PRESS RELEASE

New York State
Unified Court System

Hon. Lawrence K. Marks
Chief Administrative Judge

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Courts in Fifth, Sixth and Seventh Judicial Districts to Begin Phase Four 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 Four of a return to in-person operations; followed on Monday, July 6, by courts in the Fourth Judicial District (northern New York) and Eighth Judicial District (western New York).

In Phase Four, the types proceedings to be heard in-person will include:

- Child support proceedings
- Child permanency hearings
- Plea and sentencing proceedings for defendants at liberty
- Preliminary hearings in criminal cases for defendants being held in jail on felony complaints
- Superior civil court appearances where at least one party is self-represented
- Arraignments of defendants issued desk appearance tickets
- A limited number of bench trials in civil and criminal matters
- Small claims filed prior to April 1, 2020
- Grand jury proceedings will commence on July 13, 2020
- 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.

Matters that will continue to be held virtually and heard by the assigned judge include non-essential matters; criminal proceedings (except as noted); juvenile delinquency proceedings; adoptions; eviction matters in which all parties are represented by counsel; and mental hygiene law proceedings pertaining to a hospitalized adult. 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 Four, non-judicial staffing levels will continue to increase (not to exceed 80 percent) 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, Two and Three measures will remain in place to protect the health and safety of judges, staff and court visitors, including:

- 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.

“As we re-establish in-person courthouse operations across the State, we must continue to be mindful of all the public health best practices implemented throughout the court system in order to safely move forward,” Chief Judge DiFiore emphasized.

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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