



Press Release

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New Jury Trials in Anchorage Suspended Week of March 16, 2020

Anchorage, Alaska (March 13, 2020) – In an effort to minimize the spread of COVID-19, the Alaska Supreme Court issued a Special Order of the Chief Justice, Order No. 8129. It provides that Presiding Judges may postpone new jury trials as the necessity arises pending further order under Alaska Criminal Rule 45(d)(7), which permits periods of delay for good cause.

Presiding Judge of the Third Judicial District William Morse has ordered the suspension of new jury trials in Anchorage, Kenai, and Palmer for the week of March 16, 2020. The Anchorage trial courts had scheduled six jury trials to begin next week, which would have required over two hundred potential jurors to assemble. Disaster emergency declarations by the State of Alaska and the Municipality of Anchorage, and school closures may affect the availability of court staff, attorneys and jurors to begin these trials. The judges will discuss rescheduling these cases with litigants and their attorneys. Jury trials that have already started will continue.

Jury trials scheduled in the First and Fourth Judicial Districts will continue as scheduled at this time. There were no jury trials scheduled next week for the Second Judicial District.

<http://courts.alaska.gov/trialcourts/index.htm#locations>.

Grand jury proceedings in Anchorage and other locations will continue and assemble as scheduled. Grand juries convening next week may be moved to larger spaces to accommodate social distancing needs.

The Alaska Court System has been actively preparing a response to the virus that is comprehensive yet flexible to adjust as matters change. If proceedings and services need to be reduced, the courts will continue to perform essential functions and ensure due process. While some delays are inevitable, the court system will continue to perform essential functions, including, for example:

- Domestic Violence, Stalking and Sexual Assault protective orders
- Emergency Mental Health proceedings
- Criminal arraignments, bail hearings, changes of plea hearings, search warrants
- Emergency Child in Need of Aid (CINA) hearings
- Delinquency hearings
- Emergency Guardianship petitions

- Other emergency matters.

Courthouses statewide have implemented procedures to reduce the transmission of the virus among employees and the public, including hygiene practices and social distancing measures.

On March 19, the Alaska Supreme Court is scheduled to consider an emergency order relaxing court rules to minimize the spread of COVID-19 and in the event of an outbreak.

If you are sick or suspect you have been exposed to COVID-19, please do not come to the court. If you are scheduled to come to the court for any reason, or are at high risk from the disease, call your local courthouse to inform them and determine the best course of action. You can find your local court's contact information at <http://courts.alaska.gov/courtdir/index.htm>.

The public's patience and cooperation is especially appreciated at this time as we all work through these challenging times together.

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