

ST. CROIX COUNTY CIRCUIT COURTS COVID-19 TASK FORCE

Report by Facilities/Equipment Subcommittee

INTRODUCTION

Subcommittee Objective: To identify facilities and equipment necessary for the resumption of in-person court activities, including court hearings, jury trials and activities of the clerk of courts.

The Chief Justice's COVID-19 Task Force Final Report ("COVID-19 Report") identified 12 areas for consideration regarding facilities and equipment. They are set out below in bold, followed by the Subcommittee responses and recommendations.

Recommendations of the Subcommittee that do not specifically relate to the 12 areas identified in the COVID-19 Report are addressed at the end of this memorandum.

SUBCOMMITTEE RESPONSES AND RECOMMENDATIONS RELATED TO THE COVID-19 REPORT

1. **Signage and floor markings.** Signage should be posted around the courthouse to remind individuals to maintain proper social distancing. Floor markings in queuing areas should indicate where individuals should stand in order to maintain physical distancing.
 - Signs regarding social distancing and use of County-provided hand sanitizer stations have been placed in the public spaces throughout the St. Croix County Government Center ("Government Center").
 - These signs are on the benches, floors, walls and doors.
 - Free-standing signs should be added at the doors entering each of the courtrooms and hearing rooms to remind employees and visitors to maintain social distancing and utilize hand sanitizer stations.
2. **Enhanced barriers.** Courthouses should erect plexiglass (or similar material) dividers between the public and court staff, as well as between individuals participating in in-person courtroom proceedings, where acceptable social distancing cannot be maintained. This includes customer service counters in the clerk's office, as well as throughout the courtrooms/hearing rooms to protect judges/commissioners, court clerks, testifying witnesses, court reporters, parties at counsel tables, and jurors.
 - Plexiglas barriers have been installed at service windows in the clerk of courts' office.

- Plexiglas barriers should be installed in the courtrooms and hearing rooms to shield the witness stand and clerk's desk.
 - Given the distance of the judges/commissioners from other courtroom/hearing room participants, no barriers for the benches are recommended.
 - Barriers between and on litigant tables are not recommended.
3. **Air purifying equipment.** In consultation with local public health officials and building facilities staff, consider strategic placement of portable air purifiers (HEPA grade) in courtrooms, offices, conference rooms, and wherever people are required to congregate. The size and number of units should be based upon the placement and location to divert air away from people. Attendant to this will be the procurement of replacement filters, as such filters typically last between six to eighteen months, depending upon the size of the space and the overall air quality. Some courthouses report having HVAC systems that incorporate ultraviolet light air treatment systems. Although this may be helpful, public health experts consulting the Task Force indicated that localized (in-room) air filtration/purification may be more effective.
- The Government Center HVAC system has been adjusted to provide 100% outside air into the building, including courtrooms, hearing rooms and jury rooms. As such, all air in each space is replaced 4.5 times per hour, in an effort to diminish virus contamination in the building. No air is recirculated in the building.
 - The use of portable air purifiers will diminish the effectiveness of this air circulation and replacement process and are, therefore, not recommended.
4. **Health screening equipment.** Public health experts recommend health screening upon entry to the courthouse. This includes asking simple questions regarding symptoms and prior contacts with exposed individuals, as well as the utilization of no-touch infrared thermometers to assess individuals for fever (as recommended by OSHA and the CDC).
- Employees and visitors enter the Government Center through the main front doors where security screening has historically been conducted by Sheriff's Department staff.
 - All entrants are currently screened with questions regarding symptoms, contacts and travel related to COVID-19.
 - Temperature screening devices may be added to the screening protocol at the main entrance.
 - Any person evidencing symptoms or exposure to COVID-19 as the result of the screening should be prevented from entering the Government Center. If the affected person is required to be in court, they should be directed to call a court staff person after leaving the Government Center to inform the applicable court official.
5. **Personal Protective Equipment.** Court staff and court officials should be provided with surgical grade facemasks, as well as gloves if it is necessary to handle exhibits. Litigants who are attending proceedings where their presence is mandatory should be provided with a surgical mask if they do not have one (this would include jurors).

It is recommended that members of the public entering the courthouse on a voluntary basis should provide their own face coverings; the court would not provide this equipment to them. This recommendation should be addressed by a larger county committee based on the occupancy of building (e.g., what functions and offices are located within the courthouse or county building).

- Masks are required for entry to the Government Center and must be worn in all public areas.
 - Employees and visitors may use their own cloth or paper surgical masks. Alternatively, the masks are provided at no cost at the main entrance screening area.
 - Masks should be required during all court proceedings for judges, clerks, court reporters, attorneys, parties and spectators. The mask requirement should be suspended for witnesses at the direction of a judge or commissioner, if the court finds that it is necessary to assess the credibility of a witness and the Plexiglas barrier for the witness stand is in place.
 - Gloves should be provided to judges, clerks, litigants for handling exhibits.
6. **Cleaning/sanitizing agents. Court officials and staff should have sufficient hand and surface sanitization products to ensure that their hands are clean and that surfaces that have been touched during one transaction or proceeding can be wiped down before the next transaction/proceeding. The emphasis between hearings should be to quickly wipe down surfaces that are likely to have been touched during the proceeding (e.g., counsel tables, the witness stand, etc.). A deeper cleaning of courtrooms should be performed after hours. Additionally, wall-mounted or free-standing hand sanitizing dispensers should be located throughout the courthouse for use by the public.**
- Clorox Wipes or the equivalent should be placed on the litigant tables in each courtroom/hearing room.
 - A sign should be affixed to each litigant table requesting that each litigant use the wipes to clean the table before leaving the courtroom/hearing room.
 - The County cleaning staff should regularly clean all commonly touched surfaces (door handles, tables, witness stand and Plexiglas, chairs, etc.) throughout the day.
 - The County cleaning staff should conduct a deeper cleaning of the courtrooms, hearing rooms, jury rooms/bathrooms (if in use) at the end of each day.
 - Hand sanitizer stations are located throughout the Government Center, including outside the entrance to each courtroom.
7. **CCAP-provided touchscreen kiosk. If use of the touchscreen kiosk is a priority, consider placing sanitizing wipes at the kiosk and adding signage requiring users to wipe the screen before and after use. Provide a trash receptacle to collect used wipes. If staff and supplies are not available to clean the screen after each use, it may be advisable to temporarily prevent access to kiosks.**
- The CCAP-provide touchscreen kiosk should be regularly cleaned by clerk of courts staff.

- Computer monitor wipes should be made available next to kiosk for use by members of the public between cleanings by staff.
 - A sign requesting that the kiosk be cleaned by the public after use should be affixed to the wall adjacent to the kiosk.
8. **Install keyboard protector on public access computers. These devices are necessary for required records inspection. Staff should ensure they are disinfected between uses (either by spray or anti-viral wipes). This equipment may be seen as a CCAP responsibility.**
- Keyboard protectors should be installed on the public access computers in the law library and ensure that the protectors are regularly cleaned by clerk of courts staff.
 - Clorox Wipes or equivalent should be made available next to the computers for use by members of the public between cleanings by staff.
 - Signs requesting that the keyboard protectors be cleaned by the public after use should be affixed to the wall adjacent to the computers.
9. **Drop box / Fax machine. Many clerk's offices have installed drop boxes to allow litigants to file documents with the clerk's office without entering the courthouse. Use of such drop boxes will continue to be encouraged in order to minimize the number of people who need to physically enter the courthouse. Some clerk's offices have installed fax machines for public use. If an individual appears at the clerk's office and would like to file paper documents, they are given directions on use of the fax machine so as to avoid transmittal of the virus on the surface of said documents.**
- A drop box for court filings has been installed outside the clerk of courts' office.
 - A fax machine for court filings has been installed outside the clerk of courts' office.
10. **Elevator protocols. Staff will have to be allocated to control traffic at elevators, as physical distancing is not possible in that enclosed space. Public health officials will have to advise on how many people, if masked, can ride an elevator at once. Staff may have to press the summoning and floor buttons for riders. Staff will have to frequently disinfect button panels.**
- It is not practical to post staff to operate the two elevators in the Government Center.
 - The County should install stickers in the corners of each elevator advising passengers of a four-person limit and to maintain social distancing by standing in the corners of the elevators.
11. **Seating. Fabric-upholstered chairs are difficult to clean/disinfect. Consider replacing such seating with plastic or other hard chairs that can be disinfected more easily.**
- The seating in the courtrooms and hallway waiting areas do not have fabric coverings.

12. **Doors.** To minimize the need for sanitizing frequently-touched door handles, doors should be propped open or even removed, to the extent that this does not disrupt courthouse security.

- During non-confidential hearings and trials, one side of the double-doors entering the courtrooms should be propped open with door stops.

OTHER SUBCOMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Jury Box.

- The jury box in a single courtroom should be redesigned and reconstructed to allow for 6-foot social distancing between jurors while seated in the box (see attached drawing).
- Given the necessary dimensions of the new jury box, (1) the existing jury box walls should be removed, (2) the two existing elevated levels in the jury box should be extended to the gallery bar, (3) the gallery bar should be extended to the wall behind the jury box, (4) a new third row of juror seating should be established in front of the existing seating and (5) a new wall should be constructed along the front of the jury box.
- The Subcommittee recommends that the jury box be designed with 13 fixed seats and an additional moveable seat.
- Given the Subcommittee recommendation to modify the jury box in a single courtroom, only one jury trial could be conducted at a time in the Government Center.
- The Subcommittee elected not to address facilities and equipment issues related to other jury trial options (use of the County Board Room and courtroom gallery), as the consensus in the Subcommittee favored the jury box expansion option.

2. Jury Rooms and Deliberations.

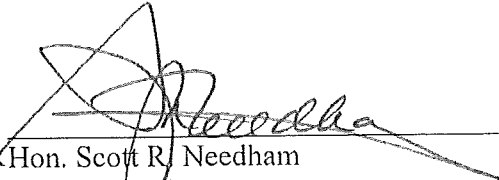
- To maintain social distancing, jurors should use 2 to 3 jury rooms for breaks, lunch, and court hearings out of presence of jury.
- The use of multiple jury rooms will also allow juror access to more private restrooms (2 per jury room).
- Two bailiffs will likely be necessary to monitor multiple jury rooms.
- During jury trials, County cleaning staff should regularly clean all commonly touched surfaces (door handles, tables, bathroom facilities, etc.) throughout the day.
- Clorox Wipes or equivalent should be provided in each jury room and bathrooms for use by the jurors to clean surfaces between County staff cleanings.
- Given space limitations, jury deliberations must be held in the courtroom.
- During jury deliberations, the judge must meet with attorneys and litigants (if necessary) in chambers or another courtroom.

3. Courtroom Gallery.

- To maintain social distancing, the existing four gallery rows should be reduced to three.
- The judge should limit seating on each of the remaining 6 benches in the gallery to 3 persons per bench (18 persons total), unless family groups not requiring social distancing allow the total to be increased.
- The removed benches should be placed in front of the gallery bar to provide supplemental seating for use at the discretion of the judge.
- In the courtroom with the new jury box, the removed gallery bench on the jury box side of the courtroom should be placed in hall outside the courtroom to provide supplemental seating.

I have conferred with all the judges of St. Croix County and the St. Croix County COVID-19 Task Force regarding this Facilities / Equipment / Jury Box Redesign Plan (Addendum A). I have also reviewed the architectural drawings for the redesign of the jury box in Courtroom 1 and recommend its approval.

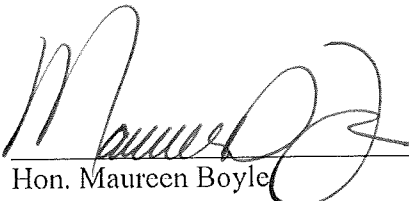
Dated this 8th day of June, 2020.



Hon. Scott R. Needham
Presiding Judge
St. Croix County Circuit Courts

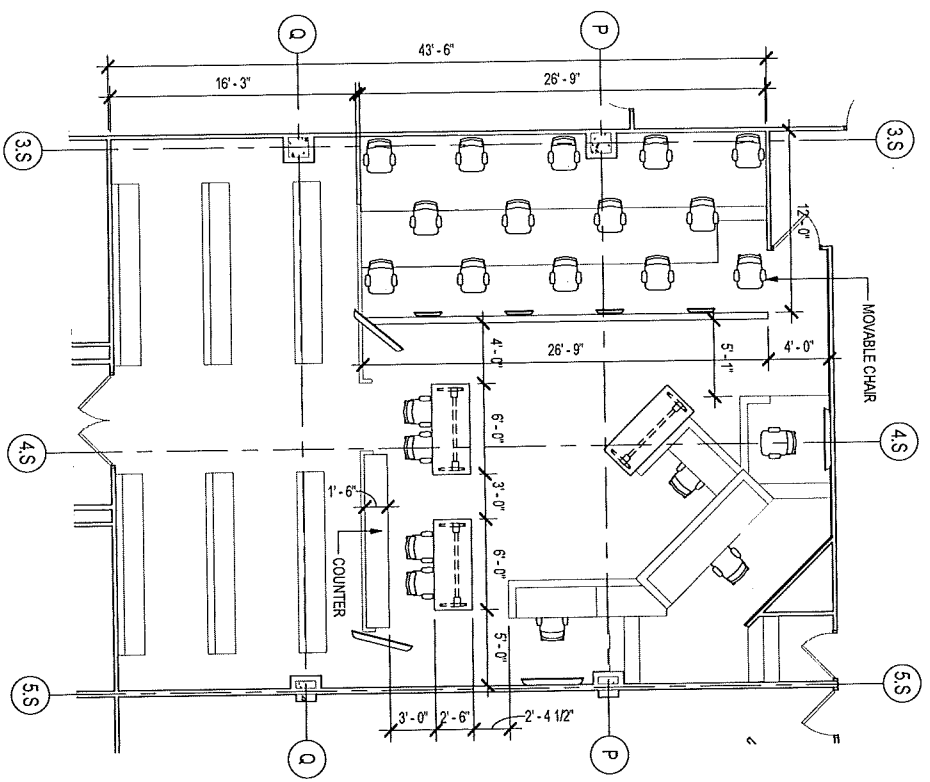
APPROVED:

Dated this 10th day of June, 2020.

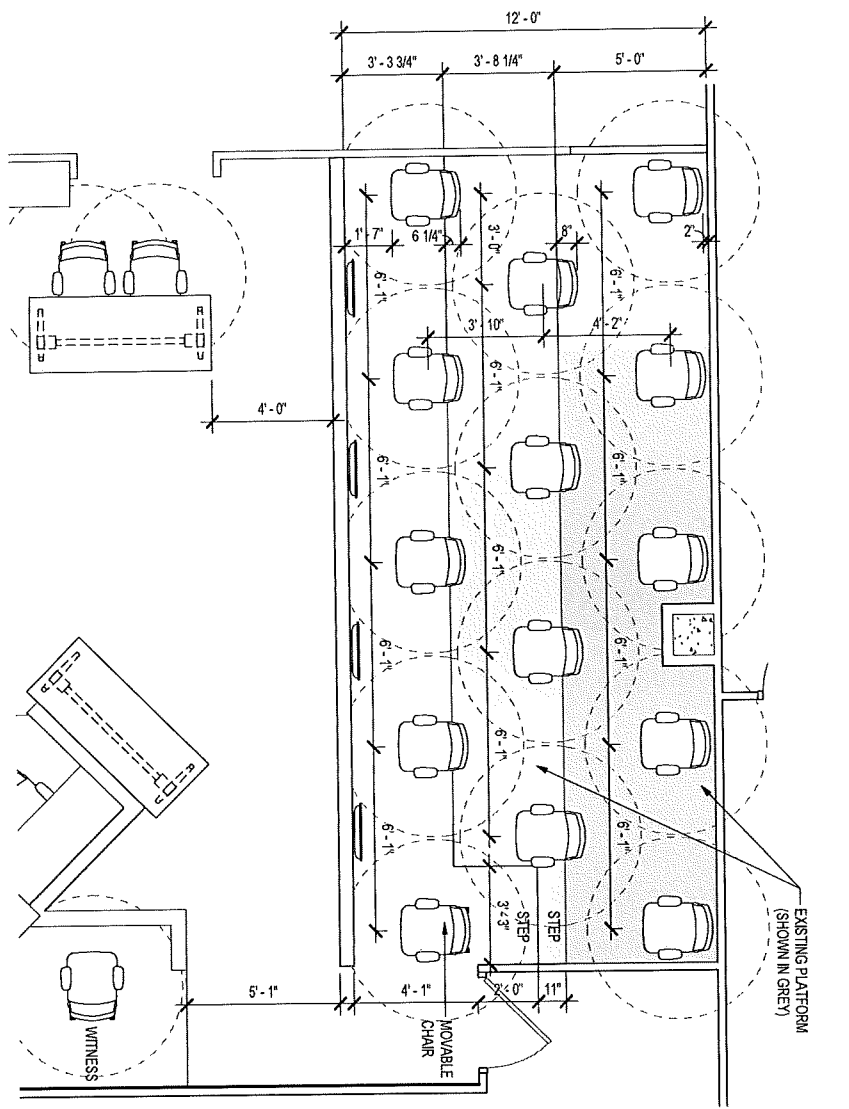


Hon. Maureen Boyle
Chief Judge
10th Judicial District

COVID-19 COURTROOM JURY BOX RE-DESIGN



1 JURY BOX RE-DESIGN PLAN
 PAGE 1 SCALE: 1/8" = 1'-0"



2 ENLARGED PLAN - JURY BOX RE-DESIGN
 PAGE 1 SCALE: 1/4" = 1'-0"

ADDENDUM A