



The Supreme Court of Texas

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Chambers of
THE CHIEF JUSTICE

March 23, 2020

To the Presiding Judges of the Eleven Administrative Judicial Regions of Texas

Hon. Ray Wheless	Hon. Missy Medary	Hon. Ana Estevez
Hon. Olen Underwood	Hon. Stephen B. Ables	Hon. Alfonso Charles
Hon. Billy Ray Stubblefield	Hon. Dean Rucker	Hon. Susan Brown
Hon. Sid Harle	Hon. David Evans	

Re: Additional Duties During COVID-19 Public Health Disaster
Declaration and Executive Orders Issued by Governor Abbott, and
Emergency Orders Issued by the Supreme Court of Texas and the
Court of Criminal Appeals of Texas

Dear Presiding Judges:

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Governor Greg Abbott on March 13, 2020, declared a state of disaster in all 254 counties in the State of Texas. That same day, the Supreme Court of Texas and the Court of Criminal Appeals of Texas (“the Courts”) issued their First Emergency Order Regarding the COVID-19 State of Disaster.¹ All Texas courts were directly ordered to modify or suspend all deadlines and procedures when appropriate to avoid risk to court staff, parties, attorneys, jurors, and the public. The Courts’ Third Emergency Order² clarified:

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

Governor Abbott has by executive order directed that “every person in Texas shall avoid social gatherings in groups of more than 10 people.” National and local officials have issued similar or even more restrictive directives. Although these

¹ March 13, 2020, Misc. Dkt. Nos. 20-9042 and 20-007, respectively.

² March 19, 2020, Misc. Dkt. Nos. 20-9044 and 20-008, respectively.

executive directives may not apply to court proceedings, they inform permitted court operations under the Courts' Orders.

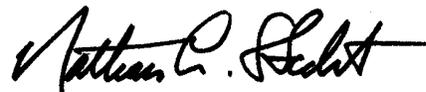
In the present state of disaster, it is critical that courts remain open at all times to handle essential matters. But it is just as critical that procedures be used to avoid risk to court staff and to the public, and that nonessential proceedings be delayed. To further assist with the administration of justice during the COVID-19 pandemic, pursuant to Section 74.046 of the Texas Government Code, I assign you the following additional duties:

1. Ensure that all courts in each region are operating consistent with executive directives and in full compliance with the Courts' Orders;
2. Ensure that all trial court judges in each region, including justices of the peace and municipal court judges, do not conduct in-person hearings inconsistent with the Courts' Orders or the latest guidance for limiting nonessential proceedings issued by the Office of Court Administration;
3. Assist the trial court judges in each region in determining what proceedings are essential and admonish those who are not in compliance with the Courts' Orders or executive directives;
4. Report to my office any proceedings that are being conducted in the regions—and the court in which the proceedings are being conducted—that are inconsistent with the Courts' Orders and executive directives; and
5. Assist each region's local governments and courts to ensure that courts have the ability to conduct essential business at the courthouse or other locations.

Please advise me at once if further action should be taken or if other orders are needed. These additional duties remain in effect while the Courts' Emergency Orders are in effect.

I commend each of you on your leadership in these difficult times.

Sincerely,



Nathan L. Hecht
Chief Justice