

**IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE EASTERN DISTRICT OF TEXAS
BEAUMONT DIVISION**

DIVISIONAL STANDING ORDER NO. 2021-7

The Jack Brooks United States Courthouse in Beaumont, Texas (the Courthouse) is a public building in which the public is welcomed. Unfortunately, because of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, operations at the Courthouse have been reduced. Many hearings have been conducted by phone or video conference, and physical access to the Courthouse has been limited. In addition, several jury trials have been postponed. This has the potential to conflict with the constitutional right to a trial by jury. Congress has expressed its clear intent that litigants must be afforded a prompt resolution of disputes, consistent with the requirements of the Constitution and statutory law. In criminal cases, while limited exceptions are permitted, the Speedy Trial Act sets deadlines for, and requires that priority be given to, providing a prompt and fair trial for each defendant charged with a criminal offense. Another important consideration is, with very limited exceptions such as cases involving minors, protection of the right of public access to court proceedings, especially criminal trials.

This court and its staff have been engaged in what is known as “Recovery Planning,” so that the court may operate safely. The court has reviewed guidance from the Administrative Office of the United States Courts (AO), in particular the “Updated Guidance Regarding Judiciary Response to COVID-19” (5/20/2021), “Health Screening, Use of Masks/Face Coverings, Testing, and General Health Questions” (3/4/2021), “COVID-19 Guidance: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Answers to Courts’ COVID-19 Questions” (7/17/2020), the “Federal Judiciary COVID-19 Recovery Guidelines” (5/7/2020), the “COVID-19 Judiciary Recovery Planning Checklist” (5/7/2020), and AO posts such as “Coronavirus (COVID-19) Guidance: Jury Duty FAQs.” The court has also reviewed the Executive Order on Protecting the Federal Workforce and Requiring Mask Wearing (1/21/2021), as well as recommendations issued by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) concerning precautions to be taken, as well as statistical data concerning COVID-19 cases in the Beaumont Division and in Jefferson County, where the Courthouse is located.

The court has carefully considered all of these factors in balancing the rights of criminal defendants to a speedy and fair trial by jury, the rights of civil litigants to a prompt and fair resolution of disputes, the right of the public to “open courts,” and the safety of Courthouse staff, jurors, witnesses, parties, observers, and counsel. The court has determined that trials and contested hearings may continue to be held on a limited and controlled basis in the Courthouse consistent with the court’s prior Divisional Standing Orders No. 2020-1, 2020-2, 2020-3, 2020-4, 2020-5, 2020-6, 2020-7, 2020-9, 2021-1, 2021-2, 2021-3, 2021-4, 2021-5, and 2021-6.

It is therefore **ORDERED**, effective **August 1, 2021**, at 12:01 a.m., that absent a specific order from this court, for the protection of Courthouse staff, litigants, attorneys, and observers, that upon entry into the Courthouse, all persons must comply with the following requirements:

- a. For individuals who are fully vaccinated for COVID-19¹, the wearing of an appropriate face mask or covering while inside the Courthouse is optional. However, for those who are not fully vaccinated, the wearing of an appropriate face mask or covering while inside the Courthouse is required, unless excused from this requirement by the judge. Witnesses shall testify unmasked, but only while behind the plexiglass shield at the witness stand. Persons entering the Courthouse, other than jurors, must supply their own face mask or covering;
- b. Each person must maintain appropriate distancing from others in the Courthouse, to include sitting at the location assigned by a member of the court staff. Each person must follow the instructions of the court staff and court security officers (“CSOs”) to aid in maintaining distance in the Courthouse; and
- c. Each person must use the hand sanitizer furnished at the front door upon entering the Courthouse.

It is further **ORDERED** that, in addition to the foregoing requirements, each courtroom within the Courthouse has specific requirements as to spectators during a trial or hearing, and access is on a first-come, first-served basis:

1. Courtroom No. 1 – All spectators must sit six (6) feet apart at all times;
2. Courtroom No. 2 – Limit of six (6) spectators, sitting six (6) feet apart;
3. Courtroom No. 3 – Limit of six (6) spectators, sitting six (6) feet apart. No persons under 18 years of age will be permitted in the courtroom;
4. Courtroom No. 4 – All spectators who do not reside in the same household must sit six (6) feet apart; and
5. Courtroom No. 6 – All spectators must sit six (6) feet apart.

It is further **ORDERED** that during jury selection and while any jury trial is ongoing, participants or jurors in the trial will have their temperature taken using a non-contact thermometer and will be allowed to remain in the Courthouse only if the reading is below One Hundred Degrees Fahrenheit (100°F).

It is further **ORDERED** that any CSO who is assisting with jury selection shall wear a face mask.

It is further **ORDERED** that all CSOs, following substantive guidance provided by this order

¹ Individuals are considered fully vaccinated for COVID-19 two weeks after they have received their second dose in a 2-dose series or two weeks after they have received a single-dose vaccine.

and administrative guidance from the United States Marshal for the Eastern District of Texas (EDTX), shall deny entry to anyone attempting to enter, or remain in, the Courthouse in violation of these protocols. In the event of any uncertainty as to whether a person should be denied entrance to the Courthouse, the CSOs shall immediately contact the U.S. Marshal for the EDTX or the designated Deputy Marshal for a determination, which shall control.

If you are scheduled or required to appear in the Courthouse before the district court or the magistrate judge during the period that this order is in effect, and you are unable to gain entry because of the restrictions in this order, you should proceed as follows:

- a. If you are represented by an attorney, please contact your attorney;
- b. If you are an attorney scheduled to appear in court before a judge, please contact that judge's chambers directly by telephone, and if necessary, follow up by email;
- c. If you are scheduled to meet with a Probation or Pretrial Services Officer, please contact the Probation and Pretrial Services Office directly for guidance and instructions; and
- d. For any other Courthouse matters, please contact the office of the Deputy Clerk in Charge of the Beaumont Division at (409) 654-7000.

It is further **ORDERED** that, unless extended by subsequent order, these restrictions shall remain in place until August 31, 2021, at 11:59 p.m., when they shall automatically expire. After this order is signed and filed with the Standing Orders of the EDTX, the U.S. Marshal for the EDTX shall post it in a prominent location at the main entrance to the Courthouse in Beaumont, Texas, so that the public may have advance notice of its requirements before it takes effect.

So **ORDERED** and **SIGNED**, July 21, 2021.



Marcia A. Crone
U.S. District Judge



Thad Heartfield
U.S. District Judge



Michael J. Truncala
U.S. District Judge

This order is available on the Court's Website – <http://www.txed.uscourts.gov>.