



*The Supreme Court  
Belize City*

*Belize C.A.*

*E-mail:* [registrar@belizejudiciary.org](mailto:registrar@belizejudiciary.org)

*Telephone No. 227-7377  
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**PRACTICE DIRECTIONS**  
**SUPREME COURT OF JUDICATURE OF BELIZE**  
**COVID-19 DIRECTIONS**

The Practice Directions hereunder are issued pursuant to Section 61A of the Supreme Court of Judicature Act, Chapter 91 of the Revised Edition of the Substantive Laws of Belize 2015 Edition and are applicable to the Supreme Court and the Inferior Courts. These Practice Directions shall be cited as “**The COVID-19 Directions.**”

The World Health Organization has declared the threat of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) to be a global pandemic and The Ministry of Health has mandated early intervention measures to address the seriousness of the pandemic.

**OVERARCHING MEASURES AND STRATEGIES**

The measures set out in these Practice Directions are aimed at:

- a) The protection of the safety and health of judicial officers, officers of the Court, Court and Office Staff, support staff including security personnel, court users, and members of the public.
- b) Ensuring the maintenance of access to justice; and
- c) Keeping the judicial system functioning

The overarching strategies to be employed are:

- a) The minimizing of attendance at Court houses and court offices by court users and members of the public;
- b) Maximizing the safety of and eliminating any health risk to judicial officers, members of staff and any other persons attending court and court offices for legitimate business or in the line of duty; and
- c) Employing as far as possible the use of technology to minimize in-person contact.

## **GENERAL RESPONSES**

1. Staff information and sensitization sessions shall continue as deemed necessary by the Registrar, the Chief Magistrate and the Director of the Family Court.
2. Hand sanitizer dispensers are installed in areas frequented by staff and members of the public.
3. Liquid soap and paper towels shall be provided in all staff and public bathrooms.
4. Frequently trafficked areas shall be periodically cleaned using sanitizing agents.
5. Information posters and signage shall be circulated and installed at strategic locations in court offices and in common areas proximate to courtrooms.
6. Strict monitoring of persons entering court offices and courtrooms to detect signs of illness and to minimize the number of persons in attendance.
7. Implementation of 'social distancing' measures in court offices and courtrooms.
8. The conduct of hearings as far as possible possible may be by telephone, by Skype or Zoom and the disposition of applications by written submissions instead of in-person hearings.
9. Where in-person hearings are deemed necessary, such as bail, the length of time for the hearing is to be strictly limited, the number of persons in attendance is to be monitored and restricted to essential personnel (judicial officers, Attorneys, parties if required and press), and persons present are to maintain social distancing of six feet between themselves.
10. Persons displaying flu-like symptoms are urged not to attend at court offices and courtrooms. An authorized person may use his discretion to restrict entry by persons who display these symptoms.

## **SUPREME COURT**

### **A. CRIMINAL DIVISION**

1. All Trials by Jury are suspended with immediate effect until further notice.
2. All pending matters are to be adjourned until after April 30, 2020 or further order.
3. All trials in progress are suspended.
4. Jury panels are to be excused for the remainder of the present court term without risk of penalty.
5. April Session of the Supreme Court in All Districts is postponed to the June Session of the Supreme Court, commencing June 16, 2020
6. Bail hearings are to be facilitated by way of video link conferencing every Friday. All applications are to be duly filed by Thursdays at 1:00 P.M.
7. The Bail for persons who are to appear in court, but are not deemed as urgent matters, shall be extended to the adjourned date given, on the same conditions, if any.
8. Case Management Conferences shall be suspended with immediate effect until April 30, 2020 or further order
9. Guilty pleas shall be entertained by way of video link conferencing in the case of persons on remand, and with only essential personnel being present in court in the case of persons on bail.
10. Sentencing may be proceeded with by way of video link conferencing in the case of persons on remand, and with only the essential personnel being present in court in the case of persons on bail.
11. The Director of Public Prosecutions is not precluded from entering a Nolle Prosequi while trials are suspended.
12. Adjournments and further remand of prisoners are to be done by way of video link conferencing.
13. As far as possible, arrangements must be put in place to avoid the congregation of persons to allow for social distancing.

### **B. CIVIL DIVISION**

1. Subject to the directions set out in paragraphs 2 to 8 inclusive, all hearings and trials are suspended with immediate effect until April 30, 2020 or further order.
2. Urgent Applications to the Court shall be heard by telephone, video link conferencing, or by written submissions where possible.

3. Filing of documents may be done by:
  - (i) Depositing copies of all documents in the drop box provided at the General Registry Office. Persons filing such documents should send an email to the Registrar, copied to parties involved in the matter, informing that the paper copies have been so filed. Follow-up to be done by email or telephone.
  - (ii) Utilizing the email-filing system as provided in the Email-Filing Guidelines at Appendix 1.
  - (iii) Documents will be deemed as duly filed upon payment of the relevant fees.
4. Service of documents by email shall be deemed to be good service with effect from Thursday, March 26, 2020. This shall not apply to service of the Statement of Case and Applications for the sale of land.
5. The running of time for the filing and service of applications, and of all documents with the court under the Supreme Court Civil Procedure Rules 2005 is suspended with effect from March 25, 2020 until April 30, 2020 inclusive or further order.
6. All trials and applications in progress are suspended, unless the judge deems the matter to be urgent. If so, the matter may continue and proceed to conclusion, bearing in mind the stipulations for social distancing and other precautions relating to COVID-19. Video link and written submissions may also be utilized.
7. The delivery of judgements shall be transmitted electronically or by any other suitable arrangement.
8. Draft orders shall be scanned and sent by email to the Registrar. The approved and settled draft orders shall be scanned and returned by email for forwarding to the Registrar, with the faired copies for entry.

### **C. DIVORCE**

1. The hearing of divorce petitions shall be suspended with immediate effect until after April 30, 2020 or further order.
2. All matters scheduled for in person hearing will be adjourned and the parties will be notified of new hearing dates.
3. Urgent applications and applications that can be granted on paper will be addressed on a case by case basis.

#### **D. PROBATE AND ADMINISTRATION OF ESTATES**

1. New applications for Probate and Letters of Administration are discouraged at this time.
2. Notwithstanding paragraph 1, new applications may be deposited into the Drop Box provided at the General Registry or sent electronically to the email address provided in these Practice Directions.

#### **MAGISTRATES' COURT**

1. Magistrates are operating on a roster/rotation basis.
2. Arraignments shall proceed in criminal cases during the morning sessions only.
3. All Pending trials are to be adjourned until after April 30, 2020 or further order. Adjournment dates may be given by telephone or email
4. All trials in progress are suspended until further notice. .
5. All preliminary inquiries including preliminary inquiries by paper committal are suspended with immediate effect until April 30, 2020 or further order.
6. In the case of traffic offences, defendants wishing to plead guilty will be advised of the procedure to do so by post prescribed in Section 41 of the Summary Jurisdiction Procedure Act, Chapter 99, except for guilty pleas that may carry a disqualification of driver's license.
7. Arraignments for traffic offences are suspended until after April 30, 2020 or further order.
8. The time for payment of all fines in ticket offences is extended to May 04, 2020.
9. Civil Trials are suspended with immediate effect until after April 30, 2020. Persons wishing to accept a claim may do so by way of signing a consent before the Clerk of Court pursuant to Section 17(1) of the District Courts (Procedure) Act, Chapter 97.
10. No warrants of committal shall be issued for non-payment of fines until after April 30, 2020. Persons detained on these warrants may be granted an extension by the Magistrate.
11. Bail applications, Adjournments and further remand for prisoners are to be dealt with by way of video link conferencing.
12. Queries or concerns may be sent by email to [magistratecourtbz@gmail.com](mailto:magistratecourtbz@gmail.com), or by calling 227-7164/227-7392

## **FAMILY COURT**

1. All juvenile cases shall be adjourned to after April 30, 2020.
2. All part heard and pending trials are suspended with immediate effect until after April 30, 2020 or further order, except for those listed in paragraph 4 below.
3. Only arraignments in juvenile cases are to continue until further notice.
4. Only urgent cases of the following nature shall be heard until further notice:
  - a) Matters involving Domestic violence
  - b) Applications for maintenance,
  - c) Urgent applications for custody.
  - d) Urgent applications for care orders.
  - e) Applications for protection orders and occupation orders.
5. No warrants of committal shall be issued for non-payment of fines or maintenance until after April 30, 2020. Persons detained on these warrants may be granted an extension by the Magistrate.
6. The Family Court shall continue to receive and process payments for maintenance.
7. Adjournments and further remand of prisoners are to be dealt with by way of video link conferencing.
8. These Directions also apply to the Family Courts in the Judicial Districts.
9. Queries or concerns may be sent by email to [famcourt@btl.net](mailto:famcourt@btl.net) or by calling 227-4114/227-4107

## **GENERAL REGISTRY/COURT OFFICE**

To minimize person to person contact, the following measures will be implemented:

1. The General Registry Office will remain open daily, providing service with a reduced staff and minimized hours (9:00 A.M. to 2:00 P.M)
2. A Drop Box shall be provided at the General Registry Office to allow persons to drop off documents daily during the minimized working hours. The Drop Box will be cleared periodically throughout the day and documents distributed to the relevant personnel. All documents must be placed in envelopes that are properly addressed, labelled, sealed,

and to include contact information. Documents may include Trusts and Administration of estate petitions, Applications for Marriage certificates, and Apostilles. Only pending and urgent matters will be processed.

3. The Email-Filing system is available and encouraged. Please refer to the Guidelines in Appendix 1.
4. The pricing of documents will continue in the usual manner. An email will be sent to the relevant persons with regard to the pricing of documents, and when payments are to be made. After payments are made, persons will be notified of pick up dates and times, where applicable.
5. Attorneys, law firms, and members of the public may also make payments online, by following the Guidelines in Appendix 1
6. Cashier hours have been changed as follows:

Mondays and Thursdays	9:00 A.M. to 2:00 P.M.
Fridays	9:00 A.M. to 1:00 P.M.
7. The Supreme Court Law Library shall be closed to the General Public until further notice. Special arrangements may be made for urgent matters with prior notice to the Law Librarian via email to [erlyngrinage@yahoo.com](mailto:erlyngrinage@yahoo.com).
8. The General Registry/Court Office shall be closed for searches until further notice.
9. The public is asked to adhere to these Practice Directions and have patience with the measures being taken, which will likely result in a delay with the delivery of service.
10. Entry into any court office or courtroom may be restricted to accommodate the COVID-19 Guidelines as they relate to the gathering of persons in any one place and social distancing.

## CONTACT INFORMATION

### EMAILS

[info@belizejudiciary.org](mailto:info@belizejudiciary.org)

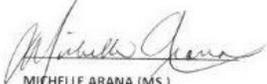
[E-filing@registry.gov.bz](mailto:E-filing@registry.gov.bz)

### PHONE NUMBERS

227-7377

227-2053

These Practice Directions comes into effect as of April 14, 2020, and may be altered depending on the developments of the COVID-19 pandemic.



MICHELLE ARANA (MS.)  
CHIEF JUSTICE OF BELIZE (Ag.)

## **APPENDIX 1**

### **EMAIL-FILING AND E-PAYMENT GUIDELINES**

As a necessary solution to combat the spread of the Global Pandemic COVID-19, the Supreme Court of Belize introduces the Guidelines to Email Filing and Payment

#### **FILING**

1. Each User is required to create and update an account at the General Registry using the prescribed form, which can be found online at our website <https://belizejudiciary.org>
2. Documents can be filed by sending to email [e-filing@registry.gov.bz](mailto:e-filing@registry.gov.bz). The email should clearly state the parties involved and nature of the document.
3. Court Office personnel are designated to receive the emails by instant notification.
4. The Data Entry Clerk will then upload the documents and price them as provided in the Case Management software system. An invoice will then be generated.
5. The invoice will be emailed back to the User, via the same email thread. The user will be required to verify the invoice and authorize payment from their account, where applicable.
6. Upon receiving the authorization from the User, an authorized person will release the invoice to the cashier, who will process the payment and issue a receipt. The receipt will be attached and emailed to the user.
7. The first page of the duly filed document will be printed, stamped, reviewed, verified, and approved.
8. The approved page will be rescanned and sent to case management to be attached and copied to the User.

## PAYMENT

9. Users with updated accounts and online banking accounts, are able to make payments online via bank transfer.
  
10. Payments to the accounts listed below can be made as per invoice, or by deposit of a lump sum from which fees can be deducted for every transaction. Users are to notify the Court Office of the payments/deposits made.

### GOVERNMENT OF BELIZE BANK ACCOUNTS

<b>Bank</b>	<b>Account Number</b>	<b>SmartStream Code</b>
Belize Bank - Main	1-299-070101-20001	76003/750122
Atlantic Bank - Main	10012-6445	76003/750142
Scotia Bank - Main	913-0974	76003/750132
Heritage Bank - Main	913-1018	76003/750133
Central Bank of Belize	311318	76003/750151

11. After every payment, a receipt will be generated, scanned, and emailed to the User as verification/confirmation of payment.
  
12. The Finance Officer will prepare the user's balance report, to be sent to the user at the end of the business day.

These Guidelines are to apply only to documents filed at the Supreme Court with effect from April 15, 2020.