

VAN BUREN COUNTY – ALL COURT POLICY (36 th Circuit Court, 7 th District Court and Van Buren County Probate Courts)		
SUBJECT: Public Health Emergency Operations Plan / Policy	SECTION: Administration	DATE: 11/18/2020
PREPARED BY: Frank Hardester, Cari Elmore	NUMBER: Policy 2.006	RESCINDS: 3/17/2020, 3/24/2020, 4/14/2020, 4/29/2020, 5/13/2020, 5/27/2020, 6/10/2020, 7/20/2020, 9/23/2020

REFERENCES:

- [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#)
- [Michigan Supreme Court Administrative Orders](#)
- [Policy 4.002 Digital Audio-Video Recordings of Court Proceedings](#)
- [Van Buren County Court Virtual Court Information](#)

Van Buren County Courts are open to conduct court operations Monday through Friday 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. The courts will continue to address after hour matters using established protocols. Visitors entering the building will be subject to COVID-19 screening procedures that include a health questionnaire and temperature check. Filings and inquires must be handled remotely as described in this plan. The court is under directives of the Michigan Supreme Court to have a phased-in reopening plan. See Local Administrative Order [Return to Phase One](#). This action is being taken to:

- Follow recommendations from the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) (CDC).
- Comply with the [Michigan Supreme Court Administrative Orders](#).
- Combat the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Reduce the risk posed to the public, court staff, and others, while protecting public safety and the legal rights of our citizens.

PROCEDURES

A. Contact Information

Patrons may call, email, or visit the court using the information below. Messages and emails are being addressed daily.

1. 36th Circuit Court:
 - Mail: 212 E. Paw Paw Street, Suite 212
Paw Paw, MI 49079
 - Email: 36circuitcourt@vbco.org
 - Phone: (269) 657-8200 ext. 2340

- a. County Clerk:
 - Mail: 212 E. Paw Paw Street, Suite 101
Paw Paw, MI 49079
 - Email: clerk@vbco.org
 - Phone: (269) 657-8218 Option 6

- b. Friend of the Court (FOC):
 - Mail: 219 E. Paw Paw Street
Paw Paw, MI 49079
 - Email: foc@vbco.org
 - Phone: (269) 657-7734

- c. Juvenile Court:
 - Mail: 212 E. Paw Paw Street, Suite 240
Paw Paw, MI 49079
 - Email: juvenilem@vbco.org
 - Phone: (269) 657-8237

- d. Child Abuse / Neglect Central Intake Hotline: (855) 444-3911

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| 2. 7 th District Court: | Mail: 212 E. Paw Paw Street, Suite 130
Paw Paw, MI 49079
Email: 7dc@vbco.org
Phone: (269) 657-8222 |
| 3. Probate Court: | Mail: 212 E. Paw Paw Street, Suite 220
Paw Paw, MI 49079
Email: probate@vbco.org
Phone: (269) 657-8225 |
| 4. Specialty Court: | Mail: 212 E. Paw Paw Street, Suite LL101
Paw Paw, MI 49079
Email: specialtycourts@vbco.org
Phone: (269) 657-8200 ext. 2478 |

B. General

1. Only authorized visitors will be allowed to enter the facility. Court staff must alert security of the names of people who will be allowed entry. Only the following individuals shall be permitted to enter:
 - a. Parties and essential case participants for hearings
 - b. Parents of in-custody juveniles for hearings
 - c. Parties' counsel for the hearings
 - d. Essential court and county staff
 - e. Essential law enforcement
2. For more information about remote proceedings see our [Virtual Court Information](#) page on our website.
3. The court will require necessary visitors to practice social distancing, complete a COVID 19 questionnaire, have a temperature reading and wear facial masks. [MCR 8.116\(d\)](#) In the interest of public health, large bags will not be allowed in the facilities.
4. The court will continue to accept filings using means other than in-person filing. The following methods may be used:
 - a. Email.
 - b. Using our [drop box location](#) near the building entrance at each court.
 - c. Mail using the United States Postal Service.
5. Scheduling notices will include the following verbiage:
 Due to COVID-19, **PARTIES ARE NOT TO APPEAR IN PERSON**; instead, all hearings will be conducted remotely. You are instructed to use zoom and appear in Virtual Meeting Room ____ using meeting ID _____. Instructions to connect using zoom are attached. If you have any technical questions or are requesting to appear in person, please contact the court at least 3 days prior to your hearing by calling or emailing us at: _____.
6. Each judicial officer, at his or her discretion, will live stream court proceedings on our YouTube channel which can be found [here](#). The public or any party may immediately request a copy of the audio/video file pursuant to [Policy 4.002 Digital Audio-Video Recordings of Court Proceedings](#) policy. During the timeframe of this emergency plan, the court will waive the video copy request fee. Parties must request a copy using [VBC-2004 Court Recording Request Form](#).
7. Instructions for joining a remote hearing, viewing live streamed hearings, or ordering copies of the audio/video file can be found on the Virtual Court Information page on our website: <https://www.vbco.org/virtualcourt.asp>. For specific guidelines, instructions and principles see form VBC-0049, [Guidelines for Virtual Hearings in Van Buren County Courts](#).

C. Payments

1. For details on payment options for criminal cases see our [Payment Options](#) form (VBC-0711) Court payments may be made as follows:
 - a. Online: <https://www.vbco.org/courtpayments.asp>
 - b. Dropbox at court entry locations
 - c. By mail, find locations at <https://www.vbco.org/locationshours.asp> .

D. Probation / Caseworker Supervision

1. All supervision of clients/defendants will be conducted remotely using electronic communication or in person as needed on a limited basis.
2. Home / off-site visits are not allowed.

E. Circuit Court

1. Criminal Matters

- a. Parties will continue to receive notices of court dates. Notices will contain language regarding remote appearance.
- b. Filings must be made with the county clerk's office by email, mail, or by using the drop box near the court entrance. The clerk's office contact information is as follows:
Email: clerk@vbco.org
Phone: (269) 657-8218
- c. If a party is filing a motion, the court will be in communication with the filing party to arrange the date and time of the proceeding. If you have concerns about the communication, or if you wish to contact the court regarding scheduling, feel free to contact the court at:
Email: williamsm@vbco.org
Phone: (269) 657-8200 ext. 2345

2. Civil Matters

- a. Parties will continue to receive notices of court dates. Notices will contain language regarding remote appearance.
- b. Filings must be made with the county clerk's office by email, mail, or by using the drop box near the court entrance. The clerk's office contact information is as follows:
Email: clerk@vbco.org
Phone: (269) 657-8218
- c. Upon receipt of filings, the court will be in communication with the filing party to arrange the date and time of the proceeding. If you have concerns about the communication, or if you wish to contact the court regarding scheduling, feel free to contact the court at:
Email: cowgillk@vbco.org
Phone: (269) 657-8200 ext. 2213

3. Domestic Matters

- a. Parties will continue to receive notices of court dates. Notices will contain language regarding remote appearance.
- b. Filings must be made with the county clerk's office by email, mail, or by using the drop box near the court entrance. The clerk's office contact information is as follows:
Email: clerk@vbco.org
Phone: (269) 657-8218
- c. Upon receipt of filings, the court will be in communication with the filing party to arrange the date and time of the proceeding. If you have concerns about the communication, or if you wish to contact the court regarding scheduling, feel free to contact the court at:
Email: schmittm@vbco.org
Phone: (269) 657-8200 ext. 2342

4. Friend of the Court (FOC)

- a. Parties will continue to receive notices of court dates. Notices will contain language regarding remote appearance.

- b. Specialized programs such as the 24/7 Dad and Do It for the Kids Workshop for Mom will be held remotely.
- c. If you have specific questions, contact the FOC at:
Email: foc@vbco.org
Phone: (269) 657-7734

5. Juvenile (Delinquency / Neglect)

- a. The Judicial Officers will process emergency proceedings using the normal on call weekly rotation.
- b. Parties will continue to receive notices of court dates. Notices will contain language regarding remote appearance.
- c. Filings must be made with the juvenile clerk's office by email, mail or by using the drop box near the court entrance. The clerk's office contact information is as follows:
Email: juvenilem@vbco.org
Phone: (269) 657-8237

6. Personal Protection Orders (PPO's)

- a. PPO Initiation – Filings must be made with the county clerk's office by email, mail or by using the drop box near the court entrance. The clerk's office contact information is as follows:
Email: clerk@vbco.org
Phone: (269) 657-8218
- b. Parties will continue to receive notices of court dates. Notices will contain language regarding remote appearance.
- c. If you need assistance with filing, parties may contact Domestic Violence Coalition at:
Email: mhookerva1@live.com
Phone: 269-655-9008
- d. Upon receipt of filings, the court will be in communication with the filing party to arrange the date and time of the proceeding. If you have concerns about the communication, or if you wish to contact the court regarding scheduling, feel free to contact the court at:
Email: kleins@vbco.org
Phone: (269) 657-8200 ext. 2321

F. District Court

1. Criminal Matters - Misdemeanors & Felonies

- a. On misdemeanors, the arresting agency will advise defendants that the court will notify them of their next appearance date
- b. Parties will continue to receive notices of court dates. Notices will contain language regarding remote appearance.
- c. Filings must be made with the district court clerk's office by email, mail or by using the drop box near the court entrance. Upon receipt of filings, the court will be in communication with the filing party to arrange the date and time of the proceeding. If you have concerns about the communication, or if you wish to contact the court regarding scheduling, feel free to contact the court at:
Email: 7dc@vbco.org
Phone: (269) 657-8222

2. Civil Matters

- a. Parties will continue to receive notices of court dates. Notices will contain language regarding remote appearance.
- b. Filings – Filings must be made with the district court clerk's office by email, mail, or by using the drop box near the court entrance. Upon receipt of filings, the court will be in communication with the filing party to arrange the date and time of the proceeding. If you have concerns about the communication, or if you wish to contact the court regarding scheduling, feel free to contact the court at:
Email: 7dc@vbco.org
Phone: (269) 657-8222

3. Civil Infractions / Tickets
 - a. Extended appearance / to pay dates will be set 90 days out from citation.
4. Wedding Ceremony/Services are suspended during the term of this plan.

G. Probate Court

1. All matters
 - a. Parties will continue to receive notices of court dates. Notices will contain language regarding remote appearance.
 - b. Filings – Filings must be made with the probate court clerk’s office by email, mail, or by using the drop box near the court entrance. Upon receipt of filings, the court will be in communication with the filing party to arrange the date and time of the proceeding. If you have concerns about the communication, or if you wish to contact the court regarding scheduling, feel free to contact the court at:
Email: probate@vbco.org
Phone: (269) 657-8225
2. GAL Reviews
 - a. All supervision of wards will be conducted remotely using electronic communication. This includes face-to-face visits.
 - b. Visits to health/residential care facilities are limited due to [Executive Order 2020-136](#).

H. Specialty Court

1. Court sessions will be held remotely during the term of this plan. Judges will communicate electronically with participants as a group.
2. Client contacts and supervision must be held remotely.
3. Drug testing will continue following guidance from CDC as needed.
4. If you have an emergency, you can contact the specialty court office at:
Email: specialtycourts@vbco.org
Phone: (269) 657-8200 ext. 2478

FORMS

- [VBC-0001 How to Join a Virtual Court Proceeding Using Zoom](#)
- [VBC-0711 Payment Options](#)
- [VBC-2004 Court Recording Request Form](#)
- [VBC-0049 Guidelines for Virtual Hearings in Van Buren County Court](#)

Effective Date: 11/18/2020

Date: 11/18/2020

Chief Judge Signature: 