

Jury Plan

Circuit Court for Somerset County

In accordance with the Amended Administrative Order on the Progressive Resumption of Full Function of Judiciary Operations Previously Restricted Due to the COVID-19 Emergency filed in The Court of Appeals of Maryland on June 3, 2020, the Circuit Court for Somerset County will resume full operations, including jury trials, on Monday, October 5, 2020. Given the continued public health emergency presented by COVID-19, jury selection and jury service will appear slightly different than in the past in order to maintain social distancing. The following outlines the Circuit Court for Somerset County's plans to protect the public and court staff while fulfilling the judiciary's mission of fair, efficient, and effective justice for all.

To ensure safety, everyone will be required to wear a mask at all times and maintain at least 6 feet of social distancing. All individuals will pass through both security and health screening prior to admission. The court areas will be cleaned before each day.

On September 11, 2020, stakeholders, including the State's Attorney, Office of Public Defender, police and sheriff's offices, judges and staff for the court were invited to tour the Somerset County Civic Center as an available option for jury selection. This location allowed more space, free parking and is only one mile from the court. After discussion, all parties agreed that the current location at the Circuit Court would be better suited for jury selection and the trial rather than relocating to the Civic Center.

Instead, the first day of the month, the court will hold juror orientation at the Civic Center for all those summoned for the month. They will check in and watch the juror orientation video, which will be able to be displayed from a projector on the wall to enable a larger audience. Jurors would then be able to leave for the day and be called back if or when needed.

For jury trials, voir dire jury selection will take place in Courtroom 1 of the Circuit Court as it normally does, with jurors asked to respond to a series of questions to gauge their qualification to serve. Follow up questions, as required, will be asked of individual jurors stepping forward to the bench area while maintaining distance. "White noise" will be played to allow confidential responses or may be answered individually in the jury room.

Once a jury is selected, those jurors will be provided a clear mask for use. The jurors who were not selected will be allowed to leave. Plexiglass has been installed in the jury box area in the courtroom to allow for a safety barrier between each juror's seat. Seating in the galley will be clearly marked to enforce social distancing.

Witnesses will be provided a clear mask for use while testifying. This mask must be worn while testifying unless the presiding judge finds good cause otherwise.

Jurors will have breaks in one of two locations: the Jury Assembly Room or the Orphan's Court. Following the conclusion of the trial, jurors will deliberate in the Annex so there will be space to spread out. Upon reaching a verdict, the jury will return to Courtroom 1 to deliver the verdict.

The Court extends its sincere thanks all of those who have cooperated to allow the safe resumption of jury trials in Somerset County.