



CIRCUIT COURT OF PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY

COVID-19 PANDEMIC
COURT OPERATIONS AND BEYOND

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COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Hybrid Operations

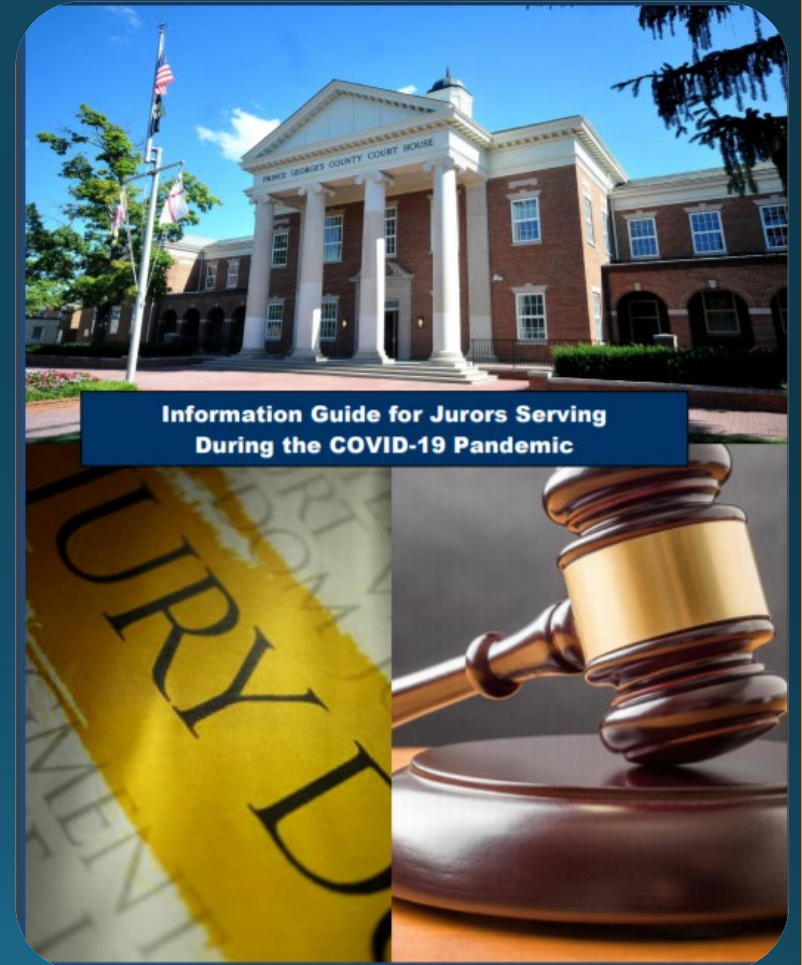
On Monday, April 26, 2021 the Circuit Court reconvened Jury Trials.

A hybrid model (in-person and virtual) has been created to accommodate the extensive case load in the Court. In-person hearings will be held in compliance with COVID-19 pandemic safeguards to account for the protection of all staff and visitor's safety.

- Family Cases will continue to be held virtually
- Some Criminal and Civil non-jury matters will be held virtually
- Criminal Jury Trials will be held in-person
- Civil Jury Trials will be held in-person

Jury Voir Dire will be held in two (2) ways:

- Criminal will be held in-person
- Civil will be held virtually via Zoom



Criminal Jury Trial Impact

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, since March 2020, all Jury Trials were suspended.

As of April 26, 2021 there are 2,034 Criminal jury trials that must be heard and this number will continue to grow with each new indictment issued by the Grand Jury.

Under our hybrid pandemic protocol, Criminal jury trials will be set on Mondays and Tuesdays. Priority of criminal trials will be given to those who are incarcerated awaiting trial.

As of April 26, 2021 there are approximately 540 individuals being held on a Circuit Court matter at the County Detention Center.



Civil Jury Trial Impact

As of April 26, 2021 there are 1,551 Civil jury trials that must be heard.

Under our hybrid pandemic protocol, Civil jury trials will be set on Wednesdays and Thursdays. Jurors will be selected virtually.

The Circuit Court has also completed a protocol to hold Civil jury trials virtually. However, it is dependent upon the approval of the Civil Virtual Jury Trial Rules by the Court of Appeals. Until that time, all Civil Jury Trials will continue to be held on Wednesdays and Thursday in-person.



Spacing Impact

Prior to the pandemic, all 32 courtrooms were used to hold in-person hearings for all case types (Criminal, Civil, Juvenile, Foreclosure, and Family). Courtroom social distancing requires the following changes:

- Criminal Jury Trials – Instead of one courtroom and one deliberation room per trial, it now requires three (3) courtrooms for one trial.
- Civil Jury Trials – Instead of one courtroom and one deliberation room per trial, it now requires two (2) courtrooms for one trial.
- Jury Operations – Instead of utilizing the Jury Lounge to accommodate up to 500 jurors a day, it now can only accommodate 56 jurors a day.
 - a. Larger courtrooms previously used for hearings have been repurposed to accommodate jurors.
 - b. The County has approved our request to use space in the County Administration Building (CAB) for additional jurors.
 - c. Jurors are reporting to the courthouse on a staggered bases to accommodate a.m. and p.m. jury selection.



Staffing Impact

- Criminal Jury Trials – Prior to the pandemic, four (4) staff were required to manage the courtroom. Now, a minimum of (15) staff are required to manage one (1) criminal jury trial.
- Civil Jury Trials – Prior to the pandemic, four (4) staff were required to manage the courtroom. Now, a minimum of (6) staff are required to manage one civil jury trial.

Family Case Impact (Non-Jury Trials)

Despite the challenges of the pandemic, all Family hearings were and continued to be heard virtually. Therefore, Family cases proceeded as scheduled notwithstanding the pandemic.

Between March 2020 – April 2021 **14,952** Family hearings have been held via Zoom.

Even though more cases are being heard in-person, Family cases will continue to be heard virtually post-pandemic.

Virtual Zoom Team



At the start of the pandemic, the Circuit Court recognized the immediate need to continue hearing cases and providing access to justice for the residence of Prince George's County.

To achieve the goal, the Circuit Court created the first *Virtual Zoom Team* in the State of Maryland.

The team is made up of our *extraordinary existing staff* that were repurposed to achieve this goal. Below are the current positions reassigned to the *Virtual Zoom Team*:

- Lead: IT Specialist
- Lead Back-Up: Children's Waiting Room Coordinator
- Zoom Team Support: DCM Coordinator
- Zoom Team Support: Criminal Scheduling Clerk
- Zoom Team Support: Family Scheduling/Continuance Clerk
- Zoom Team Support: Civil/Juvenile Scheduling Clerk
- Zoom Team Customer Service Line: Supply Clerk
- Zoom Team Customer Service Line: General Clerk

Virtual Zoom Team

Since the start of the pandemic, the *Virtual Zoom Team* has enabled the Circuit Court to:

- Fully support all Family Division Hearings virtually
- Fully support all virtual Settlement Conferences
- Coordinate Civil virtual Voir Dire to select jurors for Civil jury trials
- Coordinate virtual non-jury Criminal matters
- Coordinate virtual non-jury Civil matters
- Coordinate virtual Juvenile matters
- Support Problem Solving Courts to include virtual graduations
- Support the virtual Townhalls

As the Circuit Court is now in Phase V, the *Virtual Zoom Team* will enable the Court to simultaneously conduct all virtual operations, support virtual Voir Dire and support virtual jury trials when the rules are approved by the Court of Appeals, all while the Court resumes in-person operations. The simultaneous operation will allow the Court to address the backlog of cases that was created during the pandemic. The virtual operations will also assist the Court in preparing for MDEC – *Tentatively scheduled for October 2022.*



Budget Impact

The *Virtual Zoom Team* was created by repurposing existing employees. Now that the Circuit Court is resuming in-person proceedings in addition to virtual operations the Court must backfill these positions. Virtual hearings are and will continue to be apart of the Circuit Court on-going operations.

As we went through the initial budget process with OMB and the County Executive, the Circuit Court froze 14 positions that were not fully needed during 100% virtual operations. However, a resumption of full Court operations magnifies the need for most of those positions. The Circuit Court has subsequently been in conversation with OMB and articulated that the previously submitted budget will not allow the Court to fully operate when in-person hearings fully resume.

The following positions must be filled at the cost of **\$1,169,246** which represents salary and fringe:

8 Zoom Team Members

3 Paralegals

a. Foreclosure (2) – The ban on Foreclosure lifts on June 30, 2021

b. Juvenile (1)

1 Court Reporter

1 HR Specialist

1 Administrative Aide

- Submitted in the FY22 County Executive Budget **\$18,387,400** (\$1,615,800 less than FY2021)
- Additional Money Needed for Circuit Court Operations in FY22 **\$1,169,246**
- Total Amount Need for Circuit Court Operations **\$19,556,646**

Lessons Learned

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has taught the Circuit Court:

1. Massive creativity – Court staff, attorneys, and litigants have adapted to new Court operations.
2. Effectiveness and Efficiency of Virtual hearings – Allows litigants to participate in hearings where they are, cost effectiveness, less time consuming:
 - Avoids travel concerns litigants and witnesses
 - Avoids health concerns
 - Parking issues

Examples:

- Adoption Hearing (Reduces travel across the country for a hearing)
- Adult Guardianship cases (Reduces movement of elderly from nursing homes)
- Post Conviction cases (Reduces transport of inmates)

3. Family Cases and Non-Contestant Matters will remain virtual

Overall, the continuation of virtual services will minimize the need for future expansion of Court infrastructure. However, it does require staff resources, staff development, and staff support of Court services, while reducing visitor traffic in the Courthouse.

Circuit Courts FY2022 Newly Created Zoom Team						
Position	Proposed Classification	Proposed Grade	Proposed Working Title	Proposed Salary	Proposed Fringe	Total Comp & Fringe
New Postion Request	Audio Visual Specialist I	18	Virtual Court Technologist	\$ 55,000.00	\$ 17,435.00	\$ 72,435.00
New Postion Request	Audio Visual Specialist I	18	Virtual Court Technologist	\$ 55,000.00	\$ 17,435.00	\$ 72,435.00
Internal Transfer	Administrative Aide II	15	Virtual Courtroom Support Assistant	\$ 42,000.00	\$ 13,314.00	\$ 55,314.00
Internal Transfer	Audio Visual Specialist I	18	Virtual Court Technologist	\$ 55,000.00	\$ 17,435.00	\$ 72,435.00
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Internal Transfer	Audio Visual Specialist I	18	Virtual Court Technologist	\$ 55,000.00	\$ 17,435.00	\$ 72,435.00
Internal Transfer	Administrative Aide II	15	Virtual Courtroom Support Assistant	\$ 42,000.00	\$ 13,314.00	\$ 55,314.00
Internal Transfer	Audio Visual Specialist I	18	Virtual Court Technologist	\$ 55,000.00	\$ 17,435.00	\$ 72,435.00
Internal Transfer	IT Project Coordinator III	24	Manager, Virtual Courtroom Support Services	\$ 80,000.00	\$ 25,360.00	\$ 105,360.00
Total Cost for New Unit				\$ 494,000.00	\$ 156,598.00	\$ 650,598.00

FY2022 Positions on hold										
#	Position Title	Position Number	Grade	Salary		Date Vacated or Created	Organizational Assignment	Status of Recruitment Efforts	Funding Source	
				Budgeted	Expended (Est.)					
1	Paralegal 2G	30003002	G16	\$ 57,461	\$ 18,215	7/1/2021	JUDICIAL PARALEGAL STAFF	On Hold	GF	
2	Paralegal 2G	30055654	G16	\$ 57,461	\$ 18,215	8/3/2020	JUDICIAL PARALEGAL STAFF	On Hold	GF	
3	Paralegal 2G	30050545	G16	\$ 57,461	\$ 18,215	6/8/2020	JUDICIAL PARALEGAL STAFF	On Hold	GF	
4	Admin Aide I	30000137	G13	\$ 42,295	\$ 13,408	1/20/2020	CT CALENDAR MANAGEMENT	On Hold	GF	
5	Administrative Assistant 4G	30051560	G27	\$ 98,278	\$ 31,154	1/6/2020	H/R GENERALIST	On Hold	GF	
6	Court Reporter-G	30004148	G23	\$ 80,854	\$ 25,631	6/30/2020	COURT REPORTERS STAFF	On Hold	GF	
*** Their will remain 8 position on hold***				\$ 393,810	\$ 124,838					
				Comp	Fringe	Total				
Total Request for Additional Funding for FY2022				\$ 887,810.00	\$ 281,435.77	\$ 1,169,245.77				
				FY 2022 Proposed	FY2022 Additional Request	Total Request Needed				
Circuit Courts FY 2022 General Fund Request				\$ 18,387,400.00	\$ 1,169,245.77	\$ 19,556,645.77				

2Year Budget Comparison			
Budget Year	FY 2021	FY 2022	Diff. FY 2021 vs. FY 2022
General Fund	\$ 20,003,200.00	\$ 19,556,646.00	\$ (446,554.00)