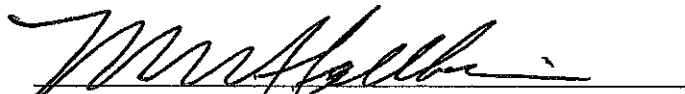
needs in consideration of available resources and physical limitations, while considering the overall needs of all divisions.

3. **Remote/Virtual/Video Hearings.** The Court will continue with an increased reliance on, virtual proceedings and hearings. It is within each Judge's discretion to conduct remote hearings as well as selecting the audio or video platform to be used. The 11th Circuit Guidelines for Remote Courtroom Proceedings should be considered when conducting such proceedings and the parties should familiarize themselves with the technology and the guidelines.
4. **Reduced Call Size.** In order to reduce the number of people in the building(s), the Court will, to the extent possible, reduce the number of cases slotted for each court call. This will in many instances require staggered court times. Attorneys are reminded that it is essential that they appear at the designated time in order to make this process work.
5. **Check case status before coming to court.** It is necessary that court dates and times for proceedings be adjusted in order to maintain reduced capacity in the courtrooms and in the building. Although, most parties and attorneys have received new notices of their rescheduled court dates, all parties and attorneys should check with their Circuit Clerk's website for case status and hearing times before coming to the courthouse. Parties should arrive no more than 10 minutes prior to their scheduled court event.
6. **Represented parties excused in some instances.** Unless ordered by the judge or directed by their attorney, parties in civil and family cases are strongly encouraged not to attend routine court hearings. Attorneys should advise their clients not to attend court unless their attendance is strictly necessary given the nature of the hearing at issue.
7. **Bench Warrants and Defaults.** Judges may refrain, in appropriate circumstances, from the issuance of bench warrants or the entry of default judgments. Individual judges may, based on the nature of the hearing, the case, and their call, be more flexible in excusing the appearance of a party or defendant.
8. **Social Distancing/Additional Persons Discouraged.** Litigants are strongly discouraged from bringing any other person with them to the courthouse. Social distancing results in reduced capacities in the courtrooms and the building. Due to space constraints, it is strongly suggested and encouraged that only necessary parties shall attend court proceedings. Subject to, and while remaining within, constitutional limitations, future policies of admission to courthouses may be made to control courthouse populations.
9. **Court Access/Entrances.** Access to all 11th Judicial Circuit Courthouses are under the control of the Sheriffs of each of the five counties that comprise the 11th Circuit. Security requires all persons entering the building to pass through a magnetometer with personal property inspected by X-ray and additional screening by deputies when warranted. In order to efficiently enter the building patrons should bring only necessary identification and documents for court proceedings. Bags, backpacks, purses and the like should not be brought for entry into the judicial center. Likewise, the wearing of jewelry, watches, shoes containing metal, or any metal on your person will slow entry and should be avoided.

10. **Face-Coverings.** All persons entering a courthouse within the 11th Judicial Circuit shall wear a face-covering, covering their nose and mouth consistent with the Centers for Disease Control guidelines while in the courthouse and maintain six (6) feet of social distancing. Court staff may remove their face covering or mask in their office or workspace when not in contact with others. Litigants, attorneys or others may remove their face covering or mask when directed to do so by the judge presiding. Judges shall exercise their discretion whether to wear a face covering or mask while conducting court proceedings. Each Sheriff's Department may have different policies, depending on supplies, of providing face-coverings. Therefore, all persons must bring their own face-covering. Questions regarding face-covering should be directed to your local Sheriff Department.
11. **Signage and restricted entry for some persons.** Everyone is strongly encouraged to read all signs and follow all instructions when entering an 11th Circuit Courthouse for general precautions. At the time of entry, persons may be asked health-related screening questions. In addition, at a minimum, the following persons will not be allowed to enter an 11th Circuit Courthouse:
 - a. Anyone exhibiting flu-like symptoms (i.e., cough, chills, fever, shortness of breath);
 - b. Have been directed to quarantine, isolate or self-monitor at home for Covid-19 by any medical provider and are still under said directive.
 - c. If you have had contact with a person that has tested positive for Covid-19 and are awaiting your Covid-19 test result.
12. **Weddings.** Weddings may proceed in the 11th Judicial Circuit on a county by county basis on terms and conditions determined by the individual Resident Circuit Judges of Ford, Livingston, Logan and Woodford Counties and by the Chief Judge for McLean County to allow proper social distancing and other protections and precautions for weddings to take place with no more than the couple getting married and two witnesses/guests.
13. **Hand sanitizer and pens.** Everyone is strongly encouraged to bring their own hand sanitizer and pen in the event supplies become limited.
14. This Order is subject to future modifications and extensions as may be warranted.

This Order is effective June 1, 2020 until further Order of Court.

Entered this 26th day of May, 2020.


Mark A. Fellheimer, Chief Judge
Eleventh Judicial Circuit