



CHIEF'S CORNER

Happy New Year! We are currently operating under the administrative order entered on September 2, 2020, except as it relates to High Point. As I indicated in an earlier communication, due to inoperable elevators, extensive water damages, cases in High Point will continue to be heard remotely until otherwise notified.

I know many of you are saddened by the damages to the High Point Courthouse. I share in your disappointment. Of course, the county has contracted with a number of service providers in order to make the proper repairs so that we can return to a safe environment. However, we have been told that the public elevators will be inoperable until the end of next week, at the earliest.

Over the past several months we have implemented the following tools to assist us with access to justice in a safe environment:

- Remote Traffic Court (Effective May 2020)
- Remote Civil Calendar Calls (Effective June 2020)
- Remote Civil Hearings (Started in April of 2020; No longer by agreement of the parties; The hearing judge will determine whether the case is appropriate for remote hearing based on the length of the case and volume of exhibits. However, we have been hearing lengthy cases, as well as those that are short in nature.)
- Limited criminal/traffic dockets to one hundred defendants in District Court
- Limited child support, pro se, magistrate's appeals, small claims, and divorce dockets
- Relocating domestic violence and 2-B cases to courtroom 2A to allow more space for social distancing
- Combined felony court (2C) with criminal court (1C) to allow more space for social distancing
- Plexiglass in the courts to protect court personnel, attorneys and the public
- Hand Sanitation stations
- Body Scanners located at the entryways to read temperatures and alarm security for individuals with fevers
- Collaboration with the Health Department, Clerk of Superior Court, Public Defender, District Attorney, Bailiffs, and Senior Resident Superior Court Judge regarding responses to COVID-19 outbreaks
- Mandate for wearing masks and social distancing
- Allowed presidents of both the High Point and Greensboro Bar Associations to share concerns of bar members with a plan to address concerns where it is appropriate to do so
- Made efforts to obtain the equipment necessary to improve the quality of remote hearings, such as the installation of microphones to amplify sound in the virtual hearings

Please know that we are making every effort to allow for remote hearings when it is feasible to do so. The courts have adjusted and made improvements while trying to maintain a safe and healthy environment. However, there have been times when we did not have any other choice and had to close courts because of circumstances that are out of our control, such as a time when we did not have but three bailiffs available to man our courts, as a result of mandatory testing for the coronavirus.

Hopefully, the pandemic and the water damage in High Point will be a distant memory at some point. Until then, please know that we are making every attempt to balance the need to keep court personnel, attorneys and the general public safe while meeting our mandate to allow access to justice. In closing, I would like to thank everyone that has expressed support and compassion during this difficult time. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions or concerns at Teresa.H.Vincent@nccourts.org.

With Warm Regards,

Teresa H. Vincent

Teresa H. Vincent
Chief District Court Judge, 18th Judicial District