



STATE OF ILLINOIS  
CIRCUIT COURT  
22ND JUDICIAL CIRCUIT  
McHENRY COUNTY, ILLINOIS



May 21, 2020

**For Immediate Release**

**FROM: The Chambers of Chief Judge James S. Cowlin**

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**Illinois Supreme Court Modifies Order to Allow Circuit Courts to Resume**

(Woodstock, IL) On May 20, 2020, the Illinois Supreme Court modified M.R. Order 30370, which states in part, “effective June 1, 2020 each circuit may return to hearing court matters, whether in person or remotely, according to a schedule to be adopted for each county by the chief judge in each circuit. The circuit courts shall continue, to the extent possible, to allow for appropriate social distancing and attempt to reduce the number of persons appearing personally for court appearances.” In addition, the Supreme Court released the Supreme Court Guidelines for Resuming Illinois Judicial Branch Operations during the Covid 19 Pandemic, which are to be incorporated in re-establishment plans of local courts.

The 22<sup>nd</sup> Judicial Circuit, in conjunction with justice stakeholders, McHenry County Emergency Management, and the McHenry County Department of Health, has developed a comprehensive Reestablishment Plan, which can be found in its entirety at <https://www.mchenrycountyil.gov/county-government/courts/22nd-judicial-circuit>. Therefore, on June 1, 2020, pursuant to Administrative Order 2020-11 for the 22<sup>nd</sup> Judicial Circuit entered by Chief Judge James S. Cowlin and the 22<sup>nd</sup> Judicial Circuit Reestablishment Plan, the Michael J. Sullivan Judicial Center will return to full functionality, with multiple safeguards in place.

The following strategies should be used by all patrons of the Judicial Center to promote the health and well-being of all:

1. **BEFORE** coming to the Michael J. Sullivan Judicial Center, check your court date & time, as many court dates and times have changed. This can be accomplished by accessing the McHenry County Circuit Clerk of the Court’s website at <https://www.mchenrycountyil.gov/county-government/departments-a-i/circuit-clerk>.

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2. Arrive no earlier than 15 minutes prior to your scheduled court time; leave the building promptly when finished.
3. Only people necessary to the proceeding should come to court, leave family, and friends at home.
4. Entry to the Judicial Center is controlled by the McHenry County Sheriff's Office. Bring only your keys, photo ID, cash/credit card and court papers into the building. Only cellphones needed for court related purposes are permitted to be brought in the Judicial Center. In order to speed entry into the Judicial Center, no purses, backpacks, bags, electronics, etc. are allowed in. Also avoid wearing metal (jewelry items, large belt buckles, steel-toe shoes, money clips, watches, etc.) to speed entry through building security. Metal items trigger the magnetometer, slowing entry to the building.
5. Wearing masks, or face coverings and practicing social distancing is required in all areas of the Michael J. Sullivan Judicial Center. Any person who is experiencing fever, chills, other symptoms, or has been exposed to COVID-19 or lives with a family member who has symptoms of COVID-19, should notify their attorney or if there is no attorney representation, should notify the Circuit Clerk of the Court of their inability to appear.

Additionally, protocols have been established for protective measures, and all courtrooms have been evaluated and the following steps have been taken.

- Social distancing decals have been placed on the floor.
- Seating has been marked.
- Germ shields have been installed in some courtrooms.
- Hand sanitizer is present in all courtrooms.
- Surface cleaner and disinfectant is present in all courtrooms.
- Courtrooms are regularly cleaned with a sanitizing agent.

The Criminal, Family, and Civil Divisions have evaluated their pre-COVID-19 practices and has put forth plans to manage their court proceedings. These plans include staggering court calls, reducing the number of cases to be heard, and waiving appearances of litigants.

Additionally, the 22<sup>nd</sup> Judicial Circuit's Department of Probation and Court Services have established protocols for their clients. If you receive services from the Department of Probation, please contact the department at (815) 334-4400 for further instructions.

There have been many changes to how and when cases are scheduled. There are also changes to how some cases may be heard. Beginning the week of May 26<sup>th</sup>, the 22<sup>nd</sup> Judicial Circuit is launching a pilot project for holding "virtual court." This initiative is a culmination of work of

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judges, administrators, Circuit Clerk's Office and Information Technology professionals and will allow individuals to appear for court on their computer, laptop, mobile device or phone via a video connection. This platform is being tested in traffic cases, small claims and a family courtroom. If successful, virtual hearings may be used throughout the court system.

In addition to video appearance, members of the public may be able to view court proceedings that will be live streamed to the internet to ensure public access to proceedings. Cases which are closed to the public will not be live streamed, and judges do have the judicial discretion to not live stream a proceeding. Links to live streaming can be found at <https://www.mchenrycountyil.gov/county-government/courts/22nd-judicial-circuit/live-streaming>.

Video or audio recording, of any live-streamed proceeding, by any party, attorney, or any member of the public, through any device or format is strictly prohibited. Failure to comply with this admonishment may result in the imposition of sanctions or in a finding of contempt.

This has been an unprecedented time for the judicial branch of government. However, through the collaborative efforts of many people, departments and agencies, the 22<sup>nd</sup> Judicial Circuit has continued to provide essential services during this time of crisis. Moving forward the Court will continually evaluate post COVID-19 practices, and if necessary will modify those practices to better serve all court patrons, while ensuring sufficient safeguards are in place.

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