

JUDGE ROGER J. HEIDEMAN
JUDGE REGGIE L. RYDER
JUDGE ELISE M. W. WHITE
JUDGE SHELLIE D. SABATA

SEPARATE JUVENILE COURT OF
LANCASTER COUNTY

Theresa L. Emmert, Court Administrator



Justice and Law Enforcement Center
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May 14, 2021

Re: Updated Court Operations Notice

Greetings Colleagues:

We wanted to take this opportunity to thank each and every one of you for your flexibility, dedication, and perseverance in keeping our courts open and running smoothly while we have navigated this life-changing pandemic. Your work with the families we serve has a tremendous impact on the health of our community overall, and we are grateful for everything you have done and continue to do in serving the families of Lincoln and Lancaster County, Nebraska.

As you may be aware, we had a judges meeting earlier this week to discuss resuming more "normalized" court operations given the current levels of COVID-19 infections in Lancaster County, as well as the availability of vaccines to the adult population, as well as certain youth. We have reviewed the comments that were submitted to Ms. Theresa Emmert in response to our inquiry of getting your thoughts and concerns on the utilization of the use of Zoom for hearings. We sincerely appreciate you taking the time to share your opinions and concerns, as this has helped guide our discussion and ultimately the unanimous decision we have reached.

Please be advised of the following regarding operations of all four courtrooms of the Juvenile Courts of Lancaster County Nebraska:

- **Effective May 17, 2021:** *In accordance with the current CDC guidelines, fully vaccinated people will no longer need to wear a mask or physically distance in our courtrooms, waiting rooms or conference rooms. Mask usage will continue to be required for all persons not fully vaccinated. All four judges have been fully vaccinated and we are comfortable disclosing this information to you all. We will not inquire whether any individual is fully vaccinated themselves, however would remind all attorneys and parties that honesty and candidness in words and actions in any court have always been and will continue to be expected.*

- **Effective June 1, 2021:** *Zoom participation will no longer be automatically available for any court appearances for Law Violation or 3(b) cases. All parties are expected to appear in person unless otherwise permitted by the assigned Judge. Each Judge is willing to allow individuals to appear via Zoom videoconferencing for good cause shown by informally contacting that judge's bailiff, as far in advance as is practicable. If Zoom accommodations are granted for any requesting individual, only that individual will be granted access to the proceeding by Zoom. We will continue to automatically send a Zoom invitation for detained youth.*
- **Effective July 6, 2021:** *Zoom participation will no longer be automatically available for all cases. All parties are expected to appear in person unless otherwise permitted by the assigned Judge. Each judge is willing to allow individuals to appear via Zoom videoconferencing for good cause shown by informally contacting that judge's bailiff, as far in advance as is practicable. If Zoom accommodations are made for any requested individual, only that individual will be granted access to the proceeding by zoom.*

Please keep a few points in mind as we transition back to more in person hearings:

- Please ensure that if you are appearing in person and intend to offer exhibits, that you bring paper copies of your exhibit to be marked for the hearing. While we appreciate receiving courtesy copies of the exhibits via e-mail in advance of the hearing, we will no longer be printing a physical copy for marking and offering for any attorney appearing in person.
- Please request a Zoom invitation for any incarcerated parent at least 48 hours in advance of the hearing to the assigned judge's bailiff if you wish for the parent to be present. Our bailiffs are not responsible for automatically knowing if a parent is incarcerated and whether they want to attend any particular hearing.
- The Zoom "room" codes will remain the same as they have been for each courtroom throughout the pandemic for any party granted permission to appear remotely.
- Any party appearing via Zoom must have a stable internet connection and be free from distractions (i.e. not driving, working, etc.).
- We are all also happy to have Zoom available for adoptions for friends and family to observe. Please let the bailiff know in advance of the adoption hearing if the adoptive family would like observers to have Zoom access to the hearing.

- We will continue to have youth at the Youth Services Center and youth in certain out-of-home placements appear via Zoom.
- All of Judge White's Safe and Healthy Families Court (DV Track) team meetings and Judge Ryder's truancy diversion arraignments will continue to be held by zoom.

As always, should you have any questions or concerns as we transition back to more normalized proceedings, please feel free to contact Ms. Emmert or our Bailiffs. We thank you for your continued excellent work in helping the families we serve.

Sincerely,



Hon. Roger J. Heideman



Hon. Reggie L. Ryder



Hon. Elise M. W. White



Hon. Shellie D. Sabata