

County Criminal Court #11 Communication Policy

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● Media Communications Policy

Purpose:

This section outlines the procedures and guidelines for handling media communications in County Criminal Court #11. The objective is to ensure that all media interactions are managed professionally, ethically, and in accordance with the court's standards.

Scope:

This policy applies to all media requests and communications involving the judge, court staff, and any proceedings within County Criminal Court #11.

Policy Statement:

All media requests must be directed to and handled by the Court Coordinator, Jacobe Graham. The judge will not comment or communicate on any pending cases in any manner to maintain the integrity of the judicial process. Media requests to record or broadcast court proceedings require explicit approval from the judge.

Procedures:

1. Handling Media Requests:

- All media inquiries, including requests for interviews, statements, or information, must be referred to the Court Coordinator, Jacobe Graham.
- The Coordinator is responsible for managing these requests and ensuring that they comply with court policies and procedures.

2. Judge's Comments on Pending Cases:

- The judge will not comment on, discuss, or communicate about any pending cases with the media. This policy is in place to preserve the impartiality of the court and the fairness of ongoing proceedings.

3. Recording of Court Proceedings:

- Any media request to record, photograph, or broadcast a court proceeding must receive prior approval from the judge.
- The decision to allow or deny such requests is at the sole discretion of the judge, who will consider factors such as the potential impact on the case, the rights of the parties involved, and the public interest.

Responsibility:

- The Court Coordinator, Jacobe Graham, is responsible for managing all media communications and ensuring compliance with this policy.
- The judge is responsible for making final decisions regarding the recording of court proceedings and maintaining the integrity of the court's communications with the media.

This policy will be reviewed annually and updated as necessary to reflect changes in legal requirements, media practices, or court procedures.

Social Media Communications Policy

Purpose:

This section outlines the guidelines for the use of social media by Judge Shequitta Kelly, specifically addressing the separation of professional duties and personal social media presence.

Scope:

This policy applies to all social media platforms operated by Judge Shequitta Kelly, including Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook.

Policy Statement:

Judge Shequitta Kelly maintains a presence on Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook under the specified social handle. At no time will the judge use these social media platforms to communicate with any parties, including attorneys, defendants, witnesses, or court staff, regarding work-related matters. This policy is designed to maintain the professionalism and integrity of the court and to ensure that all official communications are conducted through appropriate channels.

Procedures:

1. Use of Social Media:

The judge may use social media platforms for personal purposes, public outreach, or to engage with the community on non-work-related matters.

Under no circumstances should social media be used for communicating about cases, court business, or any other professional matters.

2. Communication Restrictions:

The judge will not engage in any discussions, messaging, or posting of content related to ongoing cases, court decisions, or any work-related matters on social media.

All work-related communications must be conducted through official court channels, such as email, phone, or approved virtual platforms (e.g., Microsoft Teams).

3. Monitoring and Compliance:

The judge will regularly monitor social media activity to ensure that no inadvertent communications regarding court matters occur.

Court staff and attorneys are also prohibited from using social media to communicate with the judge about court-related matters.

Responsibility:

The judge is responsible for ensuring that all social media activities comply with this policy.

Court staff and attorneys must respect this policy by refraining from initiating or participating in work-related communications with the judge via social media.

This policy will be reviewed annually and updated as necessary to reflect changes in social media practices, legal requirements, or court procedures.

Pro Se Defendants Communication Policy

Purpose: This section outlines the procedures and guidelines for how judges communicate with pro se defendants—individuals who represent themselves without legal counsel. The goal is to ensure that interactions are conducted fairly, transparently, and in accordance with legal standards.

Scope: This section applies to all judges presiding in County Criminal Court #11 when interacting with pro se defendants in the courtroom.

Policy Statement: Judges must conduct all communications with pro se defendants in a manner that preserves the integrity of the judicial process and upholds the defendant's right to a fair trial. Judges cannot provide legal advice or aid in the defense of pro se defendants.

Procedures:

Setting for Communication:

All interactions between a judge and a pro se defendant must occur in open court, ensuring transparency and adherence to legal procedures.

The prosecutor must be present during all such interactions to maintain procedural fairness and to safeguard the interests of the public and the judicial process.

Judge's Role and Limitations:

Judges may provide procedural information and clarify court rules as necessary, but they must refrain from giving legal advice or assisting in the preparation of the defendant's case.

Judges should direct pro se defendants to available resources, such as self-help centers or legal aid organizations, but cannot offer specific guidance on legal strategies or case details.

Procedural Guidance:

When a pro se defendant requests procedural information, the judge may provide general information about court procedures, filing requirements, and deadlines, as long as it does not constitute legal advice.

The judge should ensure that the defendant understands their rights and obligations within the court process without offering personal opinions or interpretations of the law.

Right to Counsel:

If at any time a pro se defendant expresses a desire to obtain legal counsel, the judge must facilitate this request in accordance with the following procedures:

The court will ensure that the defendant is informed of their right to counsel.

If the defendant cannot afford an attorney, the court will arrange for a public defender or court-appointed attorney to be provided, in accordance with applicable legal standards and resources.

The judge will grant reasonable time for the defendant to secure counsel, if necessary, and will adjust court schedules to accommodate this request.

Documentation and Record-Keeping:

All interactions with pro se defendants should be accurately documented in the court record to ensure transparency and provide a clear account of the proceedings.

The court clerk is responsible for ensuring that records reflect the judge's compliance with this policy and the procedural history of the case.

Responsibility:

Judges are responsible for ensuring that all interactions with pro se defendants comply with this policy and maintaining impartiality in court proceedings.

Prosecutors are responsible for being present during interactions with pro se defendants and ensuring that the process is conducted fairly.

This policy will be reviewed annually and updated as necessary to reflect changes in legal requirements or procedural practices.

Inter Departmental Communication Policy

The purpose of this policy is to establish clear guidelines for the communication of sensitive matters within the courthouse to ensure confidentiality, professionalism, and integrity in all interactions.

Scope: This policy applies to all Dallas county employees, including the judge, defense attorneys, prosecutors, clerks, bailiffs, court reporter, and court coordinator.

Policy Statement: All employees must handle sensitive information and matters with the utmost care and confidentiality. Sensitive matters include, but are not limited to, information about ongoing investigations, case details, personal information about defendants and victims, and internal court operations.

Procedures:

1. Identification of Sensitive Information:

- Sensitive information includes any details that, if disclosed improperly, could compromise the fairness of legal proceedings, violate privacy, or otherwise adversely affect individuals involved.
- Examples include case specifics before they are publicly accessible, personal information of defendants or victims, and confidential internal communications.

2. Communication Channels:

• Internal Communication:

- Use secure and official communication channels (e.g., court-approved email systems, encrypted messaging platforms) for discussing sensitive matters.
- Avoid discussing sensitive information in public spaces or through unsecure channels (e.g., personal email, social media).

• External Communication:

- Any external communication involving sensitive matters must be authorized by the appropriate authority (e.g., the judge presiding over the case).

3. Confidentiality and Data Security:

- Ensure that all sensitive information is stored securely and access is restricted to authorized personnel only.
- Use encryption and other data protection measures when transmitting sensitive information electronically.
- Do not leave sensitive documents or electronic devices unattended in public or unsecured areas.

4. Handling Sensitive Information:

- **For Clerks and Court Coordinators:**
 - Access to sensitive case files and information should be on a need-to-know basis.
 - Ensure that physical and digital files are securely stored and managed.
- **For Defense Attorneys and Prosecutors:**
 - Discuss sensitive case details only in secure and private settings.
 - Share information only with authorized individuals directly involved in the case.

This policy will be reviewed annually and updated as necessary to reflect changes in procedures, technology, or legal requirements.

Virtual Communications Policy

Scope:

This section applies to all virtual communications involving the judge, defense attorneys, prosecutors, clerks, and the court coordinator in County Criminal Court #11.

Policy Statement:

Virtual communications via Microsoft Teams must be conducted in a manner that preserves the integrity of the judicial process and ensures transparency. Direct communication between the judge and attorneys must include both parties to prevent ex parte communication. Defendants and witnesses are not permitted to communicate with the judge via this platform.

Procedures:**1. Authorized Communication:**

Clerks and Court Coordinator: Clerks and the Court Coordinator are permitted to contact the judge directly via Microsoft Teams regarding case-related matters. This direct communication is essential for the efficient operation of the court.

Attorneys: When attorneys communicate with the judge via Microsoft Teams, both defense and prosecution must be included in the communication thread to ensure transparency and fairness. No ex parte communications are allowed.

2. Prohibited Communication:

Defendants and Witnesses: Defendants and witnesses are strictly prohibited from communicating with the judge via Microsoft Teams. All communications from these parties must follow the established in-person or written protocols, ensuring the integrity of the judicial process.

This policy will be reviewed annually and updated as necessary to reflect changes in legal requirements, technological advancements, or procedural practices.

In- Chambers Communications Policy

Purpose:

This section outlines the procedures and guidelines for in-chamber communications between the judge and attorneys. The goal is to ensure that all discussions are conducted fairly, transparently, and in accordance with legal and ethical standards.

Scope:

This policy applies to all in-chamber communications involving the judge, defense attorneys, and prosecutors in County Criminal Court #11.

Policy Statement:

In-chamber communications must be conducted in a manner that upholds the integrity of the judicial process. Whenever attorneys wish to discuss a case with the judge, all parties must be present to prevent ex parte communication. The decision to create an official record of the meeting is at the judge's discretion.

Procedures:**1. Attorney Meetings:**

- When attorneys wish to discuss a case with the judge in chambers, all parties involved in the case must be present. This includes both defense and prosecution to ensure fairness and transparency.

2. Recording of Meetings:

- No official record of the in-chamber meeting will be made unless specifically requested by one of the parties.
- If a record is requested, it will be granted at the discretion of the judge. The judge retains the authority to determine the manner and extent of the recording, ensuring that it aligns with the principles of the judicial process.

Responsibility:

- Attorneys are responsible for adhering to the procedures outlined in this policy and ensuring that all in-chamber communications are conducted in a manner that respects the court's ethical standards.

This policy will be reviewed annually and updated as necessary to reflect changes in legal requirements or procedural practices.