

**HEARING OFFICER CONFERENCES
FOR LAFAYETTE, VERMILLION & ACADIA PARISHES
RESTRICTIONS DURING PHASE 1 REOPENING**

Issued by 15th Judicial District Family Court on May 1, 2020

PLEASE READ THE FOLLOWING CAREFULLY AS THE RESTRICTIONS WILL AFFECT YOUR ABILITY TO ENTER THE OFFICES OF THE 15TH JUDICIAL DISTRICT HEARING OFFICERS LOCATED AT THE ADDRESSES BELOW:

**LAFAYETTE PARISH: 202 WEST MAIN STREET, LAFAYETTE, LA
VERMILLION PARISH: 100 NORTH STATE STREET, ABBEVILLE, LA
ACADIA PARISH: 500 NORTH PARKERSON AVE., CROWLEY, LA**

A. Entering the building.

1. No person shall enter the office of the 15th JDC Hearing Officers if they are diagnosed with Covid-19 or suffering from any of the following symptoms:
 - Cough
 - Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing

Or at least two (2) of these symptoms:

 - Fever
 - Chills
 - Repeated shaking with chills
 - Muscle pain
 - Headache
 - Sore throat
 - New loss of taste or smell
2. All persons entering the Hearing Officers' offices are required to wear a mask. If you do not have a mask, you can make one by following the simple instructions on the Center for Disease Control website at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/diy-cloth-face-coverings.html> or you may view the video at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tPx1yqvJgf4>. Gloves are optional.

In order to adhere to the six (6) feet social distancing requirement, the following will apply:

3. If both parties are represented by an attorney, only the attorneys shall be allowed to participate in-person in the Hearing Officer Conference. However, the parties are required to participate in the conference via telephone. Each attorney shall assure that his/her client is available by phone to participate in the conference. At the appropriate time, the attorneys shall contact their respective client, using the attorney's cell phone so the party may participate by phone.
4. If one party is represented by an attorney and the opposing party is self-represented, the self-represented party shall personally appear at the Hearing Officer's office to participate in the Hearing Officer Conference. However, the opposing party shall participate by phone and only his/her attorney shall personally appear to participate in the conference.
5. If both parties are self-represented, then both parties shall personally appear at the Hearing Officer Conference.
6. For conferences held in Lafayette, everyone is required to advise the security guard of your name and case information. The security guard will scan/wand each person outside before allowing anyone to enter the building. No cell phones are allowed inside the building, except by attorneys representing clients.

7. For conferences held in Vermillion and Acadia Parishes, everyone is required to advise the security guard of your name and case information. The security guard will scan/wand each person before that person is allowed to enter the office of the Hearing Officer. No cell phones are allowed inside the courtrooms.
8. If you are not represented by an attorney (self-represented), bring your court papers with you to the Hearing Officer's office so your case can be identified and you can be directed to the appropriate Hearing Officer.
9. Only the parties (plaintiff or Moving party and defendant or responding party in the legal proceeding) and/or their attorneys of record will be allowed to enter the building where the Hearing Officer Conferences are held. No witnesses or other individuals are allowed.

B. HEARING OFFICER CONFERENCE

1. Once inside the building of the Hearing Officers' office, you must practice social distancing of six (6) feet from other individuals. As a consequence, you may be asked to wait in another room or area of the building or outside the building until your Hearing Officer Conference begins.
2. If your Hearing Officer Conference was rescheduled due to the Courthouse closure and you were unable to have a telephone Hearing Officer Conference, you must appear at the scheduled hearing so that the Court can assist the parties in reaching a temporary order awaiting your rescheduled Hearing Officer Conference.
3. In the Hearing Officer Conference, you may be instructed by the Hearing Officer to remove your mask if you are testifying or addressing the Hearing Officer while maintaining social distancing of six (6) feet.
4. Local Court Rules (Rules for District Courts, Title IV, Appendix 24.7A) require that in any matter in which witnesses are expected to testify or exhibits (documents, audio or video recordings, photographs, text messages or emails, etc.) introduced into evidence, the moving party and/or plaintiff shall provide a witness list and a copy of all exhibits reasonably expected to be introduced into evidence to opposing counsel or unrepresented party at least ten (10) days prior to the scheduled hearing or trial. The responding party and/or defendant shall provide a witness list and a copy of all exhibits reasonably expected to be introduced into evidence to opposing counsel or unrepresented party at least seven (7) days prior to hearing or trial. A party's failure to timely exchange witness lists and exhibits may result in the Court excluding the witness testimony or exhibits if objected to by the opposing party.
5. **Proper preparation and handling of exhibits during the Hearing Officer Conference.**
 - a. The Hearing Officer cannot view or listen to exhibits contained on the hard drive of a cell phone, tablet or other computer device as they are not capable of being introduced into evidence in that format.
 - b. Photographs, text messages, emails and documents must be printed, hard copies, so they can be introduced into evidence. Photographs, text messages, emails or documents on a flash drive or compact disc (CD) cannot be introduced into evidence as an exhibit. You should bring your original and two (2) copies of your exhibits to the conference. One copy is for the Hearing Officer and the other is for the opposing party/attorney to view during your testimony. The two copies are required in order to prevent the originals from being handled by multiple individuals.
 - c. Audio and video recordings shall be on a flash drive or compact disc (CD) that can be viewed or listened to in the Hearing Officer Conference and introduced into evidence. Attorneys shall provide the necessary computer equipment to play

the audio or video recording in the Hearing Officer Conference. Self-represented parties must have advanced permission from the Hearing Officer assigned to the case, in order to bring computer equipment into the conference to play the flash drive or CD. A self-represented party may utilize a computer in the Hearing Officer's office upon providing the Hearing Officer's office with a request at least three (3) days in advance of the hearing officer conference; however, the Hearing Officer cannot guarantee that the recording will properly play on the computer provided.

- d. All persons shall use hand sanitizer, which will be available in the Hearing Officer's office, before passing exhibits to another person in the conference.
-
6. If a party desires to participate by or have a remote proceeding in accordance with the April 22, 2020, Order of Louisiana Chief Justice Bernette J. Johnson, the party shall file a written request with the Clerk of Court in writing with a copy being simultaneously provided to the other party by the same means of transmission (hand delivery, e-filing, fax filing or United States Mail) as the filed request. According to Chief Justice Johnson's Order, "[The] consent for remote proceedings in civil matters shall not be unreasonably withheld by any party, which shall be enforced by the trial judge pursuant to the authority granted by Louisiana Code of Civil Procedure Article 191, or as expressly provided by law."