



St. Louis County Circuit Court

105 South Central Avenue
Clayton, Missouri 63105

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

St. Louis County Circuit Court Returns to “Operating Phase Zero” Due to COVID-19

CLAYTON, MO – July 23, 2020 – The St. Louis County Circuit Court is returning to “Operating Phase Zero,” restricting public access to the courthouse after several employees tested positive for the coronavirus. The decision by Presiding Judge Michael D. Burton means that, for the next two weeks, all in-person proceedings will be rescheduled and grand jury proceedings will be postponed.

However, the courts are not closed, Judge Burton emphasized. Court proceedings and trials will continue through video conferencing. As always, the Courthouse remains open to accept all filings. Those seeking orders of protection may enter the building to file their petitions, as the Adult Abuse Office remains open. Nonetheless, petitioners are urged to file their petitions for orders of protection online by going to the court’s website at wp.stlcountycourts.com/order-of-protection/. Everyone must continue wearing masks and having their temperatures taken before they can enter the building.

“The courts are an essential public service, and the wheels of justice must continue to turn,” Judge Burton said. “Our judges and I.T. staff have developed innovative ways to make that happen remotely. Yet, with the number of cases of COVID-19 rising sharply in St. Louis County and throughout the state, an additional level of caution is necessary to protect the health of our employees and the public. It is essential that we reduce personal contact and density in our building as much as possible to slow the spread of the virus.”

Starting this week, the court will proceed to a greatly reduced staff, with as many employees as possible working from home. Even so, increased caution is important, Judge Burton said.

All of the COVID-19 positive employees have been quarantined at home and their work stations have been commercially disinfected. The St. Louis County Department of Public Health has been conducting contact tracing. None of the employees is believed to have contracted the virus at the Courthouse, but rather through community contact.

As directed by the Missouri Supreme Court on May 4, 2020, judicial circuits cannot rush to “open their doors” during this pandemic. They must do so gradually. The Supreme Court developed four phases (Zero through Three) to allow for this process. In determining whether changing phases is appropriate, the Court provided specific “Gateway Criteria” to consider. Burton and other leaders from the Courthouse and the community engage in weekly discussions to address the criteria and the Circuit’s phase.

While the Supreme Court authorized certain proceedings to occur in person even in Phase Zero, it did not mandate that those hearings occur in person. Courts in the City of St. Louis and St. Charles County are also increasing restrictions on public access and canceling in-person hearings due to the presence of the virus.

St. Louis County Acting Co-Director of the Department of Public Health, Ms. Spring Schmidt, told the court earlier this week that she is “extremely concerned” about the number of new cases of COVID-19 in St. Louis County due to increased community spread. Schmidt said she expected the upward trend to continue as schools reopen.

Since the pandemic began, Missouri has had 33,624 confirmed cases of COVID-19; of those cases 9,361 (27.8%) came from St. Louis County, according to recent data from the Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services. Of the 1,132 deaths due to COVID-19 in Missouri, 610 (58.9%) came from St. Louis County. The state reported on Wednesday the largest single-day increase in new COVID-19 cases since the start of the pandemic, the fifth time the state has topped its daily high in the last eight days.

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