NOTICE TO THE BAR

CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19) – CONTINUATION OF NORMAL COURT OPERATIONS; GUIDANCE TO ATTORNEYS AND LITIGANTS; REMINDER NOT TO SHARE CONFIDENTIAL HEALTH INFORMATION IN PLEADINGS

The New Jersey courts are following the guidance of the New Jersey Department of Health (NJ DOH) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to navigate the evolving situation relating to the coronavirus (COVID-19). Based on that guidance, we are currently maintaining normal business operations. All courthouses and court facilities at present remain open according to their regular schedules.

At the same time, we are taking preventive measures to reduce risk and allay concerns. It is imperative that attorneys, litigants, court users, and court employees not come to court if they are or may be at risk of exposure to or transmission of COVID-19. Instead, as stressed in the message posted on our public website (njcourts.gov), anyone with symptoms of COVID-19 or a risk of exposure (including a risk based on recent travel) should contact the court by phone and request to reschedule the proceeding or seek some other accommodation. Requests should be documented in writing as well. Judges and staff will handle requests on a case-by-case basis consistent with the most up-to-date guidance from the NJ DOH and CDC.

If a person appears in court and claims to have been diagnosed with or exposed to COVID-19, we must notify the local health department (LHD). We are working closely with the NJ DOH and LHDs and providing such notifications so that public health experts can follow up as necessary.

Additionally, as a reminder, personal health information should not be included in pleadings or other documents filed with the courts, including follow-up letters requesting or confirming adjournments.

We are also closely monitoring developments relating to COVID-19 and recognize that the present situation may change on short notice. With that in mind, we are making plans to conduct virtual and telephonic court proceedings at the Superior Court, Tax Court, Appellate Division, and Supreme Court, if necessary. Any such proceedings would have to not only accommodate the parties but also create a record and allow for public access -- the hallmark of any judicial system. Conducting virtual proceedings in scores of matters at the same time presents its own set of challenges, and our IT department is hard at work on that issue. It would be necessary to prioritize different types of proceedings and, of course, address emergency situations first.

For information on individual Municipal Courts, please contact the court directly, or check the court's website or the Municipal Court page on the Judiciary's website.

Our goal is simple: to enable the New Jersey courts to continue to serve the public in an appropriate manner during a still developing public health situation. For current information, please check our public website (njcourts.gov) or contact our court offices.

Stuart Rabner
Chief Justice

Dated: March 9, 2020