

17th JUDICIAL CIRCUIT COURT

EUGENE G. DOHERTY
CHIEF JUDGE



WINNEBAGO COUNTY COURTHOUSE
400 WEST STATE STREET - ROOM 215
ROCKFORD, ILLINOIS 61101
PHONE 815-319-4800

PRESS RELEASE

Date: November 17, 2020

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Thomas Jakeway
Trial Court Administrator
Tel. (815) 319-4806

17TH CIRCUIT COURT REMAINS OPEN, PAUSES JURY TRIALS

Due to the growth of COVID in our area, the 17th Judicial Circuit announced that it is implementing a pause in jury trials effective November 23, 2020, through the end of January 2021. Chief Judge Eugene Doherty advises that, although the Court has already made extensive use of remote virtual hearings in 2020, it will be increasing its reliance on them to minimize the number of persons who must enter courthouse buildings. All court facilities remain open.

“This is a step taken out of caution,” Chief Judge Doherty said. “We have been very successful in minimizing the spread of virus in our facilities, but we know that the situation in the community is changing. We must all be mindful of the risk.”

Judge Doherty noted that litigants should be aware of the following:

- Litigants should be given instructions on how to attend court remotely, but if they have questions they should refer to <https://tinyurl.com/IL17thVC>.
- Some court locations may be moved or case times rescheduled. Litigants should make sure that the Circuit Clerk has their current contact information, including email address, to ensure proper notification.
- Any litigants who must appear in person are strongly discouraged from bringing other persons to court with them.

“We aren’t operating as we did a year ago, but we won’t be shut down to the degree we were in the spring,” Judge Doherty said. “The continued good work and cooperation of attorneys, staff, and the public have gotten us through this so far, and we are optimistic that the end is in sight.”

###

STATE OF ILLINOIS
IN THE CIRCUIT COURT OF THE 17TH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT
COUNTY OF BOONE
COUNTY OF WINNEBAGO

ADMINISTRATIVE ORDER 2020-28
TEMPORARY ORDER - COVID-19 PROCEDURE

This order supersedes Administrative Order 2020-22 entered on July 23, 2020.

Whereas the Circuit Court, pursuant to the Supreme Court's order of March 17, 2020, in M.R. 30370, previously reduced its operations to essential activities;

Whereas, the Supreme Court's order of May 20, 2020, in M.R. 30370, allows circuits to adopt their own plans for a resumption of court activity, and this Circuit did so effective June 1, 2020, as provided in Administrative Order 2020-21 entered on May 21, 2020;

Whereas, the Supreme Court's order of May 20, 2020, in M.R. 30370, implicitly allows circuits to step back from their reopening plans as dictated by local conditions;

It is therefore ORDERED that, effective immediately, the following procedures are in effect in the 17th Judicial Circuit:

1. **Masks / Face Coverings.** Pursuant to General Order 1.03, all persons, including attorneys, must wear a mask or face covering in public areas of the courthouse. This provision does not apply to any person who is: under age 2; incapacitated; having trouble breathing; or unable to remove the mask or face covering without assistance. Persons required to speak in the course of a court proceeding may be directed to remove a mask or face covering when speaking if necessary to make a record.
2. **Reduced Call Size.** In order to reduce the number of people in the building(s), the Court will, to the extent possible, reduce the number of cases slotted for each court call. This will in many instances require staggered court times. Attorneys are reminded that it is essential that they appear at the designated time in order to make this process work.
3. **Represented Parties Excused.** Unless ordered by the judge or directed by their attorney, parties in civil and family cases are strongly encouraged not to attend routine court hearings. Attorneys should advise their clients not to attend court unless their attendance is strictly necessary given the nature of the hearing at issue. In criminal cases, judges should discuss with the attorneys whether the defendant's presence might be excused.
4. **Additional Persons Discouraged.** Litigants are strongly discouraged from bringing any other person with them to the courthouse.
5. **Virtual Proceedings.** The Court will operate with increased reliance on virtual proceedings and hearings pursuant to Supreme Court Rules 45 and 241. Attorneys and parties who are offered the opportunity to appear virtually are strongly encouraged to do so. Those participating in a virtual hearing should plan to timely appear as scheduled and should become familiar with the evolving protocols at <https://tinyurl.com/IL17thVC>.

6. **Bench Warrants and Defaults.** Judges may refrain, in appropriate circumstances, from the issuance of bench warrants or the entry of default judgments. Individual judges may, based on the nature of the hearing, the case, and their call, be more flexible in excusing the appearance of a party or defendant.
7. **Jury Trials.** Effective November 23, 2020, and until February 1, 2021, no jury trials may proceed in the 17th Judicial Circuit Court. Dates set for jury trial on any judge's calendar falling prior to February 1, 2021, remain on the judge's calendar at the judge's discretion, but they may not proceed to trial. Pursuant to the Supreme Court's order, in criminal trials the period of delay shall not be attributable to either the State or the defendant for purpose of 725 ILCS 5/103-5.
8. **Alternate Court Spaces.** The following will be utilized as alternate court spaces:
 - a. In Winnebago County, the County Board Room, Winnebago County Courthouse, 400 West State Street, 8th Floor, Rockford, Illinois 61101.
 - b. In Boone County, Community Building Complex of Boone County, 111 West 1st Street, Belvidere, Illinois 61008.
9. **Individual Judge/Division Order.** Attorneys and parties should be aware that individual judges and/or divisions may issue their own guidance on practices in certain courtrooms.

ENTER: _____



Eugene G. Doherty, Chief Judge

DATED: _____

11/17/20