

Warren Circuit Court Responds to COVID-19

March 18, 2020 – For Immediate Release

In response to concerns about Coronavirus COVID-19 (COVID-19), the Warren Circuit Court has developed an internal working group to assess COVID-19's potential impact on the Court operations, employees, and public, and is monitoring the situation with guidance from health officials, while enacting continuity of operations which will change how we operate.

The [Indiana State Department of Health](#), which is Indiana's lead agency on COVID-19, has the latest information about the virus. The best approach is to use fundamental healthy practices, such as washing your hands, covering your mouth with your arm or a tissue rather than your hand, and staying home when you are ill. For more information on COVID-19, please consult the Indiana State Department of Health or the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(www.cdc.gov\)](#)

Maintaining required court operations is important. The health and safety of our employees and community are equally important. Therefore, the Warren Circuit Court is adjusting the way we operate.

General Policy

In Warren County, we are faced with no reported cases of COVID-19 in our county or any adjoining county in Indiana, according to the Indiana State Department of Health, therefore we are keeping the courthouse open for business, but following those best practices recommended from the Centers for Disease Control and Indiana State Department of Health. The Court will begin delaying (continuing) many non-essential hearings, that do not otherwise impact the Constitutional Rights of litigants, by entering orders to reschedule such hearings, up to eight (8) weeks, to improve social distancing and allow for self-isolation practices of those involved, including more intensive continuances of matters during the next fourteen (14) days, on a case-by-case basis. This has resulted in cancelling substantially all in-person hearings over the next fourteen (14) days. The Court will encourage and approve audio and video appearances whenever possible during this time. The Court has ordered that individuals, including litigants, attorneys, witnesses, or jurors, who in the last fourteen (14) days: themselves or household members have tested positive for or are exhibiting symptoms of COVID-19 (*fever, cough and shortness of breath*) or have been specifically directed to self-quarantine by a medical or government professional; who know they have come in direct contact with a person testing positive for COVID-19; or who have traveled outside the United States or to community with known COVID-19 outbreaks, should contact the Court to request continuances or reasonable accommodations, but should not come to the Courthouse in person without calling first. Anyone who do not need to appear in court, such as family supports, public observers and visitors to the Courthouse, are strongly discouraged from attending court proceedings and may be turned away by courthouse security to insure proper social distancing guidelines. More information will be posted, concerning closures or changed procedures, on the Court's website at www.warrencounty.in.gov if updates occur.

Courthouse Employees

All staff of the Warren Circuit Court and Probation will continue to report as directed by the Circuit Court Judge, unless they fall into the **General Policy** restrictions above. Court employees and custodial staff are taking measures to sanitize public areas at least hourly and after court hearings, to include door handles,

courtroom desks, chairs, counters, phone handsets, public computer terminals, and other areas commonly touched by employees and visitors to the courtroom and probation offices and follow CDC best practices.

Jury Duty

Individuals who have received a jury summons to report for jury duty, should plan to report until notified directly by the Bailiff or Court Staff. The Court is addressing individual jury trials on a case-by-case basis, to protect the public, while protecting the due process rights of the defendants involved. Jurors should adhere to the **General Policy** above, concerning COVID-19 precautions. Jurors may call the Warren Circuit Court Jury Line at (765) 762-7250 for updates on upcoming jury trials.

Litigants/Parties to a Case

Individuals who are scheduled to come to court for a hearing, will continue to appear as scheduled, unless further ordered by the Court. The Warren Circuit Court is in the process of continuing and rescheduling hearings, on a case-by-cases basis, depending upon the facts of the case. If represented, litigants should be in contact with their attorney to receive the advice of counsel.

Attorneys

Lawyers who are scheduled to appear for hearings that do not require the appearance of litigants or presentation of evidence, should arrange with opposing counsel and Court Staff to appear telephonically. Status, pretrial, and other non-substantive hearings, in which the attorneys involved jointly agree that no substantive action will be taken, should jointly contact the Court to convert those hearings to Telephonic Attorney Conferences, waive the appearance of the litigants, or jointly continue the hearings. The Court will consider social distancing as good cause, in light of the novel COVID-19 concerns, for the next eight (8) weeks. Cases which can allow for the administration of justice and disposition of cases, should continue when possible. Attorneys may consider staggering, stacked hearings, to allow for better social distancing, and may contact court staff for approval of the same. The Court has authorized Court Staff to approve the same in due course, in light of COVID-19 concerns, for the next eight (8) weeks.

E-filing and Odyssey

Indiana's e-filing system is working. Cases and documents can continue to be filed through the statewide system. The Court does not anticipate pleadings practice or deadlines impacting pleadings practice to be altered by these procedures, except upon motion of a party and showing of good cause.

The statewide case management system (Odyssey) is working. Litigants, attorneys, press, and public can continue to view case information on mycase.in.gov. Although the Warren Circuit Court is an Odyssey County, not all courts use Odyssey; [see a listing of courts online](#).

Jail

The Warren Circuit Court is working with the Warren County Sheriff to ensure public safety. Anyone arrested or defendants already in jail, will be assured their due process rights, including affording hearings by video to minimize contact with the courthouse employees and the public.

All questions regarding jail operations and visitation should be directed to the Warren County Sheriff's Office at (765) 764-4367.

Probation and Court Ordered Services

The Warren Circuit Court runs the Warren County probation department and Court Services, including pretrial services. Probation Officers are working with low to moderate risk offenders to reduce in person visits, allowing for call in, write in, or video reporting, when clients are otherwise in good standing and compliance. Individuals having appointments with the Probation Office or Pretrial Services, should call well in advance of their appointment to determine if a face-to-face appointment will be necessary, under their circumstance and disclose any COVID-19 symptoms, positive tests, or travel, as set forth in the **General Policy** above.

Special Volunteers

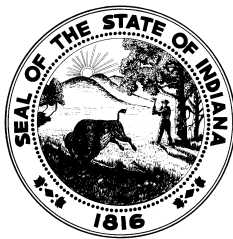
CASA Volunteers, who have cases before the court scheduled through May 10, 2020, should contact the CASA Director for guidance on reporting to court, on a case-by-case basis. The Court will encourage written reports to be filed, in lieu of in-person reporting, and encourage minimizing face-to-face contacts.

Administrative Rule 17

The Warren Circuit Court, which is part of Judicial District 11, has joined with three other counties having a single court: Parke, Fountain, and Vermillion Counties, to file a Joint Petition in Case 20S-CB-00147 pursuant to Administrative Rule 17, with the Indiana Supreme Court, to seek modified rules that includes minimizing the public's access to the Courts, if they present symptoms of COVID-19 and providing more liberal means to access the Courts through the use of technology than may typically be permitted, during this novel time, as well as delaying non-essential proceedings to limit foot traffic in the courthouse, improving social distancing and the congregation of large groups, as discouraged by the CDC and local health departments. A copy of the [Joint Petition](#) will be available on the mycase.IN.gov, along with the Order.

[Administrative Rule 17](#) describes the Indiana Supreme Court's ability to oversee the local administration of trial courts in the event of any unanticipated work interruption. Trial courts can utilize the rule by petitioning the Supreme Court for emergency relief, if needed, based on local circumstances. The relief sought by the Joint Petition filed by District 11 solo courts, allow judges to assist fellow judicial officers in the District, in the event of a COVID-19 event, requiring self-quarantine of a solo judicial officer, and the temporary relaxing of certain time restrictions provided by statute or rule, which do not otherwise deprive individuals of due process and other constitutional protections.

The Warren Circuit Court is working with and monitoring closely local emergency management and the health departments to ensure we are taking the necessary steps in response to the virus. Public or Media with questions should be directed to Court Staff at (765) 762-3604.



Hunter J. Reece, Judge
WARREN CIRCUIT COURT