

TO: Story County Board of Supervisors
FROM: Story County Courthouse Security Committee
DATE: June 26, 2020
RE: Courthouse safety requests due to COVID-19

Dear Supervisors,

As you may know, the courthouses all over Iowa have been directed to reopen for non-emergency, in-person hearings on or before July 13, 2020. The Story County Courthouse Security Committee met on June 26, 2020, and approved a variety of measures to be taken at the Story County Justice Center in Nevada in order to minimize the risks associated with reopening the courthouse for in-person hearings due to the novel coronavirus causing COVID-19 in the community.

Several of the measures are cost-free and require court participants to handle cases in new ways in order to minimize the number of people in the courtrooms and common areas, like staggering courtroom schedules and holding certain types of hearings by telephone rather than in-person even after the courthouse reopens. Attorneys will be responsible to ask their clients and witnesses if they have an elevated risk of transmitting the virus, and will also have an affirmative duty to notify opposing counsel and the judge if someone has an elevated risk. Jail staff will also question anyone in custody about their elevated risk of transmitting COVID-19 before transporting those individuals to hearings. When the judge is notified that someone who is scheduled to participate in a court hearing has an elevated risk of transmission, the judge will decide whether the person needs to appear in person (so the hearing will be continued to a new date) or whether the person can participate by telephone.

Furthermore, some assistance has been provided by state court administration. Story County has received from court administration some paper face coverings, hand sanitizer, disinfectant wipes, and gloves. Court administration expects to replenish Story County's supplies in the future, although the exact amounts and availability are unknown.

In addition to all of the steps being taken by the court, court administration, and the security committee, the committee also needs assistance from the Board of Supervisors in order to maximize the safety of court participants. The committee appreciates the Board's consideration of the following requests to be considered at its meeting on June 30th.

1. We request the county provide some face coverings at the Story County Justice Center immediately. This may have already begun, but we want to ensure the request is made. We anticipate the stock of county supplies and court supplies will be commingled so both parties provide face coverings to anyone entering the building who does not already have a face covering.
2. Related to item 1, when restocking face coverings for the Justice Center, we request the Board consider a cost-sharing arrangement with court, whether that means each party adds more supplies separately, or that one entity purchase the items and the court and the county divide the cost.

3. We have created and approved of a sign to be placed at the front entry of the Justice Center that lists the criteria to be used to determine whether an individual has an elevated risk of transmitting COVID-19. We request the county's facilities management be authorized to create and place the sign.
4. We request facilities management be approved to order and install Plexiglas in limited areas of courtrooms where less than 6' of space is available between individuals. All of the courtrooms have been measured and the minimum number of barriers are requested to be purchased and placed.
5. We request facilities management be authorized to create and place signs in the five courtroom galleries to encourage social distancing among observers. We understand facilities management has already made similar signs for other county buildings and this would not involve much additional work.
6. We request facilities management be approved to provide disinfectant spray and spray bottles for each of the five courtrooms, and to restock the spray as needed. The judge will direct the attorneys or self-represented litigants to spray their table, chair, and area at the end of each hearing. No additional cleaning of common areas is requested (beyond the normal schedule of routine cleaning).
7. We request the Board make a small investment of funds (up to \$1,500) for a joint print/radio/social media news campaign (to be done jointly with other local entities and paid for by the county) to educate the public about the courthouse reopening and the safety precautions being taken. We further request the Board involve the public information officer to manage the public awareness campaign.

Thank you for your time and consideration.