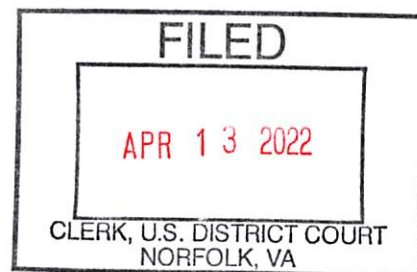


UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT  
EASTERN DISTRICT OF VIRGINIA



In re:  
COURT OPERATIONS UNDER THE EXIGENT  
CIRCUMSTANCES CREATED BY THE OUTBREAK  
OF CORONAVIRUS DISEASE 2019 (COVID-19):  
RESUMPTION OF IN PERSON NATURALIZATIONS,  
EMPLOYEE POLICY ADJUSTMENTS

Case No. 2:20mc7

General Order No. 2022-03

The United States District Court for the Eastern District of Virginia has continued to closely monitor the outbreak of Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19), as well as the developing guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and state and local health authorities. Currently, COVID-19 hospitalizations are approaching their lowest reported levels since the pandemic began, and all of the Courthouses and Court facilities in this District are located in cities with "Low" COVID-19 community levels as determined by the CDC.

**A. Naturalization Ceremonies**

As part of the Court's multi-layered pandemic strategy, which included reducing the number of individuals physically present in our Courthouses and Court facilities, in-person naturalization ceremonies have been suspended since the spring of 2020. To facilitate the naturalization process during this suspension, the Court, where necessary, temporarily ceded jurisdiction to U.S.

Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) to conduct most naturalizations, with the remainder of the naturalizations handled by the Court through virtual proceedings or limited in-person proceedings.

The Court's temporary COVID-19 waiver of exclusive jurisdiction to conduct naturalizations expires on May 31, 2022. In light of improved pandemic conditions, the Court authorizes the resumption of in-person naturalization ceremonies, with the specific date for the Court's resumption of exclusive jurisdiction to be communicated to USCIS on a Division-specific basis once details for in-person ceremonies are finalized. Because naturalization ceremonies routinely involve more than 100 people appearing for a crowded proceeding that approaches the courtroom's maximum capacity, **A WELL-FITTING MASK IS REQUIRED** at indoor naturalization ceremonies in our Courthouses until further notice. The presiding judge may, of course, exercise discretion to limit the size of the naturalization ceremony to protect the safety of the participants, court employees, and visitors.<sup>1</sup>

#### **B. Employee Policies**

In light of the special access that Court employees have to numerous private areas of our Courthouses and Court facilities,

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<sup>1</sup> As with any in-court proceeding, the presiding judge will determine masking requirements for court personnel and the speakers addressing the Court.

the Court has adopted various employee-specific COVID-19 policies throughout the pandemic, to include polices governing mask wearing in non-public office areas, communal eating in employee break rooms, COVID-19 testing, etc. In the past, many employee policies have been formally announced through General Orders, whereas other policies have been informally adopted. Acknowledging the benefits of a more responsive internal process, the Court does not intend to issue additional General Orders to adopt, modify, or terminate employee-specific policies. Rather, the Court will handle such employee matters internally, just as it did prior to the pandemic, which will provide flexibility should the Court need to implement Division-specific procedures based on CDC "community level" data.

The Court will continue to monitor pandemic conditions to determine the appropriate safeguards in our Courthouses and Court facilities, and will provide notice of the rules and policies applicable to the public through posted entry signs, information on the Court's public website, and/or future General Orders.

**It is so ORDERED.**

/s/ 

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Mark S. Davis  
CHIEF UNITED STATES DISTRICT JUDGE

Norfolk, Virginia  
April 13, 2022