PRESS RELEASE

New York State
Unified Court System

Hon. Lawrence K. Marks
Chief Administrative Judge

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Courts in Five Upstate Judicial Districts to Begin Phase Three of Return to In-Person Operations

New York−As New York continues its steady recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, Chief Judge Janet DiFiore and Chief Administrative Judge Lawrence K. Marks announced that, starting tomorrow, courts in the Fifth Judicial District (Syracuse and surrounding counties), Sixth Judicial District (Binghamton and surrounding counties) and Seventh Judicial District (Rochester and surrounding counties) will begin Phase Three of a gradual return to in-person operations; followed on Friday, June 19, by courts in the Fourth Judicial District (northern New York) and Eighth Judicial District (western New York).

The goal of Phase Three is to increase foot traffic in the courthouse in a measured manner and extend the types of proceedings to be heard in-person to include:

- Child support proceedings
- Selected plea and sentencing proceedings for defendants at liberty
- Preliminary hearings in criminal cases for defendants being held in jail on felony complaints
- Arraignments of defendants issued desk appearance tickets
- A limited number of bench trials in civil matters
- Essential Family Court matters will continue to be heard in-person

Judges will continue to expand their use of virtual proceedings whenever legally permissible and logistically possible. Where an in-person proceeding involves an incarcerated individual, that individual shall appear virtually via electronic means unless otherwise ordered by the assigned judge.

Non-essential matters, criminal proceedings (except as noted), juvenile delinquency proceedings and mental hygiene law proceedings pertaining to a hospitalized adult will continue to be held virtually and heard by the assigned judge. Mediation/alternative dispute resolution will be conducted virtually.

Judges and clerks will coordinate to ensure that court space is used to optimize safety and efficiency. There will be staggered scheduling of court appearances, court calendars and courtroom usage to limit the number of people in courthouses and ensure that no more than half of the courtrooms are being used at any given time.

During Phase Three, non-judicial staffing levels will increase modestly to support necessary administrative court functions as well as to provide support for the increase in foot traffic in the courthouse. Non-reporting court staff will continue to work virtually.

Phase One measures that will remain in place to protect the health and safety of judges, staff and court visitors include:

- 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.
- Courthouse areas will be carefully marked to ensure proper physical distancing.
- Court facilities will be regularly sanitized.
- Installation of acrylic barriers, hand sanitizer dispensers and other safety features in courthouse areas as needed.

"In order to keep up our progress as we re-establish in-person courthouse operations across the State, we must proceed cautiously, remaining vigilant in following the new safety measures and operational protocols designed to protect the health of our judges, staff and court visitors," said Chief Judge DiFiore.

Individuals with court-related questions are encouraged to call their designated county courthouse. Additional legal information and resources can be found at: https://www.lawhelpny.org/resource/coronavirus and https://www.nycourts.gov/courthelp/

For information and updates from the New York State Unified Court System on the coronavirus, please visit www.nycourts.gov or call the Coronavirus Telephone Hotline at 833-503-0447.

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