

# **Shelby County Sheriff's Office Plan for Reopening Courts**

## **Overview of Courthouses**

The Shelby County Sheriff's Office is responsible for the security of fifty-four (54) courtrooms located in the three (3) Shelby County courthouses which house the Criminal Courts, Chancery Courts, Circuit Courts, Probate Courts, Juvenile Court, the General Session Criminal and Civil Courts as well as the Judges, Clerks, the District Attorney General, the Public Defender, the Sheriff's Office, and a number of other support personnel. The main Jail is part of the Criminal Justice Complex.

There are 109 Deputies serving as court officers, excluding supervisors, on a regular basis. Currently, many more have been deployed during the pandemic. Court Officers have received special training in such security on an annual basis pursuant to State law.

Deputies oversee contract security personnel who staff the entrances to the courthouses and oversee the entry of visitors through the metal detectors that scan purses/briefcases and individuals. Hand-held wands are also available for entrances.

### **2019 Courthouse Visitors:**

In 2019, there were nearly 750,000 visitors to the criminal justice center at 201 Poplar Avenue; over 270,000 visitors to the civil courthouse at 140 Adams Avenue; and over 380,000 visitors to the Juvenile Court at 616 Adams Avenue. Those figures do not include the employees of the Clerks and other officials housed in each of those buildings.

There are also 3 City of Memphis Courts housed in the criminal justice center and the Memphis Police Department is responsible for those courtrooms.

### **All Courthouses**

The Sheriff's Office has been asked to submit its plans for reopening the courthouse buildings in light of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Sheriff's Office will continue to perform all regular duties as well as well as ensuring that all adult entrants are maintaining safe distances and have face coverings. There will be enhanced safety procedures in place in all buildings.

All adult entrants will be required to have face coverings. In the event, they have nothing available, coverings will be provided by the Sheriff's Office. In the event they cannot or refuse to wear face coverings, they will be instructed to contact the applicable Court Clerk's Office to state that they were unable to attend Court.

There is signage regarding the facial coverings and 6' social distancing. There is also signage regarding health conditions and asking that no one who is ill/COVID-19 symptomatic enter the building. Those people will be asked to notify the applicable Court Clerk's Office that they were unable to attend Court.

A request has been made to the Mayor's Administration to provide personnel to take temperatures of entrants. Volunteers have been taking temperatures at several buildings.

People with special needs due to disabilities, age, etc. will be allowed entry at the most accessible entrance.

Only people directly impacted by the litigation will be allowed entry (litigants, victims, witnesses). Children who are not involved in the litigation will not be allowed entry.

Deputies will be assigned to entrances in sufficient numbers to control access.

### **Criminal Justice Complex Ingress/Egress for Visitors**

#### **1. General Sessions Divisions 7-13 and Memphis Municipal Courts:**

Entry and exit will be on Washington Avenue at the southwest doors, which have traditionally been used for public entry. These doors are immediately off the sidewalk.

When social distance requirements demand, overflow parties for the General Sessions Courts will be brought to the auditorium. Assigned Deputies will be in communication as to when space allows additional parties to particular courtrooms.

#### **2. Criminal Court Divisions I –X, General Sessions Divisions 14, Environmental Court, and Division 25 (Orders of Protection and Drug Court Preliminary Hearings):**

Entry and exit will be on Poplar Avenue at the northwest doors. These doors are immediately off the sidewalk.

When social distance requirements demand, overflow parties for these Courts will be brought to the auditorium. Assigned Deputies will be in communication with Court officers as to when space allows additional parties to enter particular courtrooms.

**Criminal Justice Complex Ingress for Employees/Attorneys/Law Enforcement**

1. All entrances are open to employees/attorneys/law enforcement/special needs.

**Civil Courthouse Ingress/Egress for Visitors**

Every entrance currently open will remain open. Sheriff's Office personnel will verbally direct visitors to the area of the courts they are seeking.

When social distance requirements demand, overflow parties for these Courts will be brought to various locations, preferably within the courthouse, such as unused courtrooms. If necessary, overflow parties will be brought to the Jury Commission room at 157 Poplar Avenue and, in extreme cases, the Administration Building's Auditorium at 160 N. Main.

Assigned Deputies will be in communication as to when space allows additional parties to particular courtrooms.

**Civil Courthouse Ingress for Employees/Attorneys:**

1. All entrances are open to employees/attorneys.

**Juvenile Court Ingress/Egress for Visitors**

Entrance is restricted to Washington Avenue except for those with disabilities or special needs who may enter on Adams Avenue.

Most cases will be heard by Zoom conference with access to those without access to same is available in designated courtrooms. All courts will be staffed in accordance with the needs of the judiciary.

**Shelby County Sheriff's Office**

Shelby County Sheriff Floyd Bonner, Jr. is committed to ensuring the safety of everyone working/visiting the three (3) courthouses and to ensuring that the reopening of the courthouses serves the efficient administration of justice.

He is grateful that all members of the judiciary recognize that plans may need to

be modified and is confident that the lines of communication will remain open to resolve all issues expeditiously for the greater good of our community.