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San Patricio County Court at Law Reopen Plan

Judge Elizabeth Welborn announced that on June 1, 2020, the San Patricio County Court at Law will resume conducting in-person court proceedings for the first time in two months after the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. While the Court continued to operate its civil, juvenile, and jail dockets using the Court's *Lifesize video conference system*, the remainder of the misdemeanor criminal dockets had to be reset following the Texas Office of Court Administration's prohibition of in-person court hearings that was in place through May 31, 2020.

As in-person hearings start again this month, things will look much different. Defendants and litigants will be wearing face coverings, and large dockets will be relocated to the over 10,000 square foot San Patricio County Civic Center to allow for proper social distancing guidelines. Medical screenings will be conducted prior to entering the courthouse or designated court building. The Court implemented an Infectious Disease Protocol to minimize the risk of community transmission of the virus. The Protocol sets forth policies and procedures for continuances and alternatives to in-person hearings for those individuals that have been exposed to the virus or believe they are part of the vulnerable population and their appearance would jeopardize their own health.

The local presiding Judge Janna Whatley created the COVID-19 Operating Plan for the San Patricio County Judiciary. The Operating Plan for the San Patricio County Judiciary is to ensure the health and safety of the litigants, attorneys, court staff, and individuals entering the buildings housing the courts. San Patricio County Judges implemented protective measures designed to assist in keeping everyone safe, including limiting the number of cases on dockets or relocating large dockets to the civic center if an in-person hearing is scheduled. Accommodations will be made for anyone concerned about their in-person hearings and those that are part of the vulnerable populations. The vulnerable population includes any individual that has preexisting medical conditions or compromised immune system, and all individuals over the age of 65. Individuals 73 and older are considered part of the highly vulnerable population and are requested to promptly contact the office of the court they are scheduled to appear - prior to entering the courthouse.

All of the information regarding the re-opening of the courts system and the steps taken to protect the public can be found on the individual court's websites. If you have any questions or concerns, the judges encourage you to contact the Court as we all work together through this unusual time.

For information, please contact County Court at Law (361) 364-9325 or District Courts (361) 364-9310.

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