



**UNITED STATES BANKRUPTCY COURT
MIDDLE DISTRICT OF NORTH CAROLINA**

**IN RE:)
ENTRANCE AND HEARING PROTOCOLS) STANDING ORDER
FOR THE EXIGENT CIRCUMSTANCES)
CREATED BY COVID-19)**

The United States Bankruptcy Court for the Middle District of North Carolina continues to monitor the severity of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak, including directives and executive orders issued by the President of the United States and Governor of North Carolina, North Carolina’s progression with respect to the Governor’s phases of reopening, guidance issued by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the Federal Judiciary COVID-19 Recovery Guidelines. To the greatest extent possible, the Court will continue to conduct proceedings telephonically or via videoconference. However, as conditions permit, judges may begin to conduct proceedings in open court. Whether a matter is set for hearing in open court will be left to the discretion of the individual judge. The following guidelines are intended to address such open court proceedings, as well as to address general entrance protocols for courthouse buildings.

1. Those seeking entry to courthouse buildings should first conduct a health self-assessment, including taking their temperature. If an individual's temperature is greater than 100.4 or if an individual is exhibiting other signs of COVID-19 infection per CDC guidance (including cough, shortness of breath, difficulty breathing, chills, sore throat, or loss of taste or smell), the individual should stay home.
2. All entrants to courthouse buildings must comply with Standing Order 12 of the United States District Court, as amended from time to time (“Standing Order 12”). Individuals who are unable to enter the buildings as a result of Standing Order 12 should contact the

courtroom deputy for the judge assigned to their case if it is set for hearing in open court and they are required or wish to attend. Either an alternative method of appearance will be arranged, or the hearing will be rescheduled.

3. Vulnerable individuals, or those aged 65 or older and people of all ages with (or living with those with) underlying medical conditions, may contact the courtroom deputy for the judge assigned to their case if it is set for hearing in open court to request an alternative method of appearance.
4. For the protection of everyone, all entrants to courthouse buildings with official court business or an interest therein or for the purposes of providing products or services for the Court, such as vendors, Court Security Officers, and other contractors, are required to: (a) wear an appropriate face mask or cloth face covering in all public spaces, including courtrooms and security checkpoints, and (b) observe social distancing (6 feet or more) to the greatest extent practicable. Counsel, parties, and participants shall wear face masks or coverings during court proceedings unless directed by the Court otherwise. A face mask or cloth face covering will be available for any *pro se* party who does not have one.
5. Any matter set for hearing in open court will be scheduled at a specific, individual time to reduce occupancy of the courthouse to the lowest degree possible. Counsel, parties, and attendees are strongly encouraged to arrive timely only for those cases in which they are personally involved or interested. The Court may limit the number of individuals in the courtroom gallery.
6. If at any time during an open court hearing counsel or a party requires a private consultation, they will be permitted to do so by meeting in an adjacent conference room

where social distancing may be observed or by any other means the Court considers adequate to reduce any health risk.

7. All appropriate areas of the courtroom, including at a minimum the surfaces in and around counsel table and the gallery previously occupied by any spectator, will be cleaned and sanitized between hearings. To the extent possible, disinfectant wipes and/or hand sanitizer will be available at counsel tables in the courtroom. Anyone may bring an appropriate self-use supply of hand sanitizer or wipes into the courtroom.

SO ORDERED.

This the 15th day of May 2020.


Lena M. James, Chief Judge
FOR THE COURT