

SALINE COUNTY OFFICIALS AND JUDGES ANNOUNCE COVID-19 POLICIES

March 15, 2020—Saline County Judge Jeff Arey and Saline County Administrative Circuit Judge Robert Herzfeld made a joint announcement describing the Saline County administrative response for the courts and county offices related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Judge Arey said, “We have been in near constant contact with local, state, and federal officials, and we are categorically mindful of the need to eliminate crowds, practice social distancing, and take all appropriate measures while continuing to do the people’s business and ensuring that justice is available to our citizens. While we urge everyone to exercise the proper protocols by staying home and away from other people as much as possible, there are some responsibilities that must be carried out even in disturbing times such as these, therefore, under the following protocols county offices and courts will remain open at this time.”

Judge Herzfeld said, “It is important to say, if anyone is experiencing any COVID-19 symptoms A) Shortness of breath B) fever and/or C) a dry cough—they should stay home and contact their health care provider to determine the best course of action for their health and the health of others in our community. Anyone who is exhibiting these symptoms will not be allowed to enter county facilities and will be escorted off the property if necessary.”

COUNTY AND STATE OFFICES HOUSED IN COUNTY BUILDINGS

County offices such as the County and Circuit Clerks, Assessor, County Collector, etc. will remain open to the public at this time. However, Judge Arey and the other elected officials are asking the public to delay any non-urgent business for the next several weeks to decrease foot traffic and eliminate the possibility of crowding. Judge Arey explained, “First, ask yourself if your business can be put off for some time. Second, call the county office to see whether you can be helped over the phone, internet, or through email. Third, if you really must come to a county office, please do not bring extra friends or family with you, and take care of your business quickly and do your best to maintain appropriate social spacing—six feet or more from other people as much as possible. Please use common sense. This may not be the time to renew your driver’s license if your birthday is in August.” All county office phone numbers and contact information is available on the Saline County website: salinecounty.org

CIRCUIT AND DISTRICT COURT HEARINGS AND TRIALS

Judge Herzfeld said, “I want to note that all of our Saline County Circuit and District Judges have been diligent over the past week in working together and with attorneys and staff to reduce our dockets to prevent crowding while staying within our constitutional due process requirements. As a result of our proactive measures, the number of circuit court hearings and trials for the next few weeks are down to just a handful of mandatory and emergency cases. The one large circuit docket day that could not be removed altogether was felony criminal callbacks in Judge Phillips’ 3rd Division. If you have a court order to appear in 3rd Division tomorrow, Monday, March 16th, and you or your attorney have not already received a written order of continuance,

then you must come to the courthouse in the morning to sign and receive your new court order setting your next hearing date. There will be a system in place to handle that extremely quickly. Please avoid gathering in groups or close to other people for the short time you may have to wait.” Herzfeld added, “The other type of cases that could not be continued for Monday include Dependent/Neglect cases in 2nd Division. These cases must be heard by law, but Judge Arnold obviously knows his business, and I’m confident he will move through those matters efficiently while ensuring that everyone has their proper hearing.”

“Our District Courts, of course, handle a very high volume of traffic and misdemeanor cases as well as a variety of other important matters. Judge Stephanie Casady and Judge Josh Newton are putting emergency systems in place to continue or process these cases rapidly for the next several weeks to ensure that cases are properly continued or concluded as quickly as possible.

If you are not symptomatic and you have a court date, you should show up to court unless you have prior notice from your attorney or the court that your case has been continued. However, our judges and court staff will do everything possible to move things quickly and have you out of the public spaces in as short a period of time as we can. **If you have COVID-19 symptoms, do not come to court**, but you must contact your attorney to discuss your situation as soon as possible. If you do not have an attorney, contact the proper court directly and follow their instructions. We, as judges, will have to find the balance between ensuring that no contagious person has an incentive to come to court while ensuring that people properly take care of their legal responsibilities particularly those who are accused of crimes. Frankly, we’re going to be a lot more interested in helping someone who calls and provides good contact information and is making a real effort versus someone who tries to tell us two months from now that they had the virus but never bothered to call and can’t provide any documentation. We know the difference, and it will be reflected in outcomes.”

CONTINGENT PLANS

Judge Arey concluded, “We believe that these procedures—with the good faith, cooperation, and assistance of our fellow citizens—can achieve the goals of handling critical governmental business and managing emergency cases while following the advice of healthcare professionals to limit or eliminate crowding,” said Judge Arey. “However, we will be monitoring everything closely, and if we determine that it is appropriate to take additional action then we will do so immediately to protect the public. Things are moving fast, but we want to assure everyone that we are doing all we can to stay ahead of the curve while taking care of people and critical matters.”

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT Judge Arey at jeff.arey@salinecounty.org or during office hours 501-303-5640 or Judge Herzfeld at robertherzfeld@gmail.com or during office hours 501-303-1584