

NOTICE TO THE BAR AND PUBLIC

COVID-19 – NEXT PHASE OF COURT OPERATIONS: (1) CONTINUED INCREASE IN ON-SITE PRESENCE OF JUDGES AND EMPLOYEES; (2) EXPANDED CAPACITY FOR IN-PERSON COURT EVENTS; AND (3) CONTINUATION OF CERTAIN PROCEEDINGS REMOTELY

COVID-19 trends throughout New Jersey are encouraging, making it possible for the Judiciary to continue to increase on-site presence of Superior and Municipal Court judges and state court employees in court locations. That larger percentage of judges and employees will support more in-person court events and expanded availability of in-person court services. At the same time, the Judiciary will continue to provide remote options, both for court services and for those court proceedings that can be effectively conducted in a remote format. As we have throughout COVID-19, the Judiciary will continue to prioritize the health and safety of all court users.

(1) Increase in On-Site Presence of Judges and Court Employees

On June 15, 2021, up to 50% of judges and state court employees will be present on-site in each vicinage. It is anticipated that this number will increase substantially by no later than August 2, 2021.

(2) Expanded Capacity for In-Person Services and Proceedings

State court locations are not yet open to members of the public without an appointment, except in emergencies and other limited situations. However, our increased on-site presence will support more in-person services after June 15. Over the summer, all state courts will expand existing in-person services, including in the following areas:

- Extended hours of operations for court users to continue to make in-person cash payments for child support and to satisfy other court ordered financial obligations.
- Continued availability of courthouse technology rooms for self-represented litigants and others to use Judiciary equipment, including to participate in proceedings that will be conducted remotely.

- Expanded availability of both vicinage help desks and access to court staff in the Ombudsman’s office for court users to obtain procedural information and appropriate guidance.

In addition to in-person options, the above court services and others also will continue to be available via remote formats. Most Municipal Court facilities are now open to the public pursuant to decisions made by vicinage management and the local municipality.

The increased on-site presence of judges and court employees also will support more in-person court proceedings, including but not limited to those matters set forth in the Supreme Court’s February 22, 2021 Order.

(3) Continuation of Certain Court Proceedings in a Remote Format

Remote court proceedings have provided significant benefits that should and will continue even after COVID-19. Remote events enable attorneys and parties to participate with greater convenience and reduced costs. They can support efficient case management as evidenced by the 419,480 case dispositions and 259,009 motions decided in the state courts from April 2020 through March 2021. During that same period, Municipal Courts had more than 2.7 million dispositions. Remote operations also enhance the Judiciary’s capacity to continue court services in the event of future emergencies or interruptions to in-person operations.

Based on the substantial benefits realized over the past 15 months, certain court proceedings will continue to be conducted remotely, subject to limited exceptions, including the following matters:

- Motion arguments and case management conferences in all trial divisions of the Superior Court and the Municipal Courts;
- Most Municipal Court hearings, except for DWI, other matters with especially serious penalties, and trials that involve multiple witnesses or complex evidence;
- Landlord Tenant conferences and trials, when trials resume;
- Special Civil (DC) and Small Claims (SC) trials; and
- Hearings to establish or modify child support.

In all case types (including those listed above), judges may determine to proceed in person where the participants have demonstrated an inability to proceed in a remote format, or in other exceptional circumstances. In-person court events will be conducted with staggered scheduling.

Pending further Supreme Court Order, all petit and grand jury selections also will begin virtually. Selections for civil trials and grand juries will be conducted in an entirely virtual format. Criminal trial selections will continue to include a final in-person phase of selection. For now, less complex civil jury trials in general also will continue to be conducted virtually, subject to the provisions of the Court's May 11, 2021 Order.

The increased number of on-site judges and court employees will allow for a full resumption of access and services in person in state court locations by no later than August 2, 2021, while still preserving remote formats for court services and specific proceedings as set forth above. As we have throughout the pandemic, the Judiciary will be guided by the science and informed by the actions of our governmental partners.

Questions about this notice may be directed to the Office of the Administrative Director of the Courts at (609) 376-3000.



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Acting Administrative Director of the Courts

Dated: June 2, 2021