



# Press Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
May 1, 2020

For more information, please contact:  
Susan Saylor | Communications Director  
[ssaylor@washingtoncountyttn.org](mailto:ssaylor@washingtoncountyttn.org)  
(423) 753-1620

## **Courtrooms Reopen on May 4<sup>th</sup> in Carter, Johnson, Unicoi and Washington Counties**

JONESBOROUGH - The judges holding court in the First Judicial District (Carter, Johnson, Unicoi and Washington Counties) announced that the Tennessee Supreme Court has approved the plan submitted by the judges of the First Judicial District that allows in-person hearings and trials to recommence.

This plan covers all courts in the First Judicial District (Criminal, Circuit, Chancery, General Sessions, Municipal and Juvenile), except for Johnson County General Sessions and Juvenile Court presided over by Judge William Bliss Hawkins. According to the District's Presiding Judge, Criminal Court Judge Lisa Rice, the plan goes into effect May 4, 2020.

"The approved plan provides for appropriate screening measures and social distancing, as much as possible, within all courthouses and courtrooms" Rice said.

Circuit Court Judge Eddie Lauderback stated that "local courts will continue to conduct, to the greatest extent possible, arraignments and any other appropriate matters, by phone or video conference, to limit in-person proceedings, subject to each individual judge's discretion."

"The easy decision is to keep the courtrooms closed except for emergency hearings, the tough decision is to reopen the courtrooms, but the judges' reopening plan is consistent with scientific and medical data for a structured environment that is safe for the public and court personnel," Chancellor John Rambo said.

Circuit Court Judge Jean Stanley emphasized that "Throughout this crisis, the courts and court clerks' offices in all four counties have remained open to successfully serve the public." Criminal Court Judge Stacy Street stated "The judges thank our assistants, the Circuit Court Clerks and Clerk and Masters in all four counties for their professionalism and dedication to the public during this emergency period."

The court clerks, court personnel, and sheriff's department bailiffs will work together to enforce the safety measures designed to protect the public in our courthouses. The orderly plan developed by our judges emphasizes staggered dockets to limit the number of people in the courtroom and courthouses and to enforce distancing requirements.

Pursuant to the Tennessee Supreme Court Order issued April 24, 2020, all jury trials remain suspended until July 3, 2020.

Judge William Bliss Hawkins, Judge of the General Sessions and Juvenile Courts of Johnson County, has elected to not reopen his court except for limited matters consistent with the Supreme Court's Order of March 25, 2020. This order suspended in-court proceedings until May 31, 2020.