

## Courts Reopening Press Release

Pursuant to order of the Missouri Supreme Court which 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 found at <https://www.courts.mo.gov/page.jsp?id=156095>), and the 44<sup>th</sup> Judicial Circuit having successfully progressed through Operating Phases One and Two for a period of not less than two weeks each, and having reviewed the health conditions of the circuit, I have found that Wright, Douglas, and Ozark counties are favorable for the 44<sup>th</sup> Judicial Circuit to move to Operating Phase Three on June 15, 2020.

The Courts will continue social distancing, and will 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

In summary, the directives contained in the order of the Supreme Court allow courts to reopen in phases, 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 Supreme Court’s order also allows a local court to move back in phases if a local health condition deteriorates. 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.

I encourage everyone with any questions to contact the Circuit Clerk for further information about their case.

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R. Craig Carter, Presiding Judge 44<sup>th</sup> Judicial Circuit