
ORDER REGARDING EMERGENCY TEMPORARY MEASURES

The Columbia County Circuit Court is issuing the orders described below to provide procedures and directions for proceedings and essential functions in the court during the next several weeks. **The guidelines are emergency and temporary measures and ONLY effective from March 17, 2020 until May 15, 2020, or upon further order of the Court.**

The Columbia County Courthouse remains open and any change in status will be noticed on the Columbia County website at www.co.columbia.wi.us and the Wisconsin Court System website, www.wicourts.gov.

The World Health Organization declared a global pandemic of COVID-19 due to widespread human infection worldwide. We are monitoring this situation and are committed to open access to our courts and service to the public, and to protect the health and safety of the litigants, judges, court staff and security, attorneys, jurors, other participants in court proceedings, and all other persons in the court facilities.

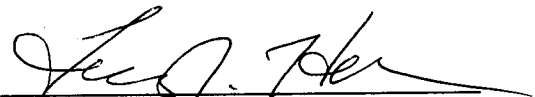
These orders are in place to ensure the continuous performance of the Court's essential functions and operations and yet seek to mitigate the risk to which our employees, lawyers, litigants, and jurors will be exposed. These guidelines incorporate use of videoconferencing and teleconferencing to minimize contact, when appropriate; follow social distancing practices; and temporarily suspend some non-essential court functions.


The Columbia County Circuit Court **HEREBY ORDERS:**

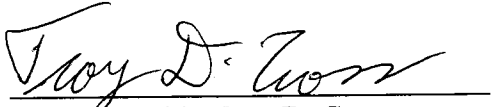
1. There shall be no jury trials held on or before May 15, 2020. The Columbia County Circuit Courts hereby find that the COVID-19 pandemic requires a continuance in any criminal case where a statutory speedy trial demand would otherwise require a jury trial before May 15, 2020. It is clear that the public health risk associated with large gatherings of people outweigh the public and defendant's interest in a speedy trial. Each individual branch may make more specific findings in the cases to which this finding might apply.
2. Any hearing that can be done by phone will proceed as scheduled by phone. **Any in-person hearing will require the specific approval of the assigned judicial officer.**
3. Counsel shall communicate with the Court, via the branch's judicial assistant, through telephonic or electronic means.
4. All temporary order hearings before the Court Commissioner shall be completed via telephone.
5. Any small claims hearings before the Court Commissioner shall be completed via telephone.
6. All informal probate matters that can be completed via telephone may proceed; otherwise, the matter shall be scheduled for an informal hearing after May 15, 2020.
7. Criminal Returns (Monday - Friday from 9:00 – 11:00 a.m.) are suspended. Any scheduled cases will be adjourned to a date and time after May 15, 2020. Any newly filed cases will be scheduled for a date and time after May 15, 2020. Counsel are encouraged to contact the Court if matters are resolved to determine when and if telephonic or other means can be used for the entry of a plea.

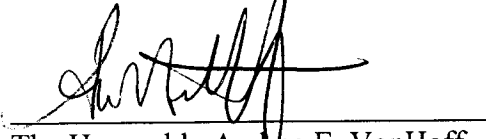
8. Essential court activities will continue as scheduled and as required by law including:
 - a. Bail hearings for arrested individuals charged with crimes
 - b. Time limit sensitive hearings in juvenile cases
 - c. Emergency detention hearings
 - d. Restraining order hearings
 - e. Guardianship and protective placement hearings
 - f. Eviction hearings
 - g. Preliminary hearings without time limit waivers
 - h. Any other time sensitive hearings required by law.
9. Any criminal cases with defendants who are in custody will be handled on a case-by-case basis.
10. No inmate transports will occur until after May 15, 2020. Any existing criminal transport orders are cancelled. A waiver of personal appearance will be accepted.
11. Non-essential court activities may continue only as approved by the responsible court official. The responsible court official shall give priority to scheduling non-essential court activities that are time sensitive, are deemed urgent by the responsible court official or implicate a possible liberty interest. **No in-person non-essential court activity shall proceed without the approval of the responsible court official.**
12. Effective March 23, 2020, all traffic, ordinance, and DNR intake dates are suspended, as are all in person initial appearances in criminal cases. Any previously filed citations will be adjourned to a date and time beyond May 15, 2020.
13. The procedure for handling juvenile cases will be addressed on a case-by-case basis by the Juvenile Court.

Dated: March 17, 2020


The Honorable Todd J. Hepler
Circuit Court, Branch I


The Honorable W. Andrew Voigt
Circuit Court, Branch II


The Honorable Troy D. Cross
Circuit Court, Branch III


The Honorable Andrea E. VonHoff
Court Commissioner