# Supreme Court forms task force to examine safe use of juries during pandemic

TOPEKA—The Kansas Supreme Court today appointed an **Ad Hoc Jury Task Force** to analyze issues courts will face when jury operations resume in district courts across the state.

The task force will study and recommend:

- ways to conduct jury trials and grand jury proceedings while protecting the safety of participants;
- how to summon juries while following safety directives;
- how to explain the process to the public; and
- other actions to help resume jury operations.

"Our courts must uphold the constitutional right to a jury trial while providing jurors and witnesses assurance that our courtrooms are safe," Chief Justice Marla Luckert said. "It's a tall order when our courtrooms are all different, but I have full faith the task force will develop helpful guidelines and suggest innovative solutions."

On May 27, the Supreme Court issued **Administrative Order 2020-PR-054**, providing updated direction to courts and court users as courts gradually conduct more in-person proceedings.

The order requires chief judges to seek input from local public health officials about how to safely resume in-person proceedings based on local risk and the courthouse facility, and it requires the chief judge to have a plan for screening people entering a courtroom or cour office.

The order allows jury trials to proceed if it's required to preserve a person's constitutional right to a speedy trial and the court has developed a detailed plan for jury operations. The task force will make recommendations for best practices courts can use to complete plans that:

- allow for voir dire, or jury selection, involving jury panels numbering no more than 12 at a time;
- use a location that provides for social distancing;
- designate how and where sidebar conversations will occur;
- specify how exhibits will be handled between attorneys, court staff, and jurors;
- provide a videostream of the proceedings for public viewing, if necessary; and
- specify how the jury will be managed to meet social distancing requirements, address jurors' ability to hear and see witnesses and exhibits, and identify where jurors will deliberate, including how they will leave for and return from deliberation.

District Judge Amy Hanley of the 7th Judicial District will chair the task force. The district is composed of Douglas County.

Other members of the task force:

- District Judge Steven Ebberts, 3rd Judicial District (Shawnee County);
- District Judge Lori Bolton Fleming, 11th Judicial District (Cherokee, Crawford, and Labette counties);
- Chief Judge Laura Lewis, 16th Judicial District (Clark, Comanche, Ford, Gray, Kiowa, and Meade counties);
- District Judge Christopher Smith, 19th Judicial District (Cowley County);
- Katherine Stocks, court administrator, 10th Judicial District (Johnson County);

- Janelle Morel, chief clerk, 17th Judicial District (Decatur, Graham, Norton, Osborne, Phillips, and Smith counties);
- Kristi Hill, clerk, 29th Judicial District (Wyandotte County);
- Crystal Gossett, clerk, 30th Judicial District (Barber, Harper, Kingman, Pratt, and Sumner counties);
- Andrea Skucius, secretary II, 20th Judicial District (Barton, Ellsworth, Rice, Russell, and Stafford counties);
- Mary Kay Howe, court reporter, 7th Judicial District;
- Paul Brothers, attorney, Topeka;
- Terrence Campbell, attorney, Lawrence;
- Jeffrey Dazey, attorney, Topeka;
- James Howell, attorney, Wichita;
- Kate McKinney, attorney, Overland Park;
- Christopher McMullin, attorney, Olathe; and
- Dionne Scherff, attorney, Overland Park.

Amy Raymond, director of trial court programs for the Office of Judicial Administration, and other judicial branch personnel will provide support.

Raymond said the task force's first meeting is Friday, June 5. The task force will meet weekly through June and biweekly starting in July.

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