



DENTON COUNTY PROBATE COURT

Judge Bonnie Robison
David W. Jahn, Associate Judge

1450 E. McKinney, Suite 2412
Denton, Texas 76209-4524

Phone 940-349-2140
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March 16, 2020

Dear Counselors:

Attached please find a Joint Statement Regarding Health and Safety Concerns and Disaster Declaration, which was promulgated by Denton County on Friday, March 13, 2020. Although the Joint Statement requires the guidelines to apply from March 16, 2020 through April 1, 2020, the guidelines may be extended through the end of April, 2020, or as directed by the Denton County Judge, Andy Eads. As of today, all non-essential court proceedings are cancelled through April 1, 2020. The Probate Court is automatically extending for 90 days all compliance hearings set from March 16, 2020 through April 1, 2020. In the event Denton County extends the guidelines past April 1, 2020, the Probate Court will continue to cancel hearings and extend compliance settings accordingly.

All non-essential court proceedings are to be rescheduled and only "essential matters" will proceed. For the Denton County Probate Court, paragraph 3-D of the Joint Statement defines essential matters as Mental Health; Temporary Restraining Orders; Temporary Injunctions; and Chapter 48 Removal hearings. Within those categories temporary guardianships and temporary probate administrations would be included. However, what constitutes an essential matter will be assessed first by Byron Brown (byron.brown@dentoncounty.com) or Nydia Godinez (nydia.godinez@dentoncounty.com), with the final decision being made by Judge Robison or Judge Jahn on which essential matters receive a setting.

The Probate Court is working with Denton County Technology Services to use Skype and/or Zoom to conduct essential hearings, including for the Mental Health Court. In the spirit of the guidelines, the Probate Court will use its best efforts to minimize the number of persons who actually must appear in person in court.

If you are feeling ill or have come in contact with the Coronavirus, please stay home. The Probate Court would like to keep everyone as safe as possible.

Respectfully,

Judge Bonnie Robison



Judge Kimberly McCary, County Court at Law No. 1
Judge Robert Ramirez, County Court at Law No. 2
Judge Jim E. Crouch, County Criminal Court No. 1
Judge Susan Piel, County Criminal Court No. 2

Judge Forrest Beadle, County Criminal Court No. 3
Judge Chance Oliver, County Criminal Court No. 4
Judge Coby Waddill, County Criminal Court No. 5
Judge Bonnie Robison, Denton County Probate Court

DENTON COUNTY COURTS AT LAW

JOINT STATEMENT REGARDING HEALTH AND SAFETY CONCERNS

In consultation with the Texas Department of State Health Services, the Texas Supreme Court, the Texas Court of Criminal Appeals, the Denton County Courts at Law are doing their part to address the potential outbreak of the COVID-19 (Novel Coronavirus) in the following manner.

These guidelines are effective from March 16, 2020, until April 1, 2020.

1. If a Person is Sick

Everyone who is sick or who thinks they have been exposed to COVID-19 should contact the court by phone or email to reschedule their hearings or trials.

2. Non-Essential Court Matters are Rescheduled

Unless a case is designated below as an Essential Court Matter, all in-person hearings and trials will be rescheduled during the time this order is in effect. Essential Court Matters will proceed. You must contact each court regarding each setting.

3. Essential Court Matters Defined

- a. Any suits or hearings with jurisdictional deadlines
- b. Any time-sensitive hearing required to be heard by an appellate court.
- c. Juvenile Detention Hearings
- d. Probate Court:
 - i. Mental Health Docket
 - ii. Temporary Restraining Orders hearings
 - iii. Temporary Injunction Hearings
 - iv. Texas Health & Safety Code Chapter 48, Removal Hearings.

- e. Criminal Cases:
 - i. Jury trials and dispositive hearings for incarcerated defendants
 - ii. Writs of habeas corpus
 - iii. Any dispositive hearing where a defendant has requested a speedy trial or speedy disposition
 - iv. Texas Code of Criminal Procedure Article 17 bond hearings
 - v. Any time-sensitive hearing required to be conducted by an Appellate Court
 - vi. Defendants who are free on bail and represented by counsel need not appear for any plea setting in person, but the defendant's lawyer is required to email pass slips to the court with the defendant's signature by noon on the following day.
- f. Magistrate Court:
 - i. Magistrations
 - ii. Emergency protective orders
 - iii. Mental health processes
- g. Civil Court: Temporary restraining orders
- h. Any other matters that may be designated by a court at its discretion.

4. No Jury Trials Except in Essential Court Matters

The county courts will not be calling any jury trials, except for Essential Court Matters, during the time this order is in effect.

5. Uncontested Matters by Submission Only

Beginning immediately, no uncontested matters will be heard. All agreed orders and matters that can be heard by submission should be electronically filed.

6. Electronic Appearances

Courts are developing a plan for electronic appearances which will be rolled out as soon as possible. Many courts already use CourtCall – contact your court for further information.

7. Contact the Courts

Look on your court's website for up-to-date contact information. If you have any questions, please email the court coordinator.

County Court at Law No. 1 (Sitting as Juvenile Court):

<https://dentoncounty.gov/Departments/County-Courts/County-Court-at-Law-1>

County Court at Law No. 2:

<https://dentoncounty.gov/Departments/County-Courts/County-Court-at-Law-2>

Probate Court:

<https://dentoncounty.gov/Departments/County-Courts/Probate-Court>

Magistrate Court:

<https://dentoncounty.gov/Departments/County-Courts/Magistrate-Court>

County Criminal Court No. 1:

<https://dentoncounty.gov/Departments/County-Courts/County-Criminal-Court1>

County Criminal Court No. 2:

<https://dentoncounty.gov/Departments/County-Courts/County-Criminal-Court2>

County Criminal Court No. 3:

<https://dentoncounty.gov/Departments/County-Courts/County-Criminal-Court3>

County Criminal Court No. 4:

<https://dentoncounty.gov/Departments/County-Courts/County-Criminal-Court4>

County Criminal Court No. 5

<https://dentoncounty.gov/Departments/County-Courts/County-Criminal-Court5>

County Court Administration:

<https://dentoncounty.gov/Departments/County-Courts/County-Court-Administration>

SIGNED on 3/13/2020

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Coby Waddill', written over a horizontal line.

By Honorable Coby Waddill
County Criminal Court No. 5
Local Administrative Judge



DENTON COUNTY

**Executive Order AE-20-03
March 13, 2020**

**DISASTER DECLARATION
AND
EXECUTIVE ORDER OF THE DENTON COUNTY JUDGE
Andy Eads**

WHEREAS, beginning in December 2019, a novel coronavirus, now designated SARS-CoV2 which causes the disease COVID-19, has been declared a global pandemic by the World Health Organization; and

WHEREAS, symptoms of COVID-19 can range from mild to severe illness and cause further complications including death; and

WHEREAS, the COVID-19 virus mainly spreads between people who are in close contact with one another through respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes; and

WHEREAS, Denton County is taking extraordinary measures to prevent the spread of this potentially devastating disease in our communities; and

WHEREAS, the Denton County Department of Emergency Services and the Denton County Department of Public Health has established emergency protective measures, mitigation procedures and emergency response plans for this type of health emergency; and

WHEREAS, this International Health Emergency has created a serious health emergency requiring the issuance of a Disaster Declaration and the implementation of the Denton County Emergency Operations Plan, the Denton County Pandemic Influenza Preparedness Plan, and associated Emergency Policies; and

WHEREAS, said state of disaster requires that certain emergency protective measures be taken pursuant to the Texas Disaster Act of 1975 relating to Emergency Management and Public Health, pursuant to Texas Government Code Chapter 418; and

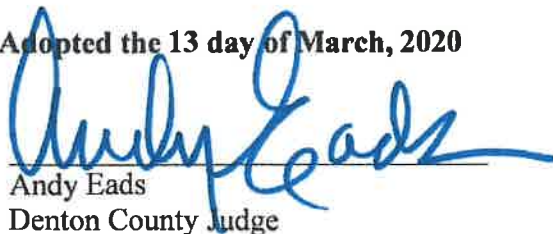
NOW, THEREFORE, this Disaster Declaration and the following Executive Order shall take effect immediately upon issuance of this order:

1. A local state of disaster is hereby declared for Denton County, pursuant to §418.108(a) of the Texas Government Code.
2. The state of disaster shall continue for a period of not more than seven days from the date of this declaration unless continued or renewed by the Denton County Commissioners Court, pursuant to §418.018(b) of the Government Code.
3. This declaration of a local state of disaster shall be given prompt and general publicity and shall be filed promptly with the County Clerk, pursuant to §418.018(b) of the Government Code.
4. This declaration of a local state of disaster activates the Denton County Emergency Operations Plan, pursuant to §418.018(b) of the Government Code.
5. This Declaration shall take effect immediately from and after its issuance.
6. Recommendations to reduce the spread of infections, such as Coronavirus (COVID-19), include:
 - Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
 - Stay home when you are sick.
 - Cover your mouth and nose to reduce the spread of germs.
 - Wash hands thoroughly and often.
 - Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth.
7. Recommend the postponement or cancellation of all large gatherings over 250 people.

In accordance with Texas Government Code 418.173, a person who knowingly or intentionally violates this order commits an offense, punishable by a fine up to \$1000.00 or confinement in jail for a term that does not exceed 180 days.

The purpose of this order is for emergency protective measures, mitigation procedures and response plans to this public health emergency;

Adopted the 13 day of March, 2020



Andy Eads
Denton County Judge



Juli Luke
County Clerk



Date