

Reopening press release

The Missouri Supreme Court has now released an order for reopening Missouri's circuit courts. This order provides guidance to the presiding judge of each judicial circuit on the steps that must be taken in order to reopen our circuit courts. The full order may be found at: <https://www.courts.mo.gov/page.jsp?id=156095>.

In summary, the directives contained in the order state that the courts are to reopen in phases. All courts are presently in Phase Zero, and after meeting certain criteria, may advance through each phase to Operating Phase Three. The criteria to be considered includes determining the local health conditions in relation to the COVID-19 virus. Each court must remain in a phase for at least fourteen (14) days prior to advancing to the next higher phase. Prior to advancing a phase, the court must inform both the Supreme Court and the public that the advance is upcoming. The Supreme Court's order also allows a local court to move back in phases if a local health condition deteriorates.


The order further directs the local courts to continue social distancing, and to work to allow "vulnerable" litigants, witnesses, victims, attorneys, and other individuals involved in court proceedings to participate remotely via audiovisual technology. "Vulnerable individuals" are defined by the Centers for Disease Control as:

1. Individuals 65 years or older, or
2. Individuals with underlying medical conditions, particularly if not well controlled, including those who suffer from:
  1. Chronic lung disease,
  2. Moderate to severe asthma,
  3. Serious heart conditions,
  4. Immune disorders,
  5. Obesity,
  6. Diabetes, or
  7. Chronic kidney or liver disease.

Operating Phase Three is the only phase wherein a court may resume regular jury proceedings, and then only if social distancing protocols can be achieved. No court may advance back to pre-COVID operations until further order of the Missouri Supreme Court.

Having reviewed the health conditions, I have found that the health conditions of Wright, Douglas, and Ozark counties are favorable to begin the reopening process. Accordingly, I will order that the courts of the 44th Judicial Circuit will move to Operating Phase One on May 16, 2020. I encourage everyone with any questions to contact the Circuit Clerk for further information about their case.

Stay safe and best regards



R. Craig Carter  
Presiding Judge  
44th Judicial Circuit