



# JULIA MALDONADO

JUDGE, 507TH DISTRICT COURT

201 CAROLINE

HOUSTON, TEXAS 77002

(713) 274-4620

March 12, 2020

## FAMILY COURTS JOINT STATEMENT REGARDING HEALTH AND SAFETY CONCERNS

The Harris County Family Courts recognize the concern about a potential outbreak of coronavirus. The health and safety of attorneys, clients, the public, and those who work in the courthouses remain a paramount concern. The family courts are doing their part to address these concerns in the following manner:

1. If a lawyer or litigant is sick: Lawyers or litigants who are sick, or think they are exposed to COVID-19, should contact the court to reschedule their hearings or trials.
2. Designation of Essential Court Matters: Unless a case is designated below as an Essential Court Matter, all in-person hearings and trials will be **continued until further notice**. Essential Court Matters will proceed as usual, however, you, must contact each individual court.
3. For the Family Division (including IV-D courts and the Project Courts), Essential Court Matters include:
  - Suits brought under Texas Family Code Title 4 (protective orders and family violence);
  - Suits brought under TFC Chapter 157, Subchapter H (habeas corpus and writs of attachment for children);
  - Suits filed by a governmental entity under TFC Title 5 (CPS cases);
  - Suits brought under TFC Chapter 33 (judicial bypass);
  - Enforcements under TFC Chapter 157 if a respondent is in custody;
  - Other suits or hearings with jurisdictional deadlines; and
  - Other matters that may be designated by the Court at its discretion.

Any question regarding whether a matter is an Essential Court Matter should be addressed to the Court where a case is assigned.

4. Phones/contacting the courts – Look on your court’s website for up-to-date contact information. Phones will be set up to forward to offsite locations if necessary. If you have any questions, please send email to Court Coordinator and a response will be provided within twenty-four (24) hours.
5. Parties are encouraged to submit contested motions on a submission docket where available. Check individual court rules for a list of matters that may be considered by submission.
6. Beginning the date of this order, there will be no uncontested matters taken, except if a specific court takes matters by submission. (Please check with the designated court).
7. Technology used to conduct hearings should be made widely available, to the extent possible. The Family Courts are developing a plan for electronic appearances to be rolled out as soon as possible.
8. The family courts may modify the protocol adopted for certain public health and safety concerns as circumstances warrant.

To protect the due process rights of all residents of Harris County, the Family District Courts will not be calling any jury trials for the remainder of March 2020.

Signed this 12<sup>TH</sup> day of MARCH, 2020.



Julia Maldonado  
Administrative Judge – Family Division  
Harris County District Courts