

IN THE 368TH, 395TH AND 425TH DISTRICT COURT

AND

IN COUNTY COURTS AT LAW NUMBERS
ONE, THREE AND FOUR

FILED P
at _____ o'clock _____ M
MAR 18 2020
Lizie Daniel
District Clerk, Williamson Co., TX. WILLIAMSON COUNTY
STATE OF TEXAS

**GENERAL ORDER:
COURT OPERATIONS IN WILLIAMSON COUNTY
FAMILY COURTS 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 declarations by the Governor of the State of Texas, and by the President of the United States, and in conformance with *First Emergency Order Regarding the COVID-19 State of Disaster* issued by the Supreme Court of Texas and the Court of Criminal Appeals¹.

The Courts of Williamson County are open, "and every person...shall have remedy by due course of law." (Tx. Const. Art. I Sec. 13). The Court finds that the State of Disaster requires certain steps to be taken in order to mitigate risk to the health and safety of the public, parties, and employees of the Court, and so it is therefore ORDERED that, effective March 17, 2020 and continuing until May 11, 2020, unless extended by further orders:

1. Due to the limitations on mass gatherings limiting the Courts' ability to impanel juries, all jury trials in ALL FAMILY COURT matters scheduled through May 11, 2020 are CONTINUED without prejudice to either party and, consistent with the directive of the Supreme Court of Texas and the Court of Criminal Appeals, this Court finds that the ends of justice are served by this continuance.
2. The Family Courts recommend that all non-essential hearings be rescheduled.
3. During this period, the parties are strongly encouraged to continue to conference in order to resolve cases, where appropriate.
4. **In the best interest of the community and in the interest of public health please do not attempt to visit the Williamson County Courthouse in person for any family court matter without direct communication with the court.** The Court will have the capability to conduct hearings in telephonically, and electronically. Check the webpages of the individual courts regarding information on virtual courtroom capabilities. Notwithstanding the limits placed on the Courts in the interest of public health, employees, including chambers staff, will be teleworking between this date and May 11, 2020 and are available by phone or email. Electronic filings shall continue to be made through the District Clerk's office.
5. Designation of **Essential Family Court Matters**: Essential Family Court matters include any matters where there is immediate harm to liberty, life, limb, or property.
 - A. Any Essential Civil Court matter shall be calendared with the Court Administrator for the court where it is assigned.

¹ Misc. Docket No. 20-9042 (Tex.) Misc. Docket No. 20-007 (Tex. Crim. App.), accessed at <https://www.txcourts.gov/media/1446056/209042.pdf>

- B. Essential Family Court matters are as follows:
 - 1) Family Violence Protective Orders
 - 2) Family Temporary Restraining Orders
 - 3) CPS Removals
 - 4) Judicial Bypass cases and appeals
- C. All requested hearings shall contact, via electronic mail, with the Court Administrator of the court where the case is assigned and provide the following information:
 - Cause number and name of Parties
 - Necessity of setting
 - Need for an interpreter or other accommodation
- D. Phones/contacting the courts: Contact the corresponding court's website for up-to-date contact information. Phones will be set up to forward to offsite locations if necessary.
- E. We understand that during this difficult emotional time there will be family tensions requiring Court action. Please do not hesitate to contact the courts regarding matters, financial or child related that are emergencies.

6. **Parties are encouraged to submit contested motions on a submission docket where available.** Contested motions to be heard on submission are:

- A. Agreed matters
- B. Agreed Uncontested Divorces: Please complete the attached Statement of Evidence along with the Agree Final Decree of Divorce and submit either through e-file or directly to the court by email to the Court Administrator
- C. Matters agreed to be heard on submission by the parties with permission of the court.

7. Please check with each court regarding the scheduling of uncontested matters. Each court has the availability to conduct hearings through a virtual courtroom. Please contact each court for their availability to conduct a virtual/electronic hearing. These platforms include CourtCall and Microsoft Teams.

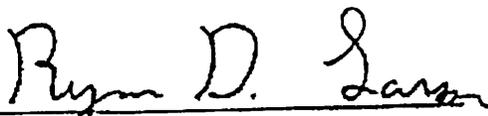
The Court reminds counsel and the public that all necessary steps will be taken to ensure that the Family Courts of Williamson County function effectively and efficiently during this disaster period. As this situation continues to evolve, this order may be modified or extended. We take seriously our obligation to balance the interest of justice and the health and safety of our courthouse community and the community at large. All are requested to exercise patience in this unprecedented situation. Notwithstanding

This order shall be filed with the Williamson County District Clerk and shall be published on both the "All District Courts" webpage and the "All County Courts at Law" webpage.

IT IS SO ORDERED THIS 18th DAY OF MARCH 2020



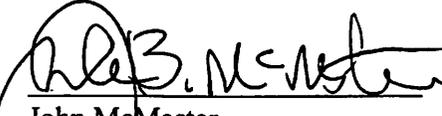
Betsy F. Lambeth
Judge, 425th District Court



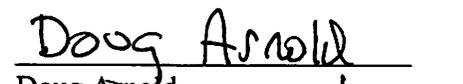
Ryan Larson
Judge, 395th District Court



Rick Kenron
Judge, 368th District Court



John McMaster
Judge, County Court at Law No. 4



Doug Arnold
Judge, County Court at Law No. 3



Brandy Hallford
County Court at Law No. 1