

VIRGINIA: NEWPORT NEWS GENERAL DISTRICT COURT

IN RE: COURTHOUSE SECURITY AND ELECTRONIC DEVICE POLICY

Pursuant to Virginia Code §§ 17.1-128.2 and 16.1-69.35:4, the Sheriff of the City of Newport News shall ensure that the courthouses, courtrooms, and related facilities within the City of Newport News are secure from violence and disruption and shall designate deputies for this purpose.

The Chief Judge of the General District Court of the City of Newport News **FINDS** that the items and activities referred to in this Order tend to cause violence, disruption, and/or unauthorized dissemination of confidential or sensitive information within the courthouse and courtroom of the City of Newport News.

THEREFORE, in order to assist the Sheriff in his efforts to provide proper security for the General District Court and its courtrooms for the City of Newport News, it is hereby **ORDERED, ADJUDGED, and DECREED** that:

1. **Weapons Prohibited:** Any firearm, handgun, or weapon (or parts thereof) as defined by the Code of Virginia is strictly prohibited in the courthouses and courtrooms for the City of Newport News, unless specifically exempted pursuant to Virginia Code § 18.2-283.1 or otherwise authorized by law.
2. **Recording Prohibited:** There shall not be any type of taping, filming, photographing, or recording of any part of the interior of the courthouses or courtrooms for the City of Newport News unless explicitly authorized by a judge of the respective court.

It is further **ORDERED** that “Portable Electronic Devices” such as personal computers, table computers, mobile telephones (including cell phones and any form of telephone with cameras and audio and video recording and transmission capabilities), electronic calendars, e-book readers and “smart” watches” will be allowed in the courthouse and courtrooms in accordance with the following policies and procedures:

1. Possession and Use of Portable Electronic Devices

a. In the Courthouse

- i. Visitors may use Portable Electronic Devices in the common areas of the courthouse, such as lobbies and hallways. Further restrictions, including restricting mobile telephone conversations to designated areas, may be imposed as needed to maintain safety, security, proper behavior, order, and the administration of justice. All Portable Electronic Devices must be placed in a silent mode, such as vibrate, at all times within the courthouse.
- ii. Using Portable Electronic Devices to take photographs, make audio or video recordings, or to transmit live audio or video streaming is prohibited except with prior written authorization by a judge of the Circuit or District Court.

- iii. Cameras, video cameras, video recording equipment and recording devices (“other electronic devices”) not classified as Portable Electronic Devices are not allowed in the courthouse except for use at events such as investitures, ceremonies and weddings. Other electronic devices may be allowed in the courthouse with prior written authorization by a judge or the Circuit or District Court.

b. In the Courtroom

Portable Electronic Devices shall not be brought into or used in the courtroom without authorization from the presiding judge. A presiding judge may authorize the possession and use of Portable Electronic Devices in the courtroom and may impose restrictions on such possession and use. If the possession of Portable Electronic Devices in the courtroom is authorized, they must remain silent at all times. They shall only be used for the purpose and manner authorized by the presiding judge. Photography, video recording, audio recording, or video transmission or communication of any information using any media from inside the courtroom is prohibited without prior written authorization of the presiding judge.

c. Confiscation of Equipment and Ejection of user

Any person using a Portable Electronic Device in violation of this or any other court order or policy may be removed from the courthouse, found in contempt of court, and subject to penalties as provided by law. Any Portable Electronic Device used in violation of this or any other court order or policy may be confiscated, and the Sheriff shall not be responsible or liable for any damage to or loss of a confiscated device.

d. Further Limitations by Judges

A judge may further limit or ban the possession or use of any portable Electronic Device:

- (i) Pursuant to the Virginia Code §19.2-266 (to regulate media coverage of judicial proceedings);
- (ii) If possession or use of the Portable Electronic Device may be or does interfere with the administration of justice or cause any threat to safety or security; or
- (iii) For any other reason.

2. Posting Notice of this Policy

The Policy regarding the possession and use of Portable Electronic Devices shall be posted on the court's home page of the Virginia Judicial System website; on the court's local website (if any); at the courthouse entrance; and, in the Clerk's Office.

3. Storage of Portable Electronic Devices

If the possession of Portable Electronic Devices in the courtroom is prohibited or restricted, then storage for the devices shall be provided at the security entrance to the courthouse for anyone who is not allowed to bring their devices into the courtroom. Storage locker units are recommended as the means for storing the devices. Other forms of on-site storage may be provided. Storage of devices may be limited to people who represent to security personnel that they have no other means of storage available to them, such as a vehicle parked on or near the courthouse premises.

Any violation of this Order may be deemed contempt of court and punishable in accordance with § 18.2-456 of the Code of Virginia and any other applicable statutes.

ENTERED THIS 1st day of July, 2026:

Chavon M. Muller

Chief Judge, Newport News General District Court

7th Judicial District of Virginia