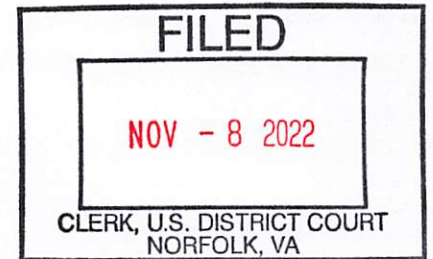


UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
EASTERN DISTRICT OF VIRGINIA



In re:
COURT OPERATIONS UNDER THE EXIGENT
CIRCUMSTANCES CREATED BY THE OUTBREAK
OF CORONAVIRUS DISEASE 2019 (COVID-19):
IN-PERSON NATURALIZATION PROCEDURES

Case No. 2:20mc7

General Order No. 2022-05

The United States District Court for the Eastern District of Virginia has continued to closely monitor the outbreak of Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19), as well as the developing guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and state health authorities. Currently, all the Courthouses and Court facilities in this District are in cities with "Low" COVID-19 community levels as determined by the CDC.

As part of the Court's multi-layered pandemic strategy, which included reducing the number of individuals physically present in our Courthouses and Court facilities, in-person naturalization ceremonies were suspended in March of 2020. To facilitate the naturalization process during the suspension, the Court, where necessary, temporarily ceded jurisdiction to U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) to conduct many naturalizations, with the remainder of the naturalizations handled by the Court through virtual proceedings or limited in-person proceedings.

In April of this year, the Court ended the suspension of in-person naturalization ceremonies. Gen. Order 2022-03, at 1-2. However, because naturalization ceremonies routinely involve more than 100 people appearing in a crowded courtroom, the Court continued to require that naturalization participants and their guests wear well-fitting masks at all indoor naturalization ceremonies. Id.

Considering current community conditions, and consistent with ongoing efforts to return to more normal operations as COVID-19 vaccines, therapeutics, and other mitigation strategies have become available, the Court **WITHDRAWS** the mask requirement specific to naturalization ceremonies.¹ Going forward, such ceremonies may be conducted consistent with Courthouse operation rules in place at the time of the ceremony, though presiding judges may, of course, continue to exercise discretion to limit the size of naturalization ceremonies and have the discretion to require masks for any proceeding, including naturalizations. Efforts will be made to communicate the presiding judge's preferences in advance

¹ Although the Court has granted case-specific exceptions based on pandemic conditions, the Court still has in place a ban on non-case related outside events, tours, and other gatherings in our Court facilities that was adopted for safety reasons at the same time that naturalization ceremonies were first suspended. See Gen. Order 2020-04, at 2-3; Gen. Order 2020-16, at 5. The Court hereby withdraws such ban, and going forward, whether community conditions allow for such events, tours, or gatherings will be addressed on a case-by-case basis, in consultation with the Chief Judge for the Norfolk and Newport News Divisions and the Senior Active Judge for the Richmond and Alexandria Divisions.

of naturalization ceremonies so that participants and their guests may plan accordingly.

The Court will continue to monitor pandemic conditions to determine the appropriate safeguards in our Courthouses and Court facilities and will provide notice of the rules and policies applicable to the public through posted entry signs and information on the Court's public website.

It is so ORDERED.

/s/ 

Mark S. Davis
CHIEF UNITED STATES DISTRICT JUDGE

Norfolk, Virginia
November 8, 2022