



# LA PORTE COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

555 Michigan Avenue, Suite 202  
La Porte, IN 46350-3400  
(219) 326-6808 ext. 2229

Sheila Matias  
President

Richard Mrozinski  
Vice President

Joseph Haney  
Member

January 18, 2022

Press statement from La Porte County Commission President Sheila Matias:

To answer questions which may arise following my directive as Commission President last week whereupon the County followed Michigan City government's lead in conducting all public meetings via Zoom as a public health strategy, I wanted to follow-up with some additional information.

Enclosed, you will find the joint statement issued and signed by all five of our county's judges on Friday 1.14.22. The statement declares that due to this public health emergency, the judges are continuing all jury trials until February 18, 2022 due to the high positivity rates for COVID. You will note the judges are still conducting regular court calls in person and/or via zoom but have chosen to avoid the large assembly of persons that come with selecting juries and conducting a jury trial.

Similarly, we are closing in-person public meetings and are not closing normal day-to-day building operations. There is much less risk in individual interactions between patrons and staff because we have many vaccinated staff; PPE is available for all staff and plexiglass protection was installed. In addition, there is a mask advisory for all county buildings. Please follow good health practices in taking care of the public, your colleagues and yourself.

The greatest risk of transmission is said to come from larger groups gathered indoors for extended periods of time – hence the move to virtual meetings. The public's right to attend, observe and even participate during public comment is preserved and is not impaired by virtual meetings. Virtual meetings are a common business practice at this point. They will be recorded and aired on ALCO as was done previously when we moved to virtual meetings earlier in the pandemic.

With a 30.47 percent positivity rate in the past seven days and La Porte County and 81 other counties in Indiana placed in the Red Zone by the Indiana Department of Health, it makes good, common sense to take measures such as virtual public meetings to protect our employees and the citizens by reducing unnecessary risk. Please stay safe out there.

Date	Positive cases La Porte County
1/11/22	173
1/12/22	225
1/13/22	165
1/14/22	136
1/15/22	223
1/16/22	180
1/17/22	185

This does not include home testing data

**IN THE LAPORTE CIRCUIT AND SUPERIOR COURTS  
STATE OF INDIANA  
JOINT STATEMENT CONCERNING CONTINUING  
JURY TRIALS DUE TO COVID – 19 EMERGENCY**

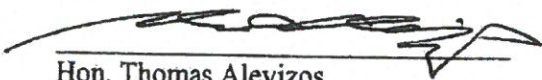
Comes now the LaPorte Circuit Court and the LaPorte Superior Courts (hereinafter “Courts”) and does hereby find and state as follows:

1. That on November 10, 2020, the Indiana Supreme Court, in 20S-CB-123, provided new guidance on how courts should minimize the risk of exposure to court staff, litigants, and members of the public. In the order the Indiana Supreme Court reiterated that the trial courts have the inherent authority to suspend and/or reschedule criminal and civil jury trials for a limited time.
2. Pursuant to Criminal Rule 4(A) and (B), Courts may continue a criminal trial upon finding of a public emergency. The LaPorte County Courts find the novel coronavirus pandemic is an emergency.
3. That on November 13, 2020, Governor Eric Holcomb issued Executive Order 20-48 which implemented restrictions on a county-based assessment depending on the color-coded zone of each county. The Indiana Supreme Court’s Resuming Court Operations Task Force issued guidance for trial courts. That guidance recommends very limited trials being held in Orange Zone counties and no trials in Red Zone counties.
4. That on December 29, 2021, Governor Eric Holcomb issued Executive Order No. 21-34 extending the State’s public health emergency until February 1, 2022.
5. That as of January 13, 2022, LaPorte County is in the Red Zone as shown in the Indiana Covid Dashboard. See: <https://www.coronavirus.in.gov/indiana-covid-19-dashboard-and-map>
6. Being in the Red Zone means that positivity rates are 15% and higher. LaPorte County currently is at a 30.47% positivity rate for the last seven days. In addition to LaPorte County, 81 out of 92 counties in Indiana are now also in the Red Zone.
7. The recent surge in coronavirus positivity rates has resulted in a shortage of testing kits and long delays in receiving testing results. The recent surge in positivity rates has also affected court staff and clerk staff in the LaPorte Courts.
8. The Judges of the LaPorte County Courts have determined that an emergency does exist.

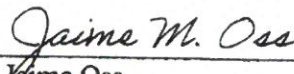


9. With the emergency finding, the Courts, pursuant to Criminal Rule 4(A) and (B), finds that all jury trials should not occur at this time due to LaPorte County and the State of Indiana's positivity rate and the increased transmission of the novel coronavirus.
10. Therefore, the Courts, in the interest of protecting the public and their safety, will be entering orders continuing all jury trials, both civil and criminal, from January 19, 2022 through February 18, 2022. Those matters will be reset to a date after February 18, 2022.
11. The Courts now feel February 18, 2022 is within what would be a reasonable time to expect to be able to safely conduct trials again. The Courts will reassess the status of the current public emergency on or before February 18, 2022.

**DATED THE 14<sup>th</sup> day of January, 2022.**



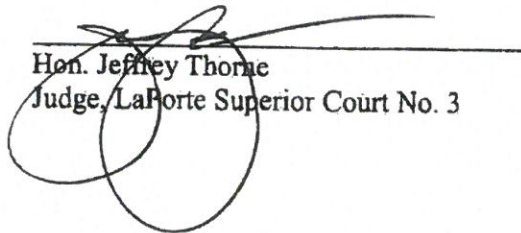
Hon. Thomas Alevizos  
Judge, LaPorte Circuit Court



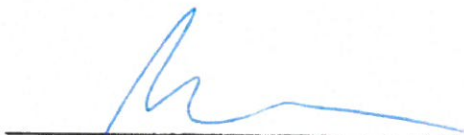
Hon. Jaime Oss  
Judge, LaPorte Superior 1



Hon. Richard R. Stalbrink, Jr  
Judge, LaPorte Superior Court No. 2



Hon. Jeffrey Thorne  
Judge, LaPorte Superior Court No. 3



Hon. Greta Friedman  
Judge, LaPorte Superior Court No. 4