EMERGENCY ALERTS

Coronavirus Update

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PRESS RELEASE

Supreme Judicial Court Issues New Order Regarding Jury Trials and Operation of Courts

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

2/24/2021

Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court

Appeals Court

Executive Office of the Trial Court

Superior Court

Boston Municipal Court

District Court

Probate and Family Court

Juvenile Court

Housing Court

Land Court

Massachusetts Court System

Massachusetts Probation Service

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BOSTON, MA — The Supreme Judicial Court (SJC) today issued an updated order regarding the operation of Massachusetts state courts and courthouses during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. The new order goes into effect March 1, 2021, and will replace the existing order issued on September 17, 2020.

Court operations largely remain the same under the new SJC order. The principal change involves the transition from Phase 1 to Phase 2 of the gradual resumption of jury trials. As described in the order, Phase 2 has been modified from the Phase 2 recommended by the Jury Management Advisory Committee (JMAC) in its **report** (/doc/jury-management-advisory-committee-jmac-report-and-recommendations-to-the-justices-of-the/download) of July 31, 2020. The modified Phase 2 will consist of six-person jury trials, conducted in person, in a select number of locations, with limitations on the number of peremptory challenges in certain types of cases. Priority will be given to criminal cases where the defendant is in custody, although civil trials may take place. The cases that will be tried during Phase 2, as well as the locations, will be determined by the Chief Justice of the Trial Court and the Chief Justices of the applicable Trial Court departments, in consultation with the Regional Administrative Justices and First Justices in each court.

During Phase 2, which is expected to last two months, all jury trials will continue to be conducted pursuant to the health and safety practices recommended by the JMAC. The SJC will issue further direction regarding the resumption of jury trials after reviewing the JMAC's evaluation of Phase 2. As throughout the pandemic, however, all plans and expectations may be adjusted at any time in the ongoing effort to balance the safety of everyone who enters a courthouse with the fundamental constitutional right to a trial by jury.

Otherwise, courts will continue to conduct most business virtually and courthouses will continue to be physically open to the public for limited purposes, including certain other in-person proceedings. Judges will continue to schedule and conduct bench trials and other hearings, either virtually or in-person. Each Trial Court department will continue to post notices to the court system's COVID-19 webpage identifying how (virtually or in-person) it is addressing various categories of matters.

Clerks', registers', and recorder's offices will continue to be physically open to the public, while still endeavoring to conduct business virtually as much as possible.

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Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court (/orgs/massachusetts-supreme-judicial-court)

The Supreme Judicial Court is the Commonwealth's highest appellate court.

More (/orgs/massachusetts-supreme-judicial-court)

Appeals Court (/orgs/appeals-court)

The Appeals Court is the Commonwealth's intermediate appellate court.

More (/orgs/appeals-court)

Executive Office of the Trial Court (/orgs/executive-office-of-the-trial-court)

The Executive Office of the Trial Court facilitates communication and enables joint leadership of the Trial Court by the Chief Justice of the Trial Court and the Court Administrator.

More (/orgs/executive-office-of-the-trial-court)

Superior Court (/orgs/superior-court)

The Superior Court Department is a statewide court that handles both criminal and civil actions.

More (/orgs/superior-court)

Boston Municipal Court (/orgs/boston-municipal-court)

The Boston Municipal Court Department serves the City of Boston, and handles both criminal and civil matters.

More (/orgs/boston-municipal-court)

District Court (/orgs/district-court)

The District Court Department hears a wide range of criminal, civil, housing, juvenile, mental health

The District Court Department hears a wide range of criminal, civil, housing, juvenile, mental health, and other types of cases.

More (/orgs/district-court)

Probate and Family Court (/orgs/probate-and-family-court)

The Probate and Family Court Department handles matters involving families and children, like divorce, child support, and wills.

More (/orgs/probate-and-family-court)

Juvenile Court (/orgs/juvenile-court)

The Juvenile Court Department oversees civil and criminal matters statewide involving children including youthful offender, care and protection, and delinquency cases.

More (/orgs/juvenile-court)

Housing Court (/orgs/housing-court)

Summary Process, Small Claims and Supplementary process matters are now available for eFiling. Efiling for Civil cases will be introduced on August 17, 2020. For more information, please see the section below titled 'eFiling in the Housing Court'.

More (/orgs/housing-court)

Land Court (/orgs/land-court)

The Land Court hears a wide range of cases involving real estate and land use, and oversees the Commonwealth's system for the registration of title to real property.

More (/orgs/land-court)

Massachusetts Court System (/orgs/massachusetts-court-system)

The Massachusetts court system consists of the Supreme Judicial Court, the Appeals Court, the Executive Office of the Trial Court, the 7 Trial Court departments, the Massachusetts Probation Service, and the Office of Jury Commissioner.

More (/orgs/massachusetts-court-system)

Massachusetts Probation Service (/orgs/massachusetts-probation-service)

MPS's main goal is to keep communities safe and to provide people on probation with the rehabilitative tools they need to live a productive and law-abiding life.

Effective Monday, July 20, 2020, the Office of the Commissioner of Probation will be open to the public by appointment only. If you wish to make an appointment or speak with someone regarding sealing or expunging a record or have questions for the Records Unit, please call (617) 557-0225.

More (/orgs/massachusetts-probation-service)

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Court system response to COVID-19

(https://www.mass.gov/resource/court-system-response-to-covid-19)