

**46<sup>th</sup> JUDICIAL CIRCUIT COURT**  
**Taney County, Missouri**

**JEFFREY M. MERRELL**  
**PRESIDING JUDGE**

**CHERYL PETERSON**  
**SECRETARY TO PRESIDING JUDGE**

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May 13, 2020

**For Public Dissemination:** Announcement About Court Business and Taney County's Judicial Center

Having met the following "Gateway Criteria" for transitioning from Phase Zero to Phase One:

- No confirmed COVID-19 cases in the court facility within 14-day period;
- Rescission or lack of stay-at-home orders, or the relaxing of group gathering restrictions applicable to our community;
- Improving COVID-19 health conditions over a 14-day period in the community, including conditions such as the number of confirmed COVID-19 cases and related deaths in relation to our community's population density, size of particularly vulnerable populations, and availability of medical facilities including emergency and intensive care capacity;
- Consultation with local health officials or departments concerning changes to levels of court and courthouse activities; and
- Consultation with local judiciary partners such as Children's Division personnel, juvenile officer, members of the local bar, prosecutors and public defenders, law enforcement and probation and parole;

Presiding Judge of the 46<sup>th</sup> Judicial Circuit has considered moving the Taney County courts from Phase Zero to Phase One an appropriate transition, beginning May 18, 2020.

Phase Zero is the level all courts in the State of Missouri have been operating at since the Missouri Supreme Court's Order of March 13, 2020 (as well as subsequent Supreme Court Orders). Phase One will include the following measures within the Taney County Judicial Center:

- Judges may consider resuming only the most critical in-person proceedings and restrict jury proceedings to only the most extraordinary, pressing, and urgent cases;
- The Judicial Center's large venues and common areas should be closed (including break rooms, etc.);
- Occupancy rates in court rooms and other rooms kept to 10 persons or less, with strict social distancing protocols observed;
- Courts will consider requiring the use of masks or face coverings;
- Judges will allow vulnerable parties, lawyers, witnesses, etc. to participate in proceedings remotely, or else postpone their required presence at the court facility;
- Judges will continue utilizing all available technologies to limit in-person courtroom proceedings;
- The suspension of non-essential travel by judicial employees will continue;
- The use of appropriate screening at the entrance to the judicial center (which has been coordinated with court security officers);

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- The increased cleaning and disinfection of common areas, and consider providing hand sanitizers and wipes;
- Vulnerable judicial employees will work with supervisors to stay home, including employees who live with or care for vulnerable persons;
- Judicial employees will observe 6-foot minimum physical distance from others, and consider use of masks or face coverings;
- Court will allow judicial employees to work in shifts whenever possible and feasible to keep staffing levels to bare minimum to support court activity;
- Court will allow judicial employees to stay home under certain circumstances (described in Operations Directives).

Also as part of Phase One, the Presiding Judge will continue to consult with and seek guidance from local health officials in order to adapt court operating decisions consistent with the needs of local health conditions, and re-examine and update local court orders and COVID-19 notices, as appropriate.

If our courts and our community safely operate in Phase One for at least 14 days, and conditions in our community continue to improve, then it is possible for our circuit to transition to Phase Two. Any plans for future transitions will be announced nearer to said transition.

Jeffrey M. Merrell  
Presiding Judge  
46<sup>th</sup> Judicial Circuit  
Taney County, Missouri

\*\*\* **“Vulnerable”** individuals are defined by the CDC as individuals 65 years or older or individuals with underlying medical conditions, particularly if not well controlled, including those who suffer from chronic lung disease, moderate to severe asthma, serious heart conditions, immune disorders, obesity, diabetes, or chronic kidney or liver disease.