



Republic of the Philippines
Supreme Court
Office of the Court Administrator
Manila

OCA CIRCULAR NO. 134- 2021

TO: ALL JUDGES, CONCERNED COURT PERSONNEL, AND COURT USERS OF THE FIRST AND SECOND LEVEL COURTS

RE: COURT OPERATIONS BEGINNING 8 NOVEMBER 2021

In view of the expansion of the pilot implementation of the COVID-19 Alert Levels System by the Inter-Agency Task Force for the Management of Emerging Infectious Disease (IATF) beginning 1 November 2021, and while the Community Quarantine Classifications for some areas continue to be used, the operations of the courts and judicial offices in areas under the said Alert Level Systems and Community Quarantine Classifications shall be as follows beginning 8 November 2021, until further notice:

1. In areas under Alert Levels 4 and 5, Granular Lockdown, Enhanced Community Quarantine (ECQ), or Modified Enhanced Community Quarantine (MECQ), with or without heightened restrictions, the courts and judicial offices shall be physically closed to court users for the duration of such Alert Level, Granular Lockdown, or Community Quarantine Classification. However, they shall continue to operate and conduct videoconferencing on ALL matters, whether urgent or not, as far as practicable, so as not to delay the trial of cases and court processes.

The official time for work will be from 9:00 A.M. to 3:00 P.M. In case there is a need for judges and personnel to physically report to the court or judicial office for urgent or essential matters, they should not exceed thirty percent (30%) of the workforce at any given time.

The personal filing or service of pleadings and other court submissions shall only be allowed for exigent matters and cases, and only after it has been properly communicated and cleared by the concerned court that the matter covered by the pleading or submission being personally filed is indeed urgent.

2. In areas under **Alert Level 3, General Community Quarantine (GCQ), or Modified General Community (MGCQ), with or without heightened restrictions**, the courts and judicial offices shall be physically open for the duration of such Alert Level or Community Quarantine Classification, and shall maintain a skeleton workforce of at least thirty percent (30%) to at most fifty percent (50%), to enable them to address matters and concerns, as far as practicable.

Judges shall maximize videoconferencing hearings and refrain from requiring parties to appear in-court, except in urgent matters and in other matters as they may determine. In-court attendance shall be limited to lawyers, parties, and witnesses required to participate in-court. All others who are not required to be in-court, but wish to observe the proceedings may do so through videoconferencing, subject to existing guidelines.

The regular office hours as prescribed in OCA Circular No. 09-2015¹ shall be observed, *i.e.*, Monday to Friday, 8:00 A.M to 5:00 P.M. (for Judicial Regions 1 to 12) and 8:00 A.M to 4:30 P.M. (for National Capital Judicial Region).

3. In areas under **Alert Levels 1 and 2**, the courts and judicial offices shall be physically open for the duration of such Alert Level, and shall maintain a workforce of at least fifty percent (50%) to at most seventy-five percent (75%), to enable them to address matters and concerns, as far as practicable.

Judges may continue to conduct videoconferencing hearings in cases that do not require in-court appearances. However, in-court attendance shall still be limited to lawyers, parties, and witnesses required to

¹ Re: *Strict Observance of Office Hours*, Dated 21 January 2015.

participate in-court. All others who are not required to be in-court, but wish to observe the proceedings may do so through videoconferencing, subject to existing guidelines.

The regular office hours as prescribed in OCA Circular No. 09-2015² shall be observed, *i.e.*, Monday to Friday, 8:00 A.M to 5:00 P.M. (for Judicial Regions 1 to 12) and 8:00 A.M to 4:30 P.M. (for National Capital Judicial Region).

Pleadings, motions, and other court submissions may likewise be filed or served by registered mail, through the services of duly accredited private couriers, or by transmitting them through electronic mail in accordance with the existing electronic filing guidelines, regardless of the Alert Level or Community Quarantine Classification.

The period for filing and service of pleadings and other court submissions shall no longer be suspended, regardless of the Alert Level or Community Quarantine Classification, since the same may be done electronically.

In case an area is placed under conflicting Alert Level and Community Quarantine Classification, as categorized herein, the more restrictive court operation as provided in the Alert Level or Community Quarantine Classification shall prevail.

All prior issuances inconsistent herewith are deemed superseded.

For the information and guidance of all concerned.

5 November 2021


JOSE MIDAS P. MARQUEZ
Court Administrator

² Re: *Strict Observance of Office Hours*, Dated 21 January 2015.