BY ORDER OF THE LOCAL ADMINISTRATIVE JUDGE:

The following PLAN protocols are adopted for the protection of the public, visitors, and staff entering Court facilities. This ORDER provides notice to all persons, of policies and procedures which have been implemented to ensure the safe operation of the Courts of Fort Bend County,

Due to the number of parties, attorneys, and expert witnesses,
may require the use of the Jury Assembly Room for juror qualification, jury selection,
and trial, subject to availability for use as determined by the Local Administrative Judge.

This ORDER shall be added to each Courts webpage

This Notice shall be sent along with the Jury Summons, which will inform the prospective juror that:

- Judges shall ensure proper precautions are/will be taken for the health and safety of those summoned during jury selection and the trial of any matter.

- Daily health checks will be conducted before jurors enter the courtroom or the Jury Assembly Room. Potential jurors shall be screened and receive a temperature check each day.

- Prospective jurors, parties, and trial participants, shall complete a short questionnaire indicating he / she does not have symptoms of illness, and has not been in contact with any person known to be Covid-19 positive.

- All participants and parties in a trial, including attorneys, jurors, staff, and spectators are **REQUIRED** to wear face masks suitable for medical procedures **or** facial coverings fashioned from fabric consisting of tightly woven cloth, but breathable materials. All face masks must fit snugly and securely, completely covering the wearer's mouth and nose.

- Facial shields may be worn with a facial mask, as described above. Facial shields without a mask are **not suitable**, except where a witness is providing testimony. Where necessary, courts will provide upon request, masks, gloves, and hand sanitizer for spectators, jurors, clerical staff, attorneys, defendants, court staff, and witnesses.

- The Court will enforce social distancing rules in all areas of the Justice Center, as described by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention guidelines. This shall include courtrooms and the Jury Assembly Room, from jury selection through the trial's end.

- The Court shall summon not more than 200 persons in an attempt to qualify up to 65 venire persons.

- The selection process shall continue in the Jury Assembly Room until 12 jurors and the requisite numbers of alternate panel members are selected, seated, and sworn.

- Fort Bend County Facilities Department shall be instructed to clean and sanitize the Jury Assembly Room following each session and at the close of the jury selection process. After the jury members are selected, sworn, and seated, the case will relocate to the designated courtroom for the continuation of the trial.

- The judge shall ensure that F.B.C. Facilities Department is instructed to clean/sanitize the Jury Assembly Room for next Judge and case.

- Once selected and sworn, the parties and the jury panel will exit the Jury Assembly Room and report to the designated Courtroom. The jury and parties will be seated in accordance with current Center for Disease Control and Prevention guidelines, consistent with and subject to Fort Bend County Department of Health guidance.

- The courtroom gallery and the jury seating areas will be marked for appropriate seating. The jury will be seated and socially distanced in the marked seats on the right side of the courtroom gallery and the customary jury seats.
  Note: Bailiffs will ensure the courtroom doors remain unlocked during trial. However, the capacity in the Courtroom will be limited to the number of previously marked and socially distanced seating. The bailiff shall enforce capacity rules. Excess counsel, witnesses, and spectators may be asked to remain outside of the Courtroom, until space is available.

- No person shall be allowed in the trial areas without a mask or face covering, as described above (except for the witness who must be seen by the jury and Judge, for the purpose of determining truthfulness and credibility).

- Persons exhibiting signs of illness, **MAY** be asked to leave the courtroom or trial area.

- Persons excused due to illness or potential illness shall be required to present proof of clearance to return to court for said illness.

- Failure to comply with the Court's mask requirement may result in contempt of court and sanctions, to include a fine, arrest, ejection from the courtroom, and /or ejection from the building.

- Juror meals will be provided when necessary and delivered to courthouse. The jury meals shall be eaten in the courtroom, with members continuing to exercise appropriate social distancing and handwashing / hand sanitizing procedures. The bailiff shall ensure that the courtroom doors are locked and that the public, parties, or any other person not a member of the jury panel, not be allowed entry during juror meals and breaks.

- Attorneys will use podiums (where available) in order to maintain spacing and must wear masks during jury selection, opening statements, closing arguments, and examination of witnesses. No person shall approach the witness stand or the Court Reporter's station, without proper face covering in place, and permission of the Court.

- Jury deliberations will take place in the courtroom to allow for distancing and privacy.

- Six to Twelve feet of social distancing can be achieved through the use of this plan.

- Reasonable accommodations will be made on a case by case basis.

These Minimum Safe Operation protocols comply with the continuing "EMERGENCY ORDER" of the Supreme Court of Texas, as extended and expressed in The 36th Emergency Order of The Supreme Court of Texas, and the continuing guidance, dated March 17, 2021, from The Office of Court Administrator.

Signed and ORDERED on this 18th day of March, 2021

R. O'Neil Williams
Local Administrative Judge
268th District Court
Richmond Texas