PRESS RELEASE

New York State
Unified Court System

Hon. Lawrence K. Marks
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Courts in 13 Counties in Western New York and the Capital Region to Begin Return to In-Person Courthouse Operations

Judges and Staff in 13 More Counties Meeting Governor's Benchmarks to Return to Their Courthouses; New Case Filings Will Be Accepted

NEW YORK−Chief Judge Janet DiFiore and Chief Administrative Judge Lawrence K. Marks today announced the return of judges and staff to courthouses in 13 more counties that have met the Governor's established safety benchmarks. Starting Thursday, May 21, Western New York's Allegany, Cattaraugus, Chautauqua, Erie and Niagara counties will gradually resume in-person courthouse operations; followed by the Capital Region's Albany, Columbia, Greene, Rensselaer, Saratoga, Schenectady, Warren and Washington counties on Tuesday, May 26.

Earlier this week, courts in 35 other upstate counties spanning the State's Finger Lakes, Mohawk Valley, Southern Tier and Central New York regions−which have all met the Governor's benchmarks−began a gradual return to in-person courthouse operations.

Beginning tomorrow, New York State court system judges and chambers staff, along with designated clerks and support staff, in the previously named Western New York and Capital Region counties will return to their courthouses. Importantly, new cases may be filed electronically in these counties.

While remaining open for business during the pandemic, courts in these 13 counties had limited their operations, consolidating court facilities, implementing and expanding virtual court models, and taking a wide range of other measures to restrict courthouse traffic and contain the spread of COVID-19. With guidance from public health officials, plans to safely resume more normalized court operations have been ongoing.

Courthouse areas that will be used in this first phase include judges' chambers, clerks' offices and back offices. Physical distancing and other steps restricting courthouse traffic will be enforced to protect the health and safety of judges and staff, attorneys, litigants and members of the public, including:

- Non-employee court visitors will be required to undergo COVID-19 screening before entering the courthouse.
- Anyone entering the courthouse will be required to wear a mask.
- All staff who interact with court visitors must wear a mask.
- Courtroom and other areas will be carefully marked to ensure proper physical distancing.
- Court facilities will be regularly sanitized.
- Acrylic barriers, hand sanitizer dispensers and other safety features will be installed in courthouse areas as needed.

These plans will serve as a template for the return of judges and staff to courthouses in additional counties of the State that have yet to meet the Governor's safety benchmarks.

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