

IN THE 26<sup>TH</sup>, 277<sup>TH</sup>, 368<sup>TH</sup>, 395<sup>TH</sup> AND 425<sup>TH</sup>  
DISTRICT COURTS

WILLIAMSON COUNTY

AND

IN COUNTY COURTS AT LAW NUMBERS  
ONE, TWO, THREE AND FOUR

STATE OF TEXAS

**GENERAL ORDER:  
REGARDING PUBLIC ACCESS TO COURT PROCEEDINGS UNDER THE 2020 STATE OF  
DISASTER COVID-19 AND RELATED CORONAVIRUS**

This General Order is issued in response to the Local State of Disaster that has been declared by the County Judge of Williamson County, as well as the state of disaster declarations by the Governor of the State of Texas, and by the President of the United States. This General Order is also issued after considering and in conformance with *Emergency Orders Regarding the COVID-19 State of Disaster* issued by the Supreme Court of Texas and the Court of Criminal Appeals<sup>1</sup>.

**WHEREAS, the Courts of Williamson County are open, “and every person...shall have remedy by due course of law.” (Tx. Const. Art. I Sec. 13).**

WHEREAS, the Courts of Williamson County have determined that there is an overriding or compelling interest to protect the health and safety of the public, parties, and employees of the Court from the risk of exposure to COVID-19 and related coronavirus;

WHEREAS, the Courts of Williamson County have determined that the exclusion of the public from in-person court proceedings is essential to reduce the risk to the public, parties, and employees of the Court from the risk of exposure to COVID-19 and related coronavirus;

WHEREAS, the Courts of Williamson County have considered that there are reasonable alternatives to total exclusion or closure of court proceedings that will serve the interest of reducing the risk of exposure to COVID19 and related coronavirus while balancing the public’s access to court proceedings.

<sup>1</sup> Misc. Docket No. 20-9042 (Tex. Misc. Docket No. 20-007 (Tex. Crim. App.), accessed at <https://www.txcourts.gov/media/1446056/209042.pdf> (2. Subject only to constitutional limitations, all courts in Texas may in any case, civil or criminal—and must to avoid risk to court staff, parties, attorneys, jurors, and the public—without a participant’s consent: ... b. Allow or require anyone involved in any hearing, deposition, or other proceeding of any kind—including but not limited to a party, attorney, witness, or court reporter, but not including a juror—to participate remotely, such as by teleconferencing, videoconferencing, or other means; c. Consider as evidence sworn statements made out of court or sworn testimony given remotely, out of court, such as by teleconferencing, videoconferencing, or other means; d. Conduct proceedings away from the court’s usual location, but in the county of venue, and only with reasonable notice and access to the participants and the public; ... f. Take any other reasonable action to avoid exposing court proceedings to the threat of COVID-19....” Misc. Docket No. 20-9044 (Tex.) Mics. Docket No. 20-008 (Tex. Crim. App.), accessed at <https://www.txcourts.gov/media/1446178/209044.pdf> (... “2. With respect to the First Emergency Order Regarding the COVID-19 State of Disaster issued March 13, 2020: a. Paragraph 2(d) is amended as follows: Conduct proceedings away from the court’s usual location with reasonable notice and access to the participants and the public; ... 3. Courts



must not conduct non-essential proceedings in person contrary to local, state, or national directives, whichever is most restrictive, regarding maximum group size.”)

Page | 1

It is therefore ORDERED that, effective immediately and continuing until further order, if a member of the public desires to observe any court proceedings held in the courts of Williamson County, Texas, the requestor shall contact the court administrator of the court in which the case is scheduled at least 24 hours prior to the date and time of the court hearing to arrange for the requestor to view the proceedings being conducted through remote technology.

Nothing in this order precludes a court in Williamson County from broadcasting hearings in a manner chosen by each individual court.

The contact information for each court administrator is located on Williamson County’s website.<sup>1</sup>

If you are viewing, please mute your connection to prevent disruption to the court proceedings. VIDEO OR AUDIO RECORDING OF THE PROCEEDINGS IS PROHIBITED.

DATED: April 1, 2020



Donna King  
Judge, 26<sup>th</sup> District Court



Stacey Mathews  
Judge, 277<sup>th</sup> District Court



Rick Kennon  
Judge, 368<sup>th</sup> District Court



Ryan Larson  
Judge, 395<sup>th</sup> District Court



Betsy F. Lambeth  
Judge, 425<sup>th</sup> District Court



Brandy Hallford,  
Judge, County Court at Law No. 1



Laura Barker  
Judge, County Court at Law No. 2



Doug Arnold  
Judge, County Court at Law No. 3



John McMaster  
Judge, County Court at Law No. 4

Doug Arnold (Apr 14, 2020)

<sup>1</sup> For County Courts at Law: <https://www.wilco.org/Elected-Officials/County-Courts>. For District Courts: <https://www.wilco.org/Elected-Officials/District-Courts>. Page

