

Councils of Judges for Potter, Randall and Armstrong Counties

Amarillo Bar Association

Amarillo Area Young Lawyers Association

Panhandle Criminal Defense Lawyers Association

Panhandle Family Lawyers Association

Texas Panhandle Paralegal Association

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>

All “non-essential” matters will 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, 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. Additional instructions will be provided as soon as available. You will require a login and password and perhaps other identifying information to join any conference.

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. Until a policy is in place, contact your assigned court for further information. 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 like 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. If you are currently on a surety bond or personal bond, please keep in contact with the person or entity supervision 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 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/>

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

