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Chief Justice Orders Courthouses Closed to the Public Except for Official Court Business

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HONOLULU – Today Chief Justice Mark E. Recktenwald ordered all state courthouses closed to the public, except for official court business, from March 23 to April 30, 2020.

"The COVID-19 pandemic continues to evolve, and the Judiciary is taking appropriate steps to ensure the safety of our community," Chief Justice Recktenwald said. "We join Hawaii's leaders in doing everything possible to slow the spread of this virus."

Those with official court business include:
• Parties, attorneys, witnesses, domestic violence advocates, guardians ad litem, interpreters, or any other person who must appear in-person as authorized by previous orders

• Individuals who need to file documents with the court and who are unable to electronically file

• Individuals who request to watch a specific public proceeding

The order states that any person entering judiciary facilities must minimize their time within the facility to the extent reasonably possible. This means going directly to areas of the facility in which their presence is required and leaving immediately after their business is complete. Additionally, anyone in judiciary facilities must maintain six feet between themselves and any other person to the extent feasible, including within courtrooms.

The chief judges of each circuit may issue orders and adjust court operations as necessary to minimize the number of people entering judiciary facilities, including establishing secure drop-boxes outside of courthouses for document filing to replace current in-person filing procedures.

In a related action to stem the spread of COVID-19, Judge Melanie May, Deputy Chief Judge of the District Court, First Circuit, today issued an order completely closing the following Oahu District Court facilities from March 23 to April 30:

- Ewa District Court
- Kaneohe District Court
- Wahiawa District Court
- Waianae District Court
- Traffic Violations Bureau (2nd floor of Honolulu District Court)
- Legal Documents Branch (3rd floor of Honolulu District Court)

Temporary Restraining Orders and other documents that a party is unable to file electronically may be filed at the Honolulu District Court Information Booth which is located to the right of the main entrance.

Essential court proceedings will be held at the Honolulu District Court, including TRO hearings. For cases involving defendants in custody, video conferencing will be used to the extent possible.

“Our local, state, and federal officials have emphasized that social distancing is critical to slowing the spread of COVID-19 in our community and flattening the curve,” said Deputy Chief Judge Melanie May. “The Judiciary’s collective efforts to further reduce court operations not only promotes social distancing within court facilities, but also in the larger community by allowing people to remain at home rather than making their way to the courthouse steps.”

Anyone with questions about any District Court case on Oahu may call 808-538-5629 or 808-538-5767.

The Judiciary has also taken action to minimize the number of in-person court proceedings. On Monday, March 16, the Chief Justice issued an order limiting all in-person appearances for civil, family, and, to the extent possible, criminal dockets, except for urgent and time sensitive matters. The order also prohibits individuals from entering judiciary facilities if they have a fever, cough, or other respiratory symptoms; traveled outside Hawaii in the past 14 days; or have had close prolonged contact with a person who has or is suspected to have COVID-19.

Additionally, to minimize health risks:

- First Circuit Chief Judge R. Mark Browning issued an emergency order stating all public sales of property ordered to be sold in foreclosure cases filed in the First Circuit be postponed until after April 30. The order also states that open houses scheduled for court-related public sale be rescheduled until after April 30. Interested parties should read the full order.

- Yesterday, Chief Justice Recktenwald issued an order extending appellate deadlines that expire between March 20 and April 3, 2020 to April 6. Interested parties should read the full order.

Copies of all orders are available on the Judiciary’s **COVID-19 Information (https://www.courts.state.hi.us/covid-19-information-page)** page.

For more information, contact the Communications and Community Relations Office at 808-539-4909 or via email at **pao@courts.hawaii.gov (mailto:pao@courts.hawaii.gov)**.

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