

**UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE EASTERN DISTRICT OF MICHIGAN**

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U.S. District Courthouses in Eastern Michigan to Reopen on Tuesday, Sept. 7

News Release

For Immediate Release

September 2, 2021

The U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Michigan plans to reopen its five courthouses to the public beginning Sept. 7 following a 17-month shutdown caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Lawyers, jurors, the public, journalists, and employees will be required to operate under restrictions to prevent the possible spread of COVID-19 at federal courthouses in Detroit, Ann Arbor, Bay City, Flint and Port Huron. The restrictions are based on guidance from the Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts, President Biden and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Policies may be revised as the Court strives to provide a safe working environment.

“The Court is doing everything in its power to make sure that everyone who uses our facilities are protected,” said Chief U.S. District Judge Denise Page Hood. “The Court will monitor developments, the number of people coming and going in our courthouses and adjust safety measures accordingly. We ask that everyone cooperate in our efforts to safely dispense justice.”

Employees will be required to indicate whether they have been vaccinated against COVID. If not, they will be required to obtain two weekly COVID tests at their own expense and submit the results to their supervisors.

The public – lawyers, jurors, citizens and news reporters – will be required to answer questions about their possible exposure to COVID and have their temperature taken at an electronic kiosk before being permitted to enter the courthouses. They will be asked if they have had COVID within the previous 10 days, been exposed to anyone with COVID during that period, or are experiencing COVID symptoms such as coughing, shortness of breath, muscle or body aches, loss of taste or smell, nausea or vomiting. Those who answer affirmatively to any of those questions or fail the temperature check will not be permitted to pass through security.

Court employees, jurors and visitors will be required to wear masks and observe social distancing. The Court will provide masks to jurors and to probation and pretrial service officers because they work in the field.

Jurors will sit socially distanced in courtroom galleries, which will limit spectator seating at jury trials. With advance notice, arrangements will be made for an overflow courtroom that will allow onlookers to view the proceeding live on large screen television monitors. Seating will be limited for other hearings due to social distancing requirements.

Remote video access will continue to be provided for some civil hearings, but nearly all criminal proceedings will be conducted in person at the courthouses.

Lawyers who expect a large crowd of participants or spectators at their hearings should alert judicial case managers several days beforehand so an overflow courtroom may be arranged. At least one journalist who is willing to serve as a pool reporter will be permitted into the main courtroom of crowded hearings. (See instructions below for pool reporters.)

The Court's online Court Calendar at www.mied.uscourts.gov will indicate the type of access that will be provided. In-person hearings will be identified as such. Video hearings may be accessed by pressing the public access button and following the prompts.

Criminal arraignments, appearances on criminal complaints and detention hearings no longer will be livestreamed outside the courthouses. Those proceedings may be observed live on two large television screens in Room 115 (The Detroit Room) of the Detroit courthouse. As cases are called, lawyers, family members and defendants not in custody will be directed across the hall to Room 104 (Duty Court) for their proceeding. Room 115 contains plenty of seating. Arraignments in divisional courthouses will be conducted in person and in magistrate judge courtrooms. Seating in those courtrooms will be arranged and/or marked to adhere to social distancing requirements.

The Clerk's Office in Detroit will resume normal 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. weekday operating hours beginning Sept. 7. The Clerk's Office may be reached at 313-234-5000 or by using the online chat function on the lower right side of the Court's website at www.mied.uscourts.gov.

Social distancing also will limit occupancy on Court elevators.

Ever since the five federal courthouses in the Eastern District of Michigan closed in March 2020, judges and Court staff have worked remotely, conducting more than 6,000 arraignments, plea hearings, sentencing and other proceedings in criminal and civil cases by video and teleconferencing.

Criminal and civil jury trials as well as criminal hearings where defendants asked to appear in person in a courtroom were postponed.

In May 2021, the Court began conducting the first of more than 200 criminal hearings in court and in person based upon the age, complexity and urgency of the cases. In every instance, the in-person hearings were limited to lawyers, witnesses and other essential

participants, including a pool reporter, who were required to observe social distancing and wear masks or face shields.

During that period, the Court conducted a bench trial in a civil lawsuit and a criminal trial. The criminal trial, however, was halted temporarily last week after the judge and chambers staff were exposed to a staff member who had been exposed to someone with COVID. Testing showed that none of the judicial staffers had contracted COVID.

Pool Reporting Requirements

At least one journalist will be permitted to attend crowded in-person court hearings. That journalist must be willing to serve as a pool reporter and brief other news organizations at the end of the hearing and before they file their own story.

The pool reporter will be selected on a first-come, first-served basis by contacting Public Information Officer David Ashenfelter at David_Ashenfelter@mied.uscourts.gov at least three days before the hearing. The pool reporter will be responsible for immediately distributing hearing details to other news organizations and shall not hold back anything the reporter plans to include in their own stories. The pool reporter must create a method for disseminating the information to other journalists, which can be done by setting up an email list.

The pool reporter must be employed by a recognized media organization or have a previously obtained Court-issued credential to enter the courthouses with a cellphone. (Reporters who have obtained such credentials have pledged to abide by the ethics policy of the Society of Professional Journalists.)

For additional information, contact the Clerk's Office at 313-234-5000 or by using the online chat function on the lower right side of the Court's website at www.mied.uscourts.gov. Jurors and prospective jurors should call the Jury Department at 313-234-5085.

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