

PHASE III OPERATIONS TO BEGIN IN OCTOBER

The Court of Common Pleas of Montgomery County will begin implementation of Phase III operations on October 5, 2020. Building on the progress of our prior plans, we continue to move forward toward a resumption of full operations. Phase III will involve the continuation of most of the current programs, while putting into place new programs especially in the civil and criminal divisions. Phase III does not involve the resumption of jury trials. The Court awaits the report of the committee established to develop a plan for conducting jury trials. As of this time, the committee continues its work addressing the many challenges that jury trials will present.

From the onset of the pandemic, the Court has adhered to its policy of addressing as many items as possible, as long as those items could be addressed effectively and safely. We do not see the benefit of committing resources for the mere sake of appearances. We also understand our obligation to tailor our plans in a way that keeps the public and our staff as safe as possible.

It is appropriate to thank the many people who have expressed their appreciation for the safety measures that we have put into place. We acknowledge the frustrations of those who wish the return to full operations would occur faster. We continue to monitor conditions and will not be reluctant to move more rapidly, if we can do so safely.

Phase III will bring about the initiation of bench trials in our Criminal and Civil Divisions. This will also include trials involving tax assessment appeals. The details of these programs are set forth in the attached protocols. These trials will take place live in the Courthouse with the exception of tax assessment appeals.

Phase III will also bring about the initiation of juvenile delinquency trials, which will take place in the Courthouse.

To accommodate these additional trials, while regulating total building population, we will be reducing the number of courtrooms handling family division cases. Our programming in Phase II allowed us to eliminate the Family Division backlog. Hence, the reduction will not be problematic. We will also be eliminating the Criminal Case Conferencing program.

We will also begin more direct supervision and drug testing through our Departments of Adult and Juvenile Probation. While yet to be fully developed we are anticipating the initiation of arbitration hearings and equitable distribution hearings.

All of our plans have involved input from members of our Bench as well as attorneys and other stakeholders. We thank all involved.