

Chancery Court
Memphis, Shelby County, Tennessee
30th Judicial District

Shelby County Chancery Court's Gradual Reopen Strategy

The Tennessee Supreme Court has offered general guidance on reopening plans, but specific planning has been placed in the hands of local courts to determine the best way forward for their own needs. The following strategic plan outlines Shelby County Chancery's practices moving forward as it performs its duties and responsibilities while keeping the public's health and safety at the forefront.

A. Admission to Courthouse:

- 1) Only litigants and lawyers appearing on the docket will be allowed in the courtroom. Lawyers and litigants will not be permitted to exceed ten (10) people unless specifically excepted by the Chancellor and no other in-person hearings are taking place in another Part.
- 2) Only persons who have business with the Clerk's Office (i.e. filing of lawsuits, receive records, etc.) shall be allowed into the Courthouse. The Clerk's Office will continue having only one set of doors for ingress and egress at the filing counter, Room 308. A drop box is also available for those matters that must be handled in-person (e.g. adoption filings).
- 3) No spectators, friends, or other individuals who have no Courthouse business will be permitted in the Courthouse.
 - a. Pursuant to approval by the Shelby County Sheriff's Office, Courthouse security personnel shall inform anyone attempting to enter the Courthouse that entry is restricted to those with business and/or case(s) and signs to this effect will be posted at the entryway prior to entry.
- 4) Chancery Court sits on the west side of the 3rd floor, and visitors to Chancery Court will utilize only the northwest entrance at the corner of Washington/2nd Street.
- 5) Clerks (when feasible) and/or Court Security Personnel will utilize screening resources when available, such as touchless thermometers and the relevant COVID-19 health questions prior to entry to the Courthouse for litigants, attorneys, and other individuals who have specific business in the Courthouse. Court staff and chancellors may also be subject to health screening.
- 6) Masks covering the mouth and nose will be required. Gloves will be encouraged and permitted. Masks and gloves will be provided if available. Hand sanitizer will be available. Court personnel, courtroom staff, and chancellors will be required to wear

masks and optionally gloves, and Sheriff's Officers will also be required to wear masks and optionally gloves, per order of the Sheriff.

- 7) Before entering a courtroom, everyone should wash their hands at the restrooms on the north corners of the building. Upon exiting the courtroom, everyone should wash their hands again.

B. Management of Social Distancing in Courtrooms/Docket Management:

- 1) The following public health practices will be enforced to ensure the safety of litigants, citizens, attorneys, and court personnel.
 - a) Attorneys have been requested, prior to the resumption of in-person hearings, to diligently attempt to contact litigants to resolve as many cases as possible.
 - b) Where there are orders for consent, voluntary non-suits, dismissals, and other matters that may not require appearance by any party, these orders may be mailed, emailed with authenticating language from all signatories (not a paralegal or assistant), or left in the respective Part's mailbox outside the Filing Counter in Room 308.
 - c) The floor has been marked with yellow tape at six foot intervals, which should be used as helpful guidance in observation of social distancing.
 - d) Plan to arrive only a few minutes before court to minimize contact with exiting parties of other cases. Use benches and seating only if necessary, and at distances created by the taped barriers.
- 2) Media requests for access to court proceedings must be directed to the Clerk and Master (as is our current procedure). Media access will be permitted in compliance with court rules. Social distancing and maximum capacities will be considered in determining the extent of media access inside the courtroom.
- 3) Cleaning and disinfecting will take place in each courtroom regularly throughout the day as the flow of litigants and court personnel allow (as each group is moved out), and a thorough cleaning and disinfecting will take place at the conclusion of each docket.

C. Continued Use of Teleconference, Video Conferencing & Other Technology

- 1) As a major population center, Shelby County must take greater precautions for public health. Therefore, for as long as permitted, Chancery Court will continue using teleconference and video conference tools for business to the greatest extent possible.
 - a) With a backlog of several months, Chancery Court Chancellors and Staff will swiftly, methodically increase its capacity for hearings as it acclimates to new technologies.
 - b) The expedience of using these technologies will not be permitted to undermine the rights of parties, and to the greatest extent possible will mirror those

traditions, preferences, requirements, and practices of regular in-person court hearings.

- 2) Court staff will utilize those technological tools where possible to work at a distance on schedules set by the Chancellors and Clerk & Master.
 - a) Chancery Court will not close down at any point, and will remain open to the public.
 - b) Staff working hours may be modified temporarily by the Chancellors and Clerk & Master.

[/s Chancellors]