March 12, 2020

DALLAS COUNTY FAMILY COURTS JOINT STATEMENT REGARDING HEALTH AND SAFETY CONCERNS AND COURT SETTINGS

The Dallas 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. In addition to following the orders of Dallas County related to civil matters as a whole and any guidance received from the Texas Supreme Court, the Dallas County 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 coordinators via telephone to reschedule their hearings or trials.

2. **IMPORTANT Designation of Essential Family Court Matters: Unless a case is designated below as an Essential Family Court Matter, all in-person hearings and trials will be continued until further notice.** Essential Family Court Matters will proceed as usual, unless you have been notified otherwise by the Court in which the hearing is set.

3. **Essential Family Court Matters:** For the Family Courts (including IV-D courts, Legacy Court, and Permanency Court), Essential Family 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 Family Court Matter should be addressed to the Court in which the case is pending.

4. **Phones/Contacting the Courts:** The Courts should be contacted by phone or through email, not in person. 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 the Court Coordinator and a response will be provided within twenty-four (24) hours.

5. **Submission Dockets:** Parties are encouraged to submit contested motions on a submission docket when allowed by the court. Check individual court rules for a list of matters that may be considered by submission.

6. **Agreed Orders:** Agreed orders shall be submitted to the Court by email to the Court Coordinator.

7. **Uncontested Matters/Prove-up Documents:** Beginning the date of this order, there will be no uncontested matters heard (including prove-ups), except if a specific court takes matters by submission.

8. 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.

9. The Family Courts may modify the protocol adopted for certain public health and safety concerns as circumstances warrant.

Signed MAR 1 2 2020

Ashley Wysocki,
Judge 254th District Court

Kim Cooks
Judge 255th District Court

David Lopez,
Judge 256th District Court

Mary Brown
Judge 301st District Court

Sandra Jackson,
Judge 302nd District Court

Dennise Garcia
Judge 303rd District Court

Andrea Plumlee,
Judge 330th District Court