

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**Delaware Judiciary unveils plan to resume jury trials in October,
extends emergency until Oct. 5, 2020**

On Friday, Chief Justice Collins J. Seitz, Jr. released a detailed plan to restart jury trials in October, and extended the current judicial emergency an additional 30 days until October 5, 2020.

The resumption of jury trials will mark a move to a modified Phase 3 of the Delaware Judiciary's four-phase reopening plan that was released in May and can be found here: <https://courts.delaware.gov/aoc/courtsreopeningplan.pdf>. In addition to resuming jury trials, the move to a modified Phase 3 will also allow court facilities and staffing to increase up to 75 percent capacity (up from 50 percent capacity in Phase 2) and increase the number of people allowed in courtrooms to accommodate jury trials.

“Since the pandemic struck earlier this year, the Courts have made significant changes to address health and safety issues -- screening all who enter our facilities, enhanced cleaning and disinfection, requiring masks and social distancing while in our buildings -- and in our court facilities themselves -- installing plastic shields in public areas and courtrooms and making hand sanitizer easily available. The jury plan builds on those changes and incorporates best practices to address the unique needs of jury service, allowing us to resume jury trials under the safest conditions possible,” said Chief Justice Seitz.

At the same time, the Chief Justice said he continues to monitor the situation and consult with state health officials and the Courts' infectious disease expert, Dr. Alfred Bacon. While an October target date for jury trials has been set, the Chief Justice said that the modified Phase 3 plans – as set forth in the emergency order – will only go forward if the spread of COVID-19 remains under control. The move to Phase 3 could be delayed or pulled back if COVID-19 conditions worsen in Delaware. The Chief Justice emphasized that, when possible, the courts should continue to encourage remote working arrangements for judicial employees.

Jury trials in Delaware State Courts were halted in March due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The plan to safely restart this key part of our justice system was crafted by the Jury Management Working Group, a subcommittee of the Courts Reopening Committee headed by Superior Court Judge William C. Carpenter, Jr. The subcommittee presented the plan to the Chief Justice on Aug. 25, 2020, which was then approved by the Chief Justice after consultation with the Presiding Judges of all Delaware Courts and members of the Supreme Court. The Working Group included judges, court staff, prosecutors, public defenders and private practice attorneys. The full report can be found here: <https://courts.delaware.gov/aoc/docs/juryreopening.pdf>

The Chief Justice thanked the members of the Jury Management Working Group for their hard work on the plan. He also thanked judicial branch employees and the public for their ongoing patience and understanding as the Courts work through the operational challenges of a COVID-19 world. Importantly, the Chief Justice also wanted to remind everyone who works in our judicial facilities that now is not the time to become complacent about preventative measures. Proper mask wearing (covering the nose), social distancing, hand-washing, and other measures are more important than ever to stop the spread of the virus. Please do it for yourself – and do it out of respect for others.

The Delaware Courts continue to provide the public and members of the Bar with regular updates on changes to court operations on the Court's COVID-19 response page <https://courts.delaware.gov/aoc/covid-19> .

For the latest information on COVID-19 please visit the State of Delaware's informational website on COVID-19 at: de.gov/coronavirus. If you have any questions you can contact the State's Department of Public Health Coronavirus call center by phone at 1-866-408-1899 or by email at DPHCall@delaware.gov.