

IN THE SUPREME COURT OF PENNSYLVANIA
EIGHTEENTH JUDICIAL DISTRICT

IN RE: EIGHTEENTH JUDICIAL DISTRICT : No. 26 WM 2020
DECLARATION OF JUDICIAL EMERGENCY : No. 349 CD 2020

EXTENSION OF DECLARATION OF JUDICIAL EMERGENCY

WHEREAS, the Covid-19 Pandemic is ongoing in Clarion County and throughout the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and continues to cause disruption to the functioning of the court system; and

WHEREAS, court operations within Clarion County continue to be impacted by required quarantine of court staff, attorneys, parties and witnesses in court proceedings as well as social distancing requirements; making it difficult to effectuate court proceedings in the usual manner; and

WHEREAS, this court declared a judicial emergency within the Eighteenth Judicial District on November 3, 2020 until December 31, 2020 and extended its declaration of judicial emergency to March 31, 2021 by Order dated December 14, 2020; and

WHEREAS, while indications exist that infection rates from the Covid-19 virus within Clarion County are lessening and opportunities for the public to be vaccinated against the virus are increasing, infections are still prevalent and emergency measures remain necessary to protect the public from the virus while continuing to carry out the functions of the court system.

THEREFORE, it is ORDERED as follows:

AND NOW this 31st day of March, 2021, the judicial emergency declared within the Eighteenth Judicial District, Clarion County, Pennsylvania by Order dated November 3, 2020 is hereby extended to July 31, 2021, unless earlier terminated or extended by further order of court.

The court hereby amends its Order of November 3, 2020 regarding the operations of the courts within Clarion County during the local judicial emergency. The following provisions shall supersede the provisions of this court's November 3, 2020 Order:

1. Rule 600 and Jury Trials

The operation of Rule of Criminal Procedure 600 shall remain suspended in the Eighteenth Judicial District during the period of the local judicial emergency.

Jury selection and jury trials shall recommence pursuant to the court's calendar in April 2021 with appropriate social distancing measures to be followed.

2. Court Proceedings

The court may restrict the physical presence of spectators in the courtroom during court proceedings if proper social distancing practices cannot be followed. When necessary, alternative arrangements may be made to permit public access to court proceedings.

All individuals present in court facilities must wear a face mask or other appropriate face covering unless authorized by the presiding judge to remove the mask or covering to communicate with the court.

At the option of the presiding judge, or upon request of counsel or a party, court proceedings, including criminal proceedings, may be conducted via advanced communication technologies such as video and telephone.

Requests for continuances of court proceedings will be liberally granted when requested due to COVID-19 exposure concerns, however all such requests must be submitted to Court Administration in writing.

Court proceedings that occur via a list of cases, such as criminal plea and sentence court, will be scheduled in increments to reduce the number of individuals present in the courtroom at one time.

3. Central Court Procedures

The procedures set forth in this court's November 3, 2020 declaration of judicial emergency shall remain in effect.

4. Domestic Relations Operations

The Domestic Relations division may, at the discretion of the Director of Domestic Relations, conduct all support conferences and other appointments via telephone or Zoom rather than face-to-face. Domestic Relations Hearing Officers may request to hold hearings in Courtroom No. 2 of the Clarion County Courthouse rather than in the Domestic Relations office to allow for social distancing.

BY THE COURT



Sara J. Seidle-Patton, P.J.

Dated: March 31, 2021