

September 10, 2021

Nathan Ochsner, Clerk of Court

By Deputy Clerk 

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF TEXAS
HOUSTON DIVISION

IN RE: COURT OPERATIONS IN §
THE HOUSTON DIVISION §
UNDER THE EXIGENT § SPECIAL ORDER H-2021-18
CIRCUMSTANCES CREATED §
BY THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC §

FIFTEENTH SUPPLEMENTAL ORDER

This Order applies in the Houston Division of the Southern District of Texas and supersedes Special Order H-2021-17.

The current surge of COVID-19 cases has increased the risks to those involved in selecting juries, conducting jury trials, and convening grand juries in the Houston Division. Although the Houston Division federal courthouse remains open, the following Order on jury trials and grand jury proceedings is entered:

1. Jury trials (criminal and civil) scheduled to begin from this date until October 12, 2021, are continued, to a date to be reset by each presiding judge. Those continuances do not affect any deadlines other than the jury trial dates. Attorneys should contact the presiding judges in their cases if they want to modify other deadlines.

2. Due to the public-health risks, the periods of the continuances implemented by this Order are excluded under the Speedy Trial Act, 18 U.S.C § 3161(h)(7)(A). The court finds that the interests of justice served by these continuances outweigh the interests of the public and of each defendant in a speedy trial and that the interests of all affected are best served by these continuances.

3. Grand juries for the Houston Division will resume September 27, 2021. The empanelment of new Houston grand juries scheduled to begin before October 12, 2021, will be reset by the court.

4. Individual judges may continue to hold bench trials, in-person hearings, sentencing proceedings, scheduling conferences, and other court proceedings. Counsel may seek relief by appropriate requests or motions. The use of telephone or video conferencing in these proceedings is encouraged when feasible, deemed appropriate by the presiding judge, and permitted by legal and technological constraints.

5. This Order does not impact any judge's continuing discretion to consider and decide particular matters on the pleadings alone. This Order is intended to give each judge discretion to handle his or her docket on a case-by-case basis, aside from the general continuance of jury trials ordered above.

6. This Order does not apply to Bankruptcy Court proceedings.

7. This Order remains in effect until October 12, 2021, absent further order or action.

8. Our court will continue to meet its constitutional obligations, while taking steps to protect the public and our employees. Our court continues to address pending matters and keep cases moving toward resolution.

Signed this 10th day of September 2021.



LEE H. ROSENTHAL
CHIEF JUDGE