

VIRGINIA: IN THE CIRCUIT COURT FOR THE CITY OF PORTSMOUTH

IN RE: MODIFICATION OF COVID-19 PROTOCOLS, INCLUDING MASK AND DISTANCING POLICY

The Portsmouth Circuit Court has continued to closely monitor the COVID-19 pandemic conditions along with guidance from the Centers for Disease Control (“CDC”), the Virginia Department of Health (“VDH”), and the Portsmouth Health Department (“PHD”). The CDC recently established a new method of categorizing COVID-19 risk levels on a county-by-county basis as determined by locality-specific factors. This system assigns a Low, Medium, or High “COVID-19 Community Level” to each locality and recommends universal indoor masking only in localities with a high Community Level. As of the date of this Order, the Portsmouth Circuit Court and the entire geographic boundary of the 3rd Judicial Circuit of Virginia are located in areas that fall into the CDC’s newly defined Low Community Level category (*see* https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#county-view?list_select_state=Virginia&data-type=CommunityLevels&list_select_county=51740 (last visited April 29, 2022)).

Based upon the CDC’s updated COVID-19 Community Level Standard, and the associated recommendations for prevention, the Court **SUSPENDS** its previous mask and social distancing policy. Individuals may still elect to wear a mask in the Courthouse if they choose.

All Courthouse employees and visitors should be aware that the previous mask and social distancing requirements may be reinstated if local metrics move this Courthouse or any part of the 3rd Judicial Circuit of Virginia into the “high” community level category or if worsening pandemic conditions warrant renewed safety procedures. While the mask and social distancing requirements are suspended regardless of vaccination status, Courthouse employees and visitors are reminded that the CDC strongly encourages staying up-to-date with vaccines and vaccine boosters in order to reduce the likelihood of contracting or becoming seriously ill with COVID-19.

The suspension of the mask and social distancing requirements does not preclude a presiding judge, in her or his discretion, from requiring masks or distancing in her or his courtroom should that judge determine that such safety measures are appropriate.

The Sheriff shall continue to screen individuals for temperature and shall continue to prohibit individuals from entering if they answer “Yes” to any of the questions set forth in the Court’s previous Health Questionnaire.

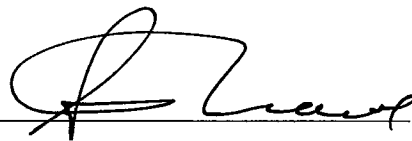
To the extent this Order conflicts with or amends any previous order or policy of this Court, this Order controls and supersedes same; otherwise, all previous orders and policies remain in effect.

The Court will continue to monitor pandemic conditions to determine whether any suspended or withdrawn COVID-19 protocols should be reinstated, or whether the safeguards currently in place may be relaxed.

The provisions of this Order shall take effect on **May 15, 2022**.

IT IS SO ORDERED.

ENTERED this 29 day of April, 2022.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Joel P. Crowe", written over a horizontal line.

Joel P. Crowe, Chief Judge