

LETTER FROM COURT ADMINISTRATION TO ALL COURT EMPLOYEES
March 15, 2020

To our Judicial Branch employees:

As many of you may have heard, by order dated March 13, 2020, a judicial emergency has been declared effective for 30 days beginning at 8 a.m. on Monday, March 16, 2020.

The declaration gives the trial courts additional flexibility in scheduling court proceedings by tolling the speedy trial guidelines for a period of 30 days and allowing courts the discretion to continue trials and hearings or, if possible, to hold proceedings (except for jury trials) using audiovisual technology.

This action was not undertaken lightly. It was done out of an abundance of caution to protect the public in general and also to protect you, our court employees. We hope that by significantly reducing the number of people visiting our court facilities, we will drastically reduce the risks of exposure to and lessen the spread of the COVID-19 virus.

What does this declaration mean for you? Although the Governor has closed public schools from March 16-27, our courts, as with other State facilities, will remain open during this 30-day emergency period unless circumstances dictate otherwise, in which case you will be notified.

Some of you may be aware that the Court of Chancery building in Georgetown was closed on Friday, and will remain closed on Monday, due to an out-of-state attorney, who self-reported to the Court of Chancery that he had begun experiencing symptoms of COVID-19 the day after he had appeared at a hearing in the court. To be clear, test results have not confirmed that this individual has COVID-19. Officials at the Department of Public Health and DEMA are responding to the situation and have provided self-quarantine instructions to those who may have been in close contact (which is defined by DPH as being within 6 feet for 10 minutes or more) with this individual. The court building has been closed temporarily while decontamination measures are completed. The building will reopen for business on Tuesday, March 17.

We recognize that many of you may be facing challenges due to the closing of all public and many private schools, daycares, and eldercare facilities. If this is an issue for you, please contact your immediate supervisor or your HR department to discuss the situation and what arrangements can be made. Up to 14 days of Emergency Paid Leave may be available due to the closure of a school, childcare or an eldercare facility, or if you need to care for a member of your family who is quarantined or is ill as a result of COVID-19. Additional Paid Emergency Leave may also be available to employees who are directly impacted by COVID-19. Please refer to the attached Frequently Asked Questions sheet for more information regarding leave policies and other topics in these extenuating circumstances.

Please also feel free to speak with your supervisor – in any circumstance – if there is a possibility that arrangements can be made to allow you to do your work remotely. Please understand that this will not be possible for all employees, but the flexibility to allow telecommuting when it is feasible is encouraged.

Your health and safety are a priority for us. We have prepared and continue to prepare, and adapt as necessary, our Judicial Branch response to COVID-19 in close coordination with the Governor and the experts at DPH and DEMA. We will continue to take responsible and proactive steps to mitigate the risks to you while maintaining the essential operations of our courts and nonjudicial agencies. We will continue to provide updates on all Judicial Branch responses to COVID-19 on our website at <https://courts.delaware.gov/aoc/covid-19>, and we will continue to provide you all with email updates as needed. Delawareans with questions about COVID-19 or their exposure risk can call the Division of Public Health's Coronavirus Call Center at [1-866-408-1899](tel:1-866-408-1899) or 711 for people who are hearing impaired from 8:30 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. Monday through Friday, and 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday and Sunday, or you may email DPH at DPHCall@delaware.gov. For the latest on the State of Delaware's response, please visit de.gov/coronavirus.

And once again, it bears repeating because it remains an effective method to prevent the spread of COVID-19, please wash your hands frequently and thoroughly; please try not to touch your face; and, if you feel sick, or think you have been exposed to the virus, please stay home and let your supervisor know.

Thank you for your continuing cooperation and your professionalism and calm in the face of this very challenging and fluid situation.

Be well.

Chief Justice C.J. Seitz, Jr.
Gayle Lafferty, State Court Administrator
Elmer Setting, Deputy State Court Administrator