

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF TEXAS
HOUSTON AND GALVESTON DIVISIONS

January 08 2021

Nathan Ochsner, Clerk of Court

By Deputy Clerk 

IN RE: COURT OPERATIONS IN §
THE HOUSTON AND GALVESTON §
DIVISIONS UNDER THE EXIGENT § SPECIAL ORDER H-2021-01
CIRCUMSTANCES CREATED §
BY THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC §

NINTH SUPPLEMENTAL ORDER

This Order applies in the Houston and Galveston Divisions of the Southern District of Texas and supersedes Special Order H-2020-24.

The current increase in COVID-19 cases has increased the risks to public health involved in selecting juries and conducting jury trials. Although the Houston and Galveston Division federal courthouses both remain OPEN, the following Order on jury trials is entered:

1. Jury trials (criminal and civil) scheduled to begin from this date until March 15, 2021, are continued, to a date to be reset by each presiding judge. Those continuances do not affect any deadlines other than the jury trial dates. Attorneys should contact the presiding judges in their cases if they want to modify other deadlines.

2. Due to the public-health risks, the periods of the continuances implemented by this Order are excluded under the Speedy Trial Act, 18 U.S.C § 3161 (h)(7)(A). The court finds that the ends of justice served by ordering these continuances outweigh the interest of the public and of each defendant in a speedy trial. Indeed, the best interests of the public are served by these continuances.

3. Meetings of the Houston and Galveston Division grand juries are not affected by this Order.

4. Individual judges may continue to hold bench trials, in-person hearings, sentencing proceedings, scheduling conferences, and other court proceedings. Counsel may seek relief by appropriate requests or motions. The use of telephone or video conferencing in these proceedings is encouraged when feasible, deemed appropriate by the presiding judge, and permitted by legal and technology constraints.

5. This Order does not impact any judge's continuing discretion to consider and decide particular matters on the pleadings alone. This Order is intended to give each judge discretion to handle his or her docket on a case-by-case basis, aside from the general continuance of jury trials ordered above.

6. Magistrate judges will continue to preside over criminal and civil matters, other than jury trials, including initial appearances, arraignments, detention hearings, the issuance of warrants, and referred civil matters.

7. Any judge may limit the number of individuals present in a courtroom, as circumstances warrant.

8. Any in-person events involving the court that are not case-specific, including continuing legal-education courses, public tours, and naturalization ceremonies conducted by the court, scheduled to occur before March 15, 2021, are canceled. They will be rescheduled as appropriate.

9. This Order does not apply to Bankruptcy Court proceedings. Separate Bankruptcy Court Orders address those proceedings.

10. Unless extended, this Order remains in effect until March 15, 2021, absent further order or action.

11. Our court will continue to meet its constitutional obligations while taking steps to protect the public and our employees. The courthouses remain OPEN, and the courts are working to address pending matters and keep the cases moving toward resolution.

Signed this 8th day of January, 2021.



LEE H. ROSENTHAL
CHIEF JUDGE