PRESS RELEASE

New York State
Unified Court System

Hon. Lawrence K. Marks
Chief Administrative Judge

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Date: April 13, 2020

Virtual Courts Expanded Beyond the Limited Category of Essential and Emergency Matters

Courts Begin Hearing Pending Matters; Ban on New Filings Still in Effect

NEW YORK−A week since the statewide rollout of virtual court operations−allowing essential and emergency proceedings, amid the COVID-19 pandemic, to be conducted remotely by Skype or teleconference−Chief Judge Janet DiFiore and Chief Administrative Judge Lawrence K. Marks today announced that this temporary "virtual court" model is being expanded beyond the limited category of essential and emergency matters. (For list of essential/emergency proceedings, see Administrative Order 78/20 at https://www.nycourts.gov/whatsnew/pdf/AO-78-2020.pdf.)

Over the past two weeks, the New York State Courts' trial court efforts have centered on arraignments, bail applications, orders of protection and other essential and emergency criminal, family and civil matters. Following a successful transition to a virtual court system for the handling of essential and emergency matters statewide, the court system is extending its focus to include pending tort, asbestos, commercial, matrimonial, trusts and estates, felony, family and other cases, which make up the vast bulk of trial court caseloads. The existing ban on the filing of new "non-essential" matters will remain in effect.

“Thanks to the adept leadership of our administrators and staff−in particular, the herculean efforts of our highly-skilled technology team−and the collaboration of our justice partners, the New York State court system, within just two weeks, has successfully implemented a virtual framework for handling all essential and emergency matters. Building on this framework, we can now begin to focus on the rest of our caseload, enabling judges and non-judicial employees across the State, who are anxious to get back to work and do their part, to be active and serve the public in this time of great need,” said Chief Judge DiFiore.

“Starting today, judges will begin remotely scheduling and conducting conferences and hearings to address discovery disputes and other outstanding issues, advancing progress and facilitating resolution in pending civil and criminal cases that fall outside the limited scope of essential and emergency matters. These are preliminary−but significant−steps forward as we strive, in these challenging times, to carry on the vitally important business of the courts,” said Chief Administrative Judge Marks.

During the past week, judges have been reviewing their non-essential case inventories, looking for ways to move these pending matters forward, both in New York City and districts in Long Island and upstate.

Court proceedings for pending non-essential matters will be heard virtually, with all interactions taking place by video or telephone, and administrative and court staff assisting judges in the use of Skype and other technology platforms to conduct conferences, access records and perform other essential tasks.

Judges and attorneys will participate remotely, with a very small number of Court Clerks and Court Officers continuing to staff designated courthouse locations to process critical paperwork and provide essential security. “We are immensely grateful to these dedicated court employees who continue to report to work so that our courts can deliver justice at this critical time,” said Chief Judge DiFiore and Chief Administrative Judge Marks.

While calendared proceedings will be open to the public, court security personnel will strictly monitor and may limit access to maintain social distancing in accordance with current public health authorities’ guidelines.

As the court system continues to evaluate and adjust its operational plans in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Judge Marks added that further steps to increase access to justice in non-essential matters will be announced in the coming weeks.

For more information about virtual court operations in your local county or Judicial District, as well as updates relating to COVID-19's impact on the New York State Courts, go to: www.nycourts.gov.

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