

Amending COVID-19 Circuit Court Operating Plan

WHEREAS: On May 21, 2021, the Wisconsin Supreme Court terminated the following orders: (1) In re the Matter of Jury Trials During the COVID-19 Pandemic—Amended (S. Ct. Order issued March 22, 2020; Amended April 15, 2020); (2) In re the Matter of Filing of Court Documents in Circuit and Appellate Courts (Temporary Mailbox Rule) (S. Ct. Order issued April 13, 2020); (3) Interim Rule 20-02; and In re the Matter of the Extension of Orders and the Interim Rule Concerning Continuation of Jury Trials, Suspension of Statutory Deadlines for Non-Criminal Jury Trials, and Remote Hearings During the COVID-19 Pandemic (Amended Order) (S. Ct. Order issued October 1, 2020).

WHEREAS: The Wisconsin Supreme Court “no longer requires that personal masking, social distancing, and sanitizing court facilities be part of any plan for circuit court and municipal court proceedings approved by the chief judge of the applicable judicial district. Instead, circuit courts and municipal courts, with the approval of the applicable chief judge, shall make county-wide decisions about what is in the best interest of circuit court and municipal court operations, respectively. This includes deciding whether or not to continue to require masking, social distancing, and sanitizing court facilities on a county by county basis.”

WHEREAS: The circuit court judge have determined that it is in the best interest of the circuit court operations for Richland County to amend its existing COVID-19 Court Operational Plan, dated July 20, 2021.

THEREFORE: The COVID-19 Court Operational Plan for Richland County is hereby amended.

Date: September 28, 2021



Honorable Robert VanDeHey
Chief Judge
Seventh Judicial Administrative District

RICHLAND COUNTY OPERATIONAL PLAN FOR REOPENING COURT AS OF OCTOBER 4, 2021

Recognizing the need to ensure the health and safety of litigants, attorneys, visitors, court staff, judges, and other individuals entering the buildings housing the courts, the Court of RICHLAND COUNTY will implement the following plan:

Richland County Circuit Court will resume remote appearances in all cases EXCEPT jury trials and Sobriety Court. Jury trials and Sobriety Court will continue to be in person but with strict requirements for masks and social distancing.

Safety Criteria for In-Person Appearances

1. ***Personal Protective Equipment*** – Face coverings shall be worn continuously in the courtroom, jury room, and other court-related confined spaces during proceedings. Masks will be provided to all court participants who do not have a face covering. The only exception to this requirement will be if the judge determines on the record that it is necessary for a witness not to wear a face covering during the witness' testimony in order for the judge or jury to weigh the witness's credibility. Notices addressing this requirement shall be posted at the entrance of each courtroom, jury room, and court related confined space and the notice shall provide that this requirement will be enforced by the judge of the circuit court.

2. ***Air Purifying Equipment*** - HEPA air purifying equipment shall be used to maintain air quality in each courtroom and jury room.

3. ***Social Distancing*** - A distance of at least six feet shall be maintained between all individuals in the courtroom, except individuals residing in the same household may sit together. The seating for participants, counsel, and court staff have been arranged to provide for at least six feet between individuals.

4. ***Limited Attendance in the Courtroom*** - Because of the importance of social distancing requirements and the need to maintain six feet between individuals, it will be necessary to control and restrict attendance in the courtroom. The court will require remote appearances for hearing participants and spectators in all cases except jury trials and Sobriety Court. The court will open up the Zoom meeting for each matter that is not a closed hearing to allow public access even if the parties appear in person.

5. ***Signage*** – Signs shall be posted at the entrance to the courtrooms, jury rooms, and other court-related confined spaces requiring all individuals to maintain minimum social distancing requirements, to use hand sanitizer, and to wear face coverings. A sign shall also be posted at the entrance of each courtroom, jury room, and court-confined space that hand sanitizer and disinfecting wipes are available for their use. The signs shall be either the signs provided by the CDC or prepared by staff.

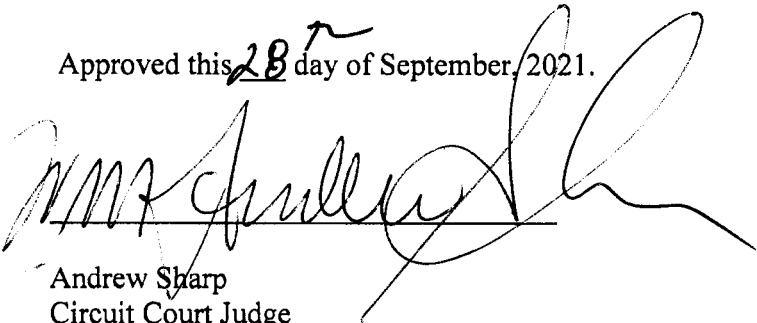
6. **Hand Sanitizers** – Each courtroom shall have alcohol-based hand sanitizer available for use before, during, and after the proceeding.

7. **Vulnerable Populations** – The court will take into consideration any accommodation(s) requested by individuals who are over age 65 and individuals with serious underlying health conditions. The court will take into consideration the requests of other individuals who do not fall into the definition of vulnerable population but express health concerns regarding an in-person court appearance. These matters will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis, but the court will liberally grant such requests. Court notices shall include language:

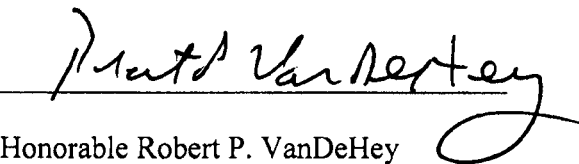
“Accommodations will be made for vulnerable individuals (those over age 65 or individuals with serious underlying health conditions), as well as other individuals who have health concerns about appearing in person. Please call (608) 647-3956 to make alternate arrangements.”

The circuit court shall continue to follow its operational plan as approved by the Chief Judge until further order of this Court.

Approved this 28th day of September, 2021.


Andrew Sharp
Circuit Court Judge

Approved this 28th day of sept, 2021.


Honorable Robert P. VanDeHey
Chief Judge
Seventh Judicial Administrative District