

SUPREME COURT OF ARKANSAS

IN RE RESPONSE TO THE COVID-19  
PANDEMIC--RETURN TO THE  
REGULAR STANDARDS FOR  
REMOTE COURT PARTICIPATION  
AND REOPENING OF THE JUSTICE  
BUILDING

Opinion Delivered: June 10, 2021

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PER CURIAM

On November 20, 2020, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, we implemented certain protocols to maintain the safety of jurors, litigants, attorneys, court personnel, and the public. See *In re Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic*, 2020 Ark. 384 (per curiam). Among those protocols was the following:

If any attorney, party, witness, or a member of their immediate family or household, has an underlying medical condition that places them at higher risk for contracting COVID-19, they may choose to participate remotely, preferably by videoconference, in a court proceeding, and no further explanation shall be required. If the proceeding cannot be held remotely, a continuance shall be granted.

*Id.* at 3. Our Committee on Civil Practice recommends that we abandon this protocol concerning requests for remote participation, and we find that it is no longer necessary in light of the continued downward trend in COVID-19 infection rates. Therefore, effective immediately, requests for remote participation shall be resolved through a return to the case-by-case exercise of judicial discretion under the applicable standards such as those set forth in Arkansas Rule of Civil Procedure 43(a).

Additionally, we previously noted that the Justice Building closed to the public on March 19, 2020, and that it would remain closed until further notice. *In re Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic*, 2020 Ark. 125, at 1 (per curiam). While our clerk's office has remained open and has continued to receive filings through eFlex and a drop box at the entrance of the Justice Building, patrons have not been permitted inside the Justice Building to conduct in-person business in the clerk's office. Today, we announce that the Justice Building reopened on June 1, 2021, for purposes of conducting in-person business in the clerk's office, and we anticipate that other portions of the building will reopen in the near future.

This order is to be interpreted broadly for the protection of the public, including the employees of the Arkansas judicial branch, from the risks associated with COVID-19. This order applies statewide to all courts and court clerks' offices except administrative courts of the executive branch, federal courts, and federal court clerks' offices located in Arkansas.

It is so ORDERED.