

**PRACTICE DIRECTION NO 17 OF 2021: CONDUCT OF PROCEEDINGS IN THE
RURAL CIRCUIT SUPERIOR CRIMINAL COURTS OF TRIAL,
MICHAELMAS TERM 2021.**

This Practice Direction is issued by the Honourable Chief Justice and applies to the Rural Circuit Superior Criminal Courts of Trial.

GENERAL

1. This Practice Direction comes into effect on Thursday, September 16, 2021 and will continue in effect until revoked or amended.
2. The following Practice Directions are revoked and superseded by this Practice Direction which is to be cited as Practice Direction No 17 of 2021:

Practice Direction No 12 of 2021, dated 1st April 2021.

Practice Direction No 12 of 2020, dated 17th September 2020.

3. The Rural Circuit Superior Criminal Courts of Trial ('RCSCCT') comprises the Supreme Court of Judicature (Criminal Division), the Western Regional Gun Court, the Circuit Court Division of the Gun Court, the High Court Division of the Gun Court sitting in any parish other than the parishes of Kingston and St Andrew.
4. There will be no ceremonial opening of the RCSCCT for the Michaelmas Term, 2021.
5. The Courts of Jamaica Remote Hearing Guidelines dated September 14, 2021 applies to all hearings being conducted remotely in the RCSCCT.
6. The 'Health Guidelines Governing Access to all the Courts of Jamaica' dated May 27, 2020, except paragraph 10, continue to apply.

DEFINITIONS

7. "Agreed bench trial" means any trial the prosecution and defence have agreed to conduct before a judge sitting without a jury that is ordinarily tried before a judge sitting with a jury.
8. "Prescribed bench trial" means any trial prescribed by law to take place before a judge sitting without a jury.

9. "Recipients" means, counsel for the sentencing judge, the Crown, and the defence.
10. "Remote hearing" means, proceedings taking place by means of telephone conference call, video conferencing or any other form of electronic communication.
11. "Remote location" means, any place other than inside the courtroom or chambers where a trial or hearing is taking place.

JURY TRIALS IN THE RCSCCT

12. Jury trials are suspended in **ALL** Rural Circuits Superior Criminal Courts of Trial, until further notice.
13. In the absence of jury trials, the emphasis will be on agreed and prescribed bench trials.

DISCHARGE OF JURORS

14. Jurors summoned for the following parishes **ARE NOT** required to attend for the dates specified and are excused without any risk of penalty.

St. Catherine -	September 16, 2021 to October 8, 2021, and October 11, 2021 to October 29, 2021
Clarendon -	September 16, 2021 to October 15, 2021
Manchester -	September 16, 2021 to October 8, 2021, and October 11, 2021 to October 29, 2021
Westmoreland -	September 16, 2021 to October 8, 2021, and October 11, 2021 to October 29, 2021,
St. James -	September 16, 2021 to October 15, 2021
St. Thomas -	September 27, 2021 to October 22, 2021
St. Ann -	September 27, 2021 to October 22, 2021

OTHER TRIALS (PRESCRIBED AND AGREED BENCH TRIALS)

15. All agreed or prescribed bench trials in the RCSCCT are to proceed in accordance with the 'Health Guidelines Governing Access to all the Courts of Jamaica' dated May 27, 2020.
16. The Judge must be present in open court.

17. Counsel for the Crown and defence are to be present in open court.
18. Other than the sentencing phase of a trial, the general rule is that defendants are to be present in open court.
19. Any defendant in custody who wishes to enter a plea of guilty shall have his matter accommodated, regardless of the date the is scheduled for trial or any other type of hearing and such plea may be entered by way of remote hearing.
20. Any defendant on bail who wishes to enter a plea of guilty, shall have his matter accommodated, regardless of the date the case is scheduled for trial or any other type of hearing, and must appear in person in open court to enter his plea.

PLEA AND CASE MANAGEMENT HEARINGS

21. Practice Direction (No. 6) (Criminal), 2020 dated 30th of May 2020 applies to all plea and case management hearings.
22. At all times during the plea and case management hearing, the Judge must be present in open court and where the hearing is to be held remotely, then the parties are to be connected to the court in which the Judge is present.
23. Unless the Judge of the plea and case management court orders otherwise, defendants in custody are not to be taken to court and the plea and case management hearing will be conducted remotely.
24. Where the defendant is in custody and the Crown intends to offer no evidence against the defendant, the defendant need not be present in open court and such hearing may be conducted remotely.
25. Where the Crown intends to offer no evidence against a defendant who is on bail, the defendant must appear in person in open court.
26. Paragraphs 19 and 20 apply to defendants in custody or on bail who are listed for plea and case management hearing as the case may be.
27. Where a plea of guilty is to be entered, counsel for both the Crown and the defence must be present in open court, regardless of whether the defendant is on bail or in custody.

SENTENCING

- 28.** Subject to paragraphs 35, 36 and 37, the general rule is that the judge, counsel for the Crown, counsel for the defence, the defendant, and the court reporter are to be present in open court at the sentencing hearing.
- 29.** Notwithstanding paragraph 28, sentencing of persons in custody may take place by remote hearing where it is convenient and just to do so.
- 30.** Any Social Enquiry Report (SER) requested by the court will be in the short form unless the judge specifically requests the long form of the report.
- 31.** Any SER requested is to be sent by the probation officer by way of electronic mail to the following email addresses for the respective parishes:

St. Catherine – stcatherine.rmc@rnc.gov.jm

Clarendon – clarendon@rnc.gov.jm

Manchester – manchester@rnc.gov.jm

St. Elizabeth – stelizabeth.rmc@rnc.gov.jm

Westmoreland – westmoreland@rnc.gov.jm

Hanover – hanover.rmc@rnc.gov.jm

St. James – stjames@rnc.gov.jm

Trelawny – trelawny.rmc@rnc.gov.jm

St. Ann – stann@rnc.gov.jm

St. Mary – stmary.rmc@rnc.gov.jm

Portland – portland@rnc.gov.jm

St. Thomas – stthomas.rmc@rnc.gov.jm

- 32.** The SER should be sent by the probation officer at least five (5) days before the sentencing date.
- 33.** On receipt of the SER, the registry is to send the report to the recipients as well as the court reporter.
- 34.** Unless the recipients indicate that the probation officer is needed to answer questions in court then the SER will form part of the record of the trial.

35.Where probation officers are needed in court, their appearance should be facilitated from a remote location unless the Judge orders otherwise.

36.Counsel for the Crown and the defence may appear remotely.

37.Where a defendant has been convicted of any criminal offence at any court to which this Practice Direction applies and has not yet been sentenced, and the judge is no longer presiding at the court where the defendant was convicted, the judge may proceed to pass sentence by live video link, provided the following conditions are met:

- a. the judge is present in court either in-person or remotely where the sentencing hearing is to take place;
- b. the defendant is present in the court either in-person or remotely;
- c. the court reporter is present in court either in-person or remotely;
- d. the live video link facilitates two-way communication between the judge, counsel for the defendant, counsel for the Crown and any other person whose participation is necessary;
- e. in the event that the defendant, the judge, counsel for the Crown or defence or court reporter or any of them are unable to be physically present in a court room the sentencing hearing can proceed provided all parties can be connected to a specified courtroom remotely.

38.In respect of paragraph 37, it is the duty of the Judge and the Registrar to ensure that all relevant documents needed to be signed by the judge are signed within seventy- two (72) hours of sentencing the defendant.

DATED THIS 14TH DAY OF SEPTEMBER 2021



BRYAN SYKES OJ, CD

CHIEF JUSTICE