

Councils of Judges for Potter, Randall and Armstrong Counties

Amarillo Bar Association – director@amarillobar.org

Amarillo Area Young Lawyers Association – thomas.mcmillan@amarillo.gov

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Panhandle Criminal Defense Lawyers Association – j.e.wooldridge@att.net

Panhandle Family Lawyers Association – ckw@uwlaw.com

NALS of Amarillo – nalsofamarillotexas@gmail.com

General Public – By Posting on County Websites and Notice to Local Media Outlets

March 19, 2020

Re: Policies and Procedures for all County Courts at Law, District Courts and the IV-D Child Support Court. (Different policies and procedures may apply to Child Protective [CPS] Courts - consult those courts for further guidance). These policies and procedures will remain in effect from 3/19/20 until further notice.

To All Concerned:

The Councils of Judges for Potter, Randall, and Armstrong Counties intend to follow all current and updated rules, regulations, policies, procedures and recommendations of the Texas Office of Court Administration, Texas Supreme Court and Texas Court of Criminal Appeals during this pandemic crisis. Until further notice, in the same manner as given here, legal matters pending before the courts will be handled as follows. A copy of the current *“First Emergency Order Regarding the COVID-19 State of Disaster”* can be viewed here:

<https://www.txcourts.gov/media/1446056/209042.pdf> Please check the Texas courts site for updates. If the Emergency Rules change you are responsible for compliance with the current rules.

All “non-essential” matters may be postponed until or after May 8, 2020. All jury trials during that time will be postponed. Any jury panels scheduled for the remainder of March and April and the week of May 4, 2020 are canceled. If you have been summoned to appear, **during the months of March or April or the week of May 4, 2020 only**, you are excused without any additional action required by you. If you have any questions about this please contact the District Clerk’s office for the county in which you were called to serve. Those numbers are:

806-468-5600 (Randall County); 806-379-2300 (Potter County); or, 806-553-2860 (Armstrong County).

Essential Matters, such as: in custody criminal pleas, mental health hearings, temporary restraining orders, juvenile detention hearings and some Child Protective Court hearings (see caveat above), will be held, when possible, by remote means. Currently, the courts anticipate this will be accomplished by using a teleconference app called Zoom. Lawyers, litigants, witnesses, the general public and others wishing to participate should download the free Zoom app for your mobile device or visit zoom.us for more information. Zoom is a third party vendor and none of the counties or court are responsible for its content or terms of use. If, and when, a hearing using the Zoom program is scheduled, the parties will be provided a meeting I.D. and password via email from the court's Outlook calendar. This information will also be available on the website for the County in which the hearing is to be held by searching for the cause number or client name on the public records part of the website.

As the courts get a permanent process in place and are satisfied it is possible to conduct non-essential matters remotely, additional efforts will be made to accommodate those on a case-by-case basis. All such hearings will be conducted in accordance with the POTTER, RANDALL AND ARMSTRONG COUNTIES OMNIBUS ORDER FOR CIVIL AND FAMILY LAW LITIGANTS (attached below). Please understand that your patience is appreciated as we work through this unprecedented process. The Court Coordinators in particular have been, and will continue to be, overwhelmed with inquiries as we proceed.

We are currently attempting to designate certain courts to handle all criminal matters for a set period of time to streamline the process. As soon as such courts are designated and scheduled additional instructions will be posted.

Because the Family Protective Courts are governed by different guidelines and considerations, please consult with them about matters pertaining to scheduling or logistics involving your case if applicable.

For Family Law and Civil matters pending in the County Courts at Law, District Courts and IV-D Child Support Court, please see additional matters set forth in the attached Order.

As is always the case, if you are represented by an Attorney, please stay in contact with that counsel, and do not contact the courts directly. If you are currently on a surety bond or personal bond, please keep in contact with the person or entity supervising that bond. If you are on probation or parole, contact your officer with any questions you have, including but not limited to scheduled appointments.

Please understand that the courts – including the Judges and their staff – cannot give you legal advice. Attempting to talk to the Judge or staff beyond matters pertaining to scheduling and/or logistics, without the other litigant(s) and lawyer(s) present, may violate the rules of Judicial Conduct and are thus prohibited.

Everyone in the Justice System understands the anxiety that results, under normal circumstances, for those involved. We appreciate that the current climate only increases that anxiety. We pledge to remind ourselves of that fact as we try to meet our constitutional duties to you the public.

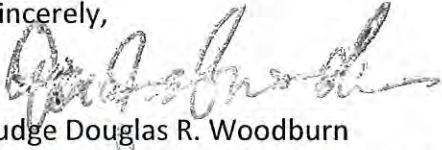
For additional Justice System information, the following websites may be informative:

<https://www.co.potter.tx.us/page/potter.home> <https://randallcounty.com/>
<http://www.co.armstrong.tx.us/> <https://www.txcourts.gov/oca/>

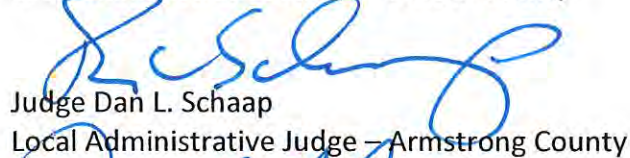
For local information concerning the coronavirus please see:

<https://www.amarillo.gov/departments/community-services/public-health>

Sincerely,



Judge Douglas R. Woodburn
Local Administrative Judge – Potter County



Judge Dan L. Schaap
Local Administrative Judge – Armstrong County



Judge John B. Board
Local Administrative Judge – Randall County

Cc: District and County Clerks, District and County Attorneys, County Judges, Office of Court Administration, County Webmasters, Local Media

POTTER, RANDALL AND ARMSTRONG
OMNIBUS ORDER FOR CIVIL AND FAMILY LAW LITIGANTS

The Governor has declared a state of emergency and the Office of Court Administration (OCA) has suggested that all non-essential court proceedings should be suspended. Current technology has greatly expanded the ability for courts to hear matters without the participants being actually present in the courtroom of a particular court. As a result the County Courts at Law and District Courts will continue to hear matters subject to each Court's determination concerning the necessity of the cause, with particular emphasis on essential proceedings, chiefly: CPS removal hearings, temporary restraining orders/requests for temporary hearings in family cases, juvenile detention hearings, family violence protective orders, and certain mental health proceedings. All hearings will be conducted on a "virtual" basis as described below unless specific authorization is obtained from the Court for in person presentation with notice to all parties, which will be granted only on rare occasions due to a particularized need.

PROCEDURES FOR LITIGANTS

All Courts intend to use Zoom video conferencing to conduct hearings. It is free to download at zoom.us or you can download the app directly to your cell phone, Ipad or tablet. If, and when, a hearing using the Zoom program is scheduled, you will be provided a meeting I.D. and password via email from the Court's Outlook calendar. Your computer must have internet access, a video camera and a functional microphone. IF YOU CAN ONLY PARTICIPATE VIA TELEPHONE YOU MUST INQUIRE WITH THE COURT THE DAY BEFORE THE HEARING TO FIND OUT IF IT WILL BE POSSIBLE TO DO SO FOR YOUR HEARING. If you have any doubt as to whether the Court has your email address, please send an email to the Court Coordinator for the Court holding your hearing.

If you intend to offer any exhibits during the hearing you must email the exhibits to all parties and to the Court Coordinator for the Court holding your hearing. All exhibits must be exchanged by no later than 2 pm the day before the hearing. With the exception of those documents required to be provided by the local rules in Family Law cases, the Court will not review any exhibits provided to the Court Coordinator until the exhibit has been offered and admitted in evidence. The subject of the email will list the full cause number and designate the documents as Petitioner (or Plaintiff), and Respondent (or Defendant), Intervener or other Party: Exhibit #1, 2, etc. The Court will not consider any exhibits which have not been emailed to the Court Coordinator and all parties in a timely manner, absent good cause. The documents must be filed in .pdf format. Failure to follow these procedures will result in the exhibits being excluded from the record. IN FAMILY LAW CASES EACH PARTY IS ORDERED TO PROVIDE ALL DOCUMENTS REQUIRED BY THE LOCAL RULES INCLUDING FINANCIAL INFORMATION STATEMENTS, REQUIRED TAX RETURNS, PAY STUBS AND OTHER DESIGNATED DOCUMENTS IN ADVANCE OF THE HEARING.

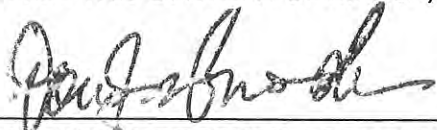
The parties are ordered to email a copy of any responses or replies which are e-filed with the Clerk less than 48 hours prior to the hearing to the Court Coordinator, in addition to filing with the Clerk. E-mailing a copy of the document to the Court Coordinator shall NOT be considered filed, but must be filed with the clerk in order to be considered filed in the case. [Notice: Do not include the Court Coordinator or the Judge as a service contact when e-filing your documents!] Any case law a party wishes to have the Court consider need not be e-filed with the Clerk but should be emailed to the Court Coordinator the day before the hearing to allow consideration. Documents which have been e-filed and accepted need not be re-filed with the Clerk.

Child Protection Service Courts are not included in these rules and will issue their own particularized guidelines.

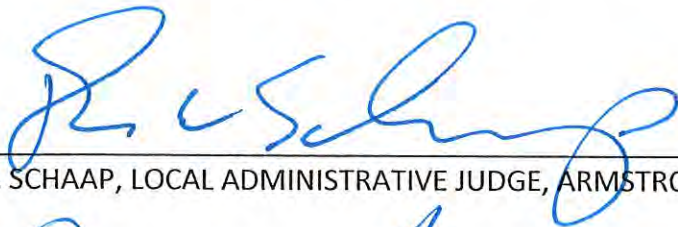
FOR THE PUBLIC

THE OPEN COURTS PROVISION OF TEXAS LAW ALLOWS ALL TEXANS ACCESS TO COURT PROCEEDINGS. AS SUCH, ANYONE MAY JOIN THE ZOOM HEARING. THE MEETING I.D. AND PASSWORD WILL BE AVAILABLE ON THE WEBSITE FOR THE COUNTY IN WHICH THE HEARING IS TO BE HELD BY SEARCHING FOR THE CAUSE NUMBER OR CLIENT NAME ON THE PUBLIC RECORDS PART OF THE COUNTY'S WEBSITE. IF YOU ARE VIEWING THE PROCEEDINGS, PLEASE MUTE YOUR CONNECTION TO PREVENT DISRUPTION TO THE PROCEEDINGS. WHILE THE PUBLIC MAY VIEW OR LISTEN TO PROCEEDINGS, VIDEO OR AUDIO RECORDING IS PROHIBITED AND MAY SUBJECT THE VIOLATOR TO CIVIL OR CRIMINAL PENALTY.

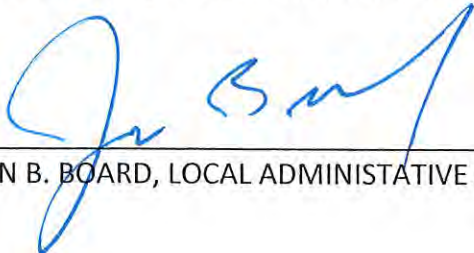
ENTERED THIS 19TH DAY OF MARCH, 2020.



DOUGLAS R. WOODBURN, LOCAL ADMINISTRATIVE JUDGE, POTTER COUNTY



DAN L. SCHAAP, LOCAL ADMINISTRATIVE JUDGE, ARMSTRONG COUNTY



JOHN B. BOARD, LOCAL ADMINISTRATIVE JUDGE, RANDALL COUNTY