



*The Supreme Court
Belize City*

Belize C.A.

E-mail: registrar@belizejudiciary.org

*Telephone No. 227-7377
Fax No. 227-0181*

PRACTICE DIRECTIONS

SUPREME COURT OF JUDICATURE OF BELIZE

COVID-19 DIRECTIONS (May 2020)

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 (May 2020)**”.

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 measures to continue to address the seriousness of the pandemic and to prevent further spread in Belize.

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, and in line with the official notices from the Ministry of Health and the Government Press Office.
2. Hand sanitizer dispensers are installed in areas frequented by staff and members of the public. Persons will be required to sanitize their hands before gaining entry in these areas.
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. Persons entering the court offices and courtrooms will be required to wear a face mask or face covering.
8. Implementation of 'social distancing' measure of six (6) feet in court offices and courtrooms.
9. The conduct of hearings as far as possible may be by telephone, Skype, Microsoft Teams, or Zoom, and the disposition of applications by written submissions instead of in-person hearings.
10. 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.

11. 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 continue to be suspended until further notice.
2. All pending matters are to be held at the discretion of the judge, with notices to be issued to the relevant parties involved in any particular case.
3. All trials in progress may proceed at the discretion of the judge, with notices to be issued to the relevant parties involved in any particular case.
4. Jury panels are to be excused for the remainder of the present court term without risk of penalty. A notice will be issued for jurors for the June Session of the Supreme Court.
5. Matters scheduled for the 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, unless otherwise notified.
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 may be conducted at the discretion of the judge, with notices to be issued to the relevant parties involved in any particular case.
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 shall not be precluded from entering a Nolle Prosequi.
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. All hearings and trials, both pending and in progress, are to be held at the discretion of the judge, with notices to be issued to the relevant parties involved in any particular case. All persons are to bear in mind the stipulations for social distancing and other precautions relating to COVID-19. Video link and written submissions may also be utilized.
2. Urgent Applications and any other civil matter may be heard by telephone, video link conferencing, or by written submissions where possible.
3. Case Management Conferences may be conducted at the discretion of the judge, with notices to be issued to the relevant parties involved in any particular case, and may be held by video link conferencing, where possible.
4. 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.
5. 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.
6. The delivery of judgements shall be transmitted electronically or by any other suitable arrangement.
7. 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.
8. As far as possible, arrangements must be put in place to avoid the congregation of persons to allow for social distancing.

C. DIVORCE

1. The hearing of contested divorce petitions may proceed at the discretion of the judge, with notices to be issued to the relevant parties involved in any particular case. All persons

are to bear in mind the stipulations for social distancing and other precautions relating to COVID-19.

2. The hearing of uncontested divorce petitions may proceed at the discretion of the Registrar, with notices to be issued to the relevant parties involved in any particular case. All persons are to bear in mind the stipulations for social distancing and other precautions relating to COVID-19.
3. Applications for adoption may be heard at the discretion of the Registrar, with notices to be issued to the relevant parties involved in any particular case. All persons are to bear in mind the stipulations for social distancing and other precautions relating to COVID-19.
4. 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 may be deposited into the Drop Box provided at the General Registry or sent electronically to the email address provided in these Practice Directions.
2. Fees due may be paid by using the payment method as provided in Appendix 1, or by scheduled appointments with the cashier

MAGISTRATES' COURT

1. Magistrates in Belize City are operating on a roster/rotation basis. Magistrates in the Districts remain on call, and are available when needed.
2. Arraignments shall proceed in criminal cases during the morning sessions only.
3. All Pending trials are to be adjourned until after June 30, 2020 unless the State of Emergency is sooner lifted. . 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 June 30, 2020, unless the State of Emergency is sooner lifted.
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 June 30, 2020, unless the State of Emergency is sooner lifted. In the interim, Traffic Matters are being addressed at the Magistrate's Court located on Treasury Lane, Belize City.
8. The time for payment of all fines in ticket offences is extended to June 30, 2020.
9. Civil Trials are suspended with until after June 30, 2020, unless the State of Emergency is sooner lifted. 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 June 30, 2020. Persons detained on these warrants may be granted an extension by the Magistrate.
11. Bail applications, Adjournments and further remand for prisoners may be dealt with by way of video link conferencing or in person.
12. The Magistrate's Court Office will be open daily from 9:00 A.M. to 2:00 P.M.
13. Queries or concerns may be sent by email to magistratecourtbz@gmail.com, or by calling 227-7164/227-7392

FAMILY COURT

1. All juvenile cases shall be adjourned to after June 30, 2020, unless the State of Emergency is sooner lifted.
2. All part heard and pending trials are suspended until after June 30, 2020, unless the State of Emergency is sooner lifted, except for those matters 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 June 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 may to be dealt with by way of video link conferencing, after making arrangements at the Magistrate Court
8. These Directions also apply to the Family Courts in the Judicial Districts.
9. The Belize City Family Court office will be opened daily from 9:00 A.M. to 3:00 P.M.
10. Queries or concerns may be sent by email to famcourt@btl.net or by calling 227-4114/227-4107.

COURT OF APPEAL

1. The Office of the Assistant Registrar (Court of Appeal) will be opened daily from 9:00 A.M. to 3:00 P.M.
2. Any queries or concern may addressed to email mrowley@belizejudiciary.org .

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 on rotation, and minimized hours (9:00 A.M. to 3:00 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.
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. Where necessary, an email will be sent to persons asking for pricing. Alternatively, persons who know the prices, may proceed to make payment as scheduled. Scheduled payments have become necessary to avoid overcrowding at the cashier's booth, to maintain social distancing, and to avoid the gathering of persons. After payments are made, persons will be notified of pick up dates and times, where applicable, or the respective vault folder can be checked.

5. Attorneys, law firms, and members of the public may also make payments by deposit, by following the Guidelines in Appendix 1.
6. Cashier opening hours are 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 or access to the library, with prior notice to the Law Librarian via email to erlyngrinage@yahoo.com .
8. Searches at the General Registry may be accommodated, provided that prior arrangements are made by way of a formal request in writing. This is to avoid overcrowding in the search area. Walk-ins are highly discouraged.
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

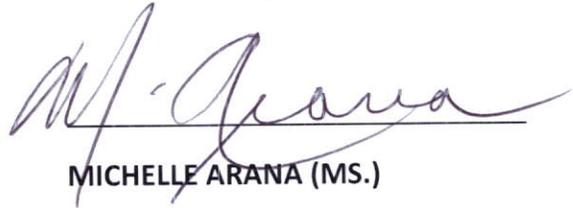
E-filing@registry.gov.bz

PHONE NUMBERS

227-7377

227-2053

These Practice Directions comes into effect as of May 01, 2020, and may be altered depending on the developments of the COVID-19 pandemic.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M. Arana', written over a horizontal line.

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 encouraged to create and update an account at the General Registry using the prescribed form, which will be made available online at our website <https://belizejudiciary.org>
2. Documents can be filed by sending to email 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. Where applicable, the customer will be notified of the fees due, either by email or by an invoice which will be generated.
5. The generated invoice, where applicable, will be emailed back to the User, via the same email thread. The user will be required to verify the invoice and make the payment, either by a bank deposit, or as scheduled at the cashier.
6. Where payments are made by bank deposits, proof of payment is to be scanned and emailed back to the General Registry at the email address provided. Upon receiving proof of payment and confirmation of receipt, the cashier will process the payment and issue a receipt. The receipt will be attached and emailed to the user, or the vault folder can be checked.
7. The first page of the duly filed document will be printed, reviewed, and stamped as filed.
8. The approved page will be rescanned and sent to case management to be attached and copied to the User. The User is to check for their copy of the document in their vault folder located at the Registry

PAYMENT

1. Payments may be made to the Cashier during the adjusted working hours, and as scheduled by the Assistant Registrar.
2. Payments can be deposited to the accounts listed below. Users are asked to place details of the transaction on the deposit slips, and thereafter to notify the Court Office of the payments/deposits made. Persons are encouraged to make lump sum deposits for more than one transaction, where possible.

GOVERNMENT OF BELIZE BANK ACCOUNTS

Bank	Account Number	Smart Stream Code
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

3. After every payment, a receipt will be generated for each transaction, scanned, and emailed to the User as verification/confirmation of payment, or the vault folder can be checked.

These Guidelines are to apply only to documents filed at the Supreme Court with effect from **May 01, 2020**.