

UNITED STATES BANKRUPTCY COURT
FOR THE EASTERN DISTRICT OF WISCONSIN

**GENERAL ORDER ON CONTINUED OPERATIONS DURING COVID-19
NATIONAL EMERGENCY**

On January 31, 2020, the Secretary of Health and Human Services declared a public health emergency in response to COVID-19 outbreak. On March 11, the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a pandemic. On March 13, the President declared that the outbreak of COVID-19 in the United States constitutes a national emergency. On March 13, 2020, the District Court for the Eastern District of Wisconsin entered a general order limiting its operations in response to the public health emergency.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention advises to implement operational plans that account for the following considerations: “(a) reducing transmission among staff, (b) protecting people who are at higher risk for adverse health complications, (c) maintaining business operations, and (d) minimizing adverse effects on other entities in their supply chains.”

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/guidance-business-response.html> (last visited March 16, 2020).

To these ends, effective March 17, 2020, the Bankruptcy Court for the Eastern District of Wisconsin modifies its operations as follows until further notice:

- 1) The court will conduct all hearings by telephone unless specifically ordered otherwise.
 - a) **Appearance at, participation in, and observations of hearings must be by telephone**, unless ordered otherwise; call-in information is as follows:
 - For hearings before **Chief Judge Halfenger** call **(888) 684-8852, access code: 7183566#**.

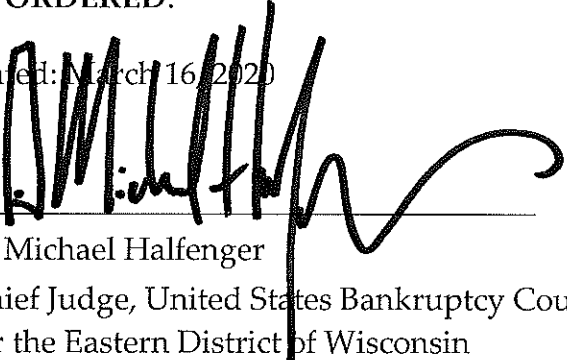
- For hearings before **Judge Hanan** call (888) 808-6929, access code: 9122579#.
- For hearings before **Judge Ludwig** call (888) 808-6929, access code: 5457889#.
- For hearings before **Judge Perhach** call (888) 675-2535, access code: 9918878#.

- b) The court determines that the COVID-19 national emergency constitutes good cause in compelling circumstances (see Fed. R. Civ. P. 43(a) incorporated by Fed. R. Bankr. P. 9017) to **permit testimony to be taken electronically** (by telephone or video conference). Based on this determination, the court expects to conduct many evidentiary hearings, including, but not limited to, hearings on fee waivers, requests to continue or impose the automatic stay, requests to modify the automatic stay, requests to approve reaffirmation agreements, requests to approve fee applications, and confirmation hearings, by telephone or video conference. The court will undertake to notify parties when converting hearings previously scheduled to be held in person to being held telephonically or by video conference.
- c) The judges will be reviewing the docket and expect to reschedule until a date after May 1, 2020, pending evidentiary hearings that are not time sensitive or that are not conducive to being conducted by telephone or video conference.
- 2) In continuing to provide essential functions during the COVID-19 national emergency, most court staff will be teleworking to best implement a physical-distancing policy. As a result, counsel and parties who seek information about or relief from the court on specific matters, including rescheduling hearings, should make their inquiries and requests in writing, either by letter or motion. Persons making telephonic inquiries of the Clerk or court staff, about scheduling hearings or otherwise, should be prepared to leave a message; staff will be monitoring voicemails and will endeavor to act on them as soon as practical under the circumstances.

- 3) The court expects to be able to continue minimal in-person staffing of the Clerk's Office during its regular hours, Monday through Friday, 8:30 a.m. until 4:30 p.m., except legal holidays, to receive pro se filings, but Clerk's Office staff will not review schedules or otherwise meet with pro se filers while operating under this COVID-19 National Emergency Plan.
- 4) The court's pro se help desk will not be in operation until further notice.
- 5) All Lou Jones events scheduled for before June 1, 2020, are canceled.

IT IS SO ORDERED.

Dated: March 16, 2020



G. Michael Halfenger
Chief Judge, United States Bankruptcy Court
for the Eastern District of Wisconsin