



**DISTRICT COURT OF MARYLAND FOR BALTIMORE COUNTY
PHASE III REOPEN PLAN
JULY 20, 2020 – AUGUST 30, 2020**

**THE CLERK'S OFFICE IS OPEN
Monday – Friday, 8:30 am – 4:30 pm
(410) 512-2000**

SAFETY MEASURES

- **All visitors entering the Essex District Courthouse, the Temporary Towson District Courthouse, the “old” Catonsville District Courthouse and the Annex building, must wear a mask or face covering, must participate in the Initial Screening Protocol and must maintain 6-foot social distance within the courtroom and throughout the building.**
- Any individual who refuses to participate in the Initial Screening Protocol or answers “yes” to any question on the Initial Screening Questionnaire or has a fever will be denied entry into the building.
- Any individual who has a scheduled court date and is denied entry must provide their name, case information and phone number to the bailiff. The information will be forwarded to the courtroom to determine if the case can be heard by remote participation or must be postponed. The denied party will be informed of the court’s determination.
- All visitors are required to maintain 6-foot social distance in accordance with the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and the Maryland Department of Health (MDH).
- Attendance in the courtrooms may be limited as necessary to maintain social distancing.
- While at the trial tables, attorneys may social distance from their clients by sitting at opposite ends of the trial table and communicating by passing written notes. Individuals may request a recess to have confidential communication while maintaining 6-foot social distance.
- Social distancing markings have been placed on the floors, seating areas, elevators, stairwells, bathrooms and other public spaces throughout the courthouse building, courtrooms and the Annex building.
- Within the courtrooms, individuals must maintain social distancing by sitting in designated spaces where social distancing markers have been placed.
- Signage has been posted throughout the courthouse building and the Annex building reminding visitors to maintain social distancing, to wear a mask or face covering and to sanitize and/or wash their hands frequently.
- Hand sanitizer stations have been installed.
- Department of General Services (DGS) will perform extra cleanings throughout the day and will maintain a public log to record cleaning of high touch areas such as elevator buttons, handrails, doorknobs and bathrooms. Cleaning will be completed using EPA-approved disinfectant.

- Plexiglass partitions will be installed to separate court personnel from each other and from the public in places where 6-foot social distancing cannot be maintained.
- Docket case counts have been substantially reduced and scheduled on a staggered basis to reduce the number of individuals in the courtroom at one time.
- The number of courtrooms with dockets has been reduced.
- To avoid handling documentary evidence, such evidence may be submitted electronically in advance of the court trial, whenever possible.
- Trial tables and the witness stand will be cleaned with an EPA-approved disinfectant periodically throughout the docket.
- An individual who is testifying or otherwise addressing the court may lower their mask or face covering temporarily while speaking but must return their mask or face covering when finished.
- All court personnel, including clerks, judges, commissioners and bailiffs, must wear a mask or face covering, must participate in the Initial Screening protocol and must maintain social distancing whenever possible.

REMOTE PARTICIPATION

- Remote participation is encouraged and may be used throughout Phase III operations.
- Anyone who wishes to have their case heard by remote participation should contact the Clerk's Office or submit a written request.
- A request for remote participation should include the requester's name, phone number, email address, case name, case number and court date.
- The clerk will contact the appropriate parties regarding the request.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

The Clerk's Office is open. Filings may still be submitted as indicated below:

- Locked drop-boxes at each courthouse location: Monday – Friday, 8:30 am – 4:30 pm.
- U.S. Mail
- MDEC

Essex District Courthouse – 8914 Kelso Drive, Essex, MD 21221

- Clerk's Office - (410) 512-2300
- Commissioners' Office – (410) 512-2328

Temporary Towson Courthouse – 1 Rolling Cross Road, Catonsville, MD 21228

- Clerk's Office – (410) 512-2000
- Commissioners' Office – (410) 512-2030

"Old" Catonsville District Courthouse – 900 Walker Avenue, Catonsville, MD 21228

- Clerk's Office – (410) 512-2500

Daily Docket Website: www.mdcourts.gov/district/directories/courtmap

Maryland Judiciary Website: www.mdcourts.gov

CRIMINAL MATTERS

GENERAL INFORMATION

- Criminal and must appear serious traffic cases will be scheduled in all three court locations.
- Dockets in all three court locations will be scheduled at four (4) sessions: 9:00 a.m., 11:00 a.m., 1:30 p.m. and 3:00 p.m. with no more than 9 cases (4 criminal /5 must appear serious traffic) per session.
- To comply with the CDC guidelines for social distancing, most courtrooms can only accommodate 14 - 26 people. As a result, it may be necessary to limit attendance in the courtroom to prosecutors, criminal defense attorneys and/or public defenders, defendants, testifying witnesses, victims, law enforcement and media with credentials.
- For Essex and old Catonsville courthouses, only two courtrooms will conduct criminal/must appear-serious traffic cases. Each courthouse will have one courtroom available for extra witnesses to wait or for public defenders and/or private defense attorneys to communicate with their clients while maintaining 6-feet social distance.
- For Temporary Towson courthouse, no more than four courtrooms will conduct hearings: two courtrooms on the third floor and two courtrooms on the fourth floor. At least one courtroom will remain available for extra witnesses to wait or for public defenders and/or private defense attorneys to communicate with their clients while maintaining 6-feet social distance. Attorney conference rooms will also be available.

BAIL REVIEWS/BENCH WARRANTS

- All bail review hearings including requests for second bail review hearings and bench warrants for any court location in Baltimore County will be heard by video conference with the Detention Center daily at 1:00 PM at the Temporary Towson courthouse.
- Prosecutors, public defenders and private criminal defense attorneys may participate remotely.
- Anyone who wishes to participate remotely should contact the Clerk's Office and provide the defendants name, the case number and a phone number.

CRIMINAL COMPETENCY MATTERS

- All criminal competency matters, and mental health evaluation hearings will be heard at the Temporary Towson courthouse.
- All matters will be handled by remote participation, whenever possible. Defendants will not be transported to the court. Instead, defendants may be able to remain in their housing units. The defense attorney may waive the defendant's presence at the hearing, unless justice requires otherwise.
- Status hearings regarding competency matters will be held every other Tuesday or as justice requires.
- Hearings on mental health evaluations may require in-person proceedings. Such matters will be scheduled every other Tuesday or as justice requires.

- Cases involving defendants who are opined to be competent to stand trial, whenever possible, should be scheduled promptly for a bail review to determine pretrial release conditions pending a trial date.
- Defendants who are deemed competent to stand trial should be scheduled for trial as soon as possible.

MATTERS INVOLVING LOCALLY INCARCERATED DEFENDANTS

- Matters involving locally incarcerated defendants will be scheduled up to twice per week in all court locations. Dockets in all court locations will be scheduled at four (4) sessions: 9:00 a.m., 11:00 a.m., 1:30 p.m. and 3:00 p.m. No more than 9 cases (4 criminal /5 must appear serious traffic) will be scheduled per session.
- Defendants will be transported to court from the detention center. Three transport vehicles will be used to help maintain social distancing.
- Defendants who are transported will have a transfer form completed prior to leaving the detention center. The transfer form will include the health screening information.
- The detention center will provide each inmate with a mask prior to leaving the facility.
- If, because of the defendant's health screening, a defendant is unable to be transported or is denied entry upon arrival, the defendant's case will be postponed.
- If the defendant does not need to be present because of the resolution of the case (such as when a nolle prosequi or stet of the charge will be entered), the case may proceed without the defendant, unless justice requires otherwise.
- For any case that will be resolved by trial, it may be necessary to hold the trial of that case until later in the docket or the case may be postponed and rescheduled on another court date that can accommodate the trial.

CRIMINAL TRIALS

- Criminal cases, including must appear serious traffic matters, will be scheduled at all courthouse locations.
- The parties are encouraged to discuss cases in advance of the scheduled court date to resolve the case by a plea.
- If a plea has been reached, the case should proceed on the scheduled date to verdict and to sentencing, unless justice requires otherwise.
- If no plea has been reached and the case must be resolved by a trial, it may be necessary to hold the case until later in the docket for the trial to be conducted or the case may be postponed and rescheduled on another court date that can accommodate the trial.
- If the sentencing of the defendant will include a period of incarceration, deferral of the start date for any incarceration may be considered, in conjunction with the status of the COVID-19 pandemic.

VIOLATIONS OF PROBATION

- Violations of probation (VOP) will be scheduled in each courthouse location.

- VOPs will be heard at 11:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m. on days for which criminal / must appear serious traffic cases are scheduled.
- VOP hearings may be conducted by remote participation. To participate by remote means, an individual should submit a written request to the Clerk's Office in advance of the scheduled VOP hearing date. The Clerk's Office will contact the individual concerning the request.

PRELIMINARY HEARINGS

- Cases scheduled for a preliminary hearing will be heard at the Temporary Towson courthouse every Friday. Cases will be scheduled on a staggered basis throughout the court day.
- For non-incarcerated defendants whose felony charges are being dismissed or amended to misdemeanor charges, whenever possible, those cases will be handled by filing the pleadings electronically through MDEC. The case will receive a new trial date and will be removed from the preliminary hearing docket.
- For incarcerated defendants whose charges are being dismissed or amended to misdemeanor charges, whenever possible, those cases may be handled by video conference with the detention center and the defendant may receive a second bail review given the change in the charges.
- The State may provide the court with a list of cases that will be presented to the Grand Jury for possible indictment. No inmate will be transported if their case will be presented to the Grand Jury for indictment.
- Preliminary hearings for which no resolution has been reached, no waiver of the preliminary hearing has been entered and for which a hearing must be conducted should be rescheduled for witness testimony.

QUARANTINE AND/OR ISOLATION VIOLATIONS

- To date, Baltimore County District Court has not received any quarantine and/or isolation violations.
- Any such filings will be heard at the Temporary Towson courthouse location.
- Whenever possible, violations of quarantine and/or isolation orders may be heard by remote means, unless justice requires otherwise.
- Prosecutors, public defenders, criminal defense attorneys, law enforcement and other witnesses may participate remotely.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE PROTECTIVE ORDERS, PEACE ORDERS AND EXTREME RISK PROTECTIVE ORDERS (ERPO)

GENERAL INFORMATION

- During Phase III, cases will be scheduled at all courthouse locations.
- Each courthouse will hear new walk-in temporary domestic violence protective orders, peace orders and extreme risk protective orders (ERPOs) daily, promptly throughout the day.

- Each courthouse will hear cases involving temporary or final domestic violence protective orders, peace orders, extreme risk protective orders (ERPOs), motions to dismiss or to modify and contempt petitions.
- Temporary and final hearings will be scheduled on a staggered basis throughout the court day as follows: (1) Temporary Towson courthouse - Monday, Wednesday and Friday; (2) Essex Courthouse – Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday; and (3) ‘Old” Catonsville courthouse – Monday, Wednesday and Friday.
- For each courthouse, up to two courtrooms will conduct hearings for this case type. One courtroom will remain available for extra witnesses to wait or for advocates or attorneys to communicate with their clients while maintaining 6-feet social distance.
- For Temporary Towson courthouse, attorney conference rooms will be available.
- To maintain social distancing, it may be necessary to limit attendance in the courtroom to parties, attorneys, testifying witnesses, advocates and media with credentials.

TEMPORARY AND FINAL DOMESTIC VIOLENCE PROTECTIVE ORDERS, PEACE ORDERS AND EXTREME RISK PROTECTIVE ORDERS

- Each courthouse will hear cases involving temporary or final domestic violence protective orders, peace orders, extreme risk protective orders (ERPOs), motions to dismiss or to modify and contempt petitions.
- Temporary and final hearings will be scheduled on a staggered basis throughout the court day as follows: (1) Temporary Towson courthouse - Monday, Wednesday and Friday; (2) Essex Courthouse – Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday; and (3) “old” Catonsville courthouse – Monday, Wednesday and Friday.
- Cases may be heard by remote participation.
- If an individual wishes to participate by remote means, the individual should contact the Clerk’s Office or send a written request to the court. The request should include the requester’s name, phone number, email address, case name, case number and court date. The clerk will contact the appropriate individuals regarding the request.
- The Court may consider handling unserved temporary matters and waiver of appearance protective order cases by remote participation, unless justice requires otherwise. If the Court determines that a case will be heard by remote participation, the Clerk will contact the appropriate individuals to arrange the remote participation.

CIVIL MATTERS

GENEREAL INFORMATION

- Throughout Phase III, civil matters will be scheduled at all courthouse locations.
- Cases will be scheduled on a staggered basis at four (4) sessions: 9:00 a.m., 11:00 a.m., 1:30 p.m. and 3:00 p.m.

- For Essex and “old” Catonsville courthouses, up to two courtrooms will conduct hearings on civil matters. At least one courtroom will be available for extra witnesses to wait or for attorneys to communicate with their clients while maintaining 6-foot social distance.
- For Temporary Towson courthouse, up to four courtrooms will conduct hearings on civil matters: two courtrooms on the third floor and two courtrooms on the fourth floor. At least one courtroom will remain available for extra witnesses to wait or attorneys to communicate with their clients while maintaining 6-foot social distance. Attorney conference rooms will also be available.
- To comply with the CDC guidelines for social distancing, most courtrooms will only accommodate 14 - 26 people. As a result, it may be necessary to limit attendance in the courtroom to parties, attorneys, testifying witnesses and media with credentials.
- If an individual wishes to participate by remote means, the individual should contact the Clerk’s Office or send a written request to the court. The request should include the requester’s name, phone number, email address, case name, case number and court date. The clerk will contact the appropriate individuals regarding the request.

BODY ATTACHMENTS

- Body Attachments will be heard in-person at the Temporary Towson courthouse location and will be scheduled daily at 1:00 p.m.

SPECIAL PROCEEDINGS – BREACH OF LEASE, WRONGFUL DETAINER, TENANT HOLDING OVER AND CERTAIN RENT ESCROW ACTIONS

- Special Proceedings involving breach of lease, wrongful detainer, tenant holding over and certain rent escrow actions that are not consolidated with a failure to pay rent case and where Baltimore County Code Enforcement inspections can be conducted, will be scheduled at all courthouse locations.
- Special Proceeding will be scheduled as needed at one of four (4) sessions: 9:00 a.m., 11:00 a.m., 1:30 p.m. and 3:00 p.m.
- If an individual wishes to participate by remote means, the individual should contact the Clerk’s Office or send a written request to the court. The request should include the requester’s name, phone number, email address, case name, case number and court date. The clerk will contact the appropriate individuals regarding the request.
- On a case-by-case basis, Warrants of Restitution that are associated with any breach of lease, wrongful detainer and/or tenant holding over action may be processed by Baltimore County Constables.
- On or after July 25, 2020, Warrants of Restitution may be processed for failure to pay rent actions which were pending or already authorized prior to the March 16, 2020 closure of courts.
- For more information, please go to the “*Communication from the District Court of Maryland Regarding Landlord/Tenant Actions and CARES Act Information During Phase III of the Maryland Judiciary’s Reopening Plan*” which can be found at the following website listed below:
- https://mdcourts.gov/sites/default/files/import/district/phaseIII_communication_landlordtenant_7.17.20.pdf

OTHER CIVIL MATTERS – TORT, CONTRACT, AFFIDAVIT JUDGMENT AND CONSUMER DEBT CASES

- Other civil matters involving tort, contract, affidavit judgment and consumer debt actions will be scheduled at all courthouse locations.
- These case types will be scheduled as needed at one of four (4) sessions: 9:00 a.m., 11:00 a.m., 1:30 p.m. and 3:00 p.m.
- If an individual wishes to participate by remote means, the individual should submit a written request in advance of the scheduled court date. The request should include the requester's name, phone number, email address, case name, case number and court date. The clerk will contact the appropriate individuals regarding the request.
- For more information regarding Affidavit Judgment actions, please go to the *"Updated Communication from the District Court of Maryland regarding Affidavit Judgments in the District Court of Maryland"* which can be found at the website listed below:
- https://mdcourts.gov/sites/default/files/import/coronavirus/communicationaffidavitjudgmen_tsd071020.pdf
- To avoid handling documents that may be offered into evidence at trial, whenever possible, documents may be submitted electronically through MDEC in advance of the scheduled court date.
- Tort cases may be scheduled for a pre-trial conference in advance of the scheduled trial date. Pre-trial conferences may be conducted by remote participation.
- Whenever possible, information regarding Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) will be provided to the parties. The Court will inform the parties whenever a mediator is present to provide ADR services, which are free of charge and confidential.
- The Self-Help Center will be open with a limited staff to assist self-represented litigants. Litigants may visit the Self-Help Center located at 1 Rolling Cross Road, Catonsville Md 21228 or may contact the call-in center at 410-260-1392 or participate in a live chat by visiting the Self-Help Center's website at <http://www.courts.state.md.us/selfhelp>.

EMERGENCY EVALUATION PETITIONS

- Emergency Evaluation Petitions will be heard immediately upon filing, either in-person or remotely at each courthouse.

COMMISSIONERS

GENERAL INFORMATION

- Court Commissioners are available 24 hours per day / 7 days per week at Temporary Towson and Essex courthouse locations.

- There are no Court Commissioners stationed at the “old” Catonsville District courthouse location. Instead, Court Commissioners have been reassigned to the Temporary Towson courthouse location at 1 Rolling Cross Road, Catonsville, MD. 21228.
- Anyone visiting the Court Commissioner must wear a mask or face covering, must participate in the Initial Screening Protocol and must maintain social distancing.
- Anyone who is denied entrance as result of the Initial Screening Protocol must provide their name and phone number to the guard who will give the information to the Court Commissioner.
- The Court Commissioner will call the individual to provide instructions to the individual for handling their matter by remote participation.
- To contact a Commissioner at the Temporary Towson courthouse, please call (410) 512-2030.
- To contact a Commissioner at the Essex courthouse, please call (410) 512-2328.

NEW INTERIM DOMESTIC VIOLENCE PROTECTIVE ORDERS, PEACE ORDERS AND EXTREME RISK PROTECTIVE ORDERS (ERPOs)

- Beginning July 20, 2020, Court Commissioner will resume hearing all new interim domestic violence protective orders, peace orders and extreme risk protective orders (ERPOs) daily, after regular court hours from 4:30 p.m. – 8:30 a.m.
- Court Commissioners, in addition to all other required information, will obtain the petitioner’s phone number, and advise the petitioner that the case may be heard by remote participation.
- Court Commissioners will provide petitioners with information regarding available resources and services that petitioners may choose to use, if they wish.
- If the Court Commissioner grants the interim order, the Court Commissioner will provide the petitioner with a copy of the interim order along with any additional information related to the Phase III court operations.

INITIAL APPEARANCES

- All Initial Appearances will be heard by Court Commissioners remotely, using a video conferencing platform. Arrested defendants will be transported to one of the following four police precincts: Dundalk, Towson, Woodlawn or Catonsville.
- Court Commissioners located at Temporary Towson and Essex courthouses will conduct the Initial Appearance. There are no Court Commissioners located at the “old” Catonsville courthouse location.
- No Initial Appearances will be heard at the “old” Catonsville courthouse location.
- Attorneys who are part of the Appointed Attorneys Program or private defense attorneys will participate remotely by phone.

PRELIMINARY INQUIRY

- Court Commissioners will conduct Preliminary Inquiries at the Temporary Towson and Essex courthouse locations.
- No Preliminary Inquiries will be conducted at the “old” Catonsville courthouse location.

APPLICATIONS FOR STATEMENTS OF CHARGES, ACCEPTANCE OF BAIL BONDS, AND BENCH WARRANT SATISFACTIONS

- Applications for Statements of Charges, Acceptance of Bail Bonds and Bench Warrant Satisfactions will be taken at Temporary Towson courthouse and Essex courthouse.
- No Applications for Statements of Charges, Acceptance of Bail Bonds and Bench Warrant Satisfactions will be taken at “old” Catonsville courthouse location.

APPLICATIONS FOR PUBLIC DEFENDER REPRESENTATION

- Walk-in applications for Public Defender representation will be processed by Court Commissioners in Temporary Towson courthouse and Essex courthouse.
- Applications for Public Defender representation may also be completed and deposited into one of the locked drop-boxes at each courthouse location.
- No applications for Public Defender representation will be processed at “old” Catonsville courthouse location.