The response to COVID-19 has impacted access to courthouses and may change the way cases are handled.
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News Item

First Four Counties Approved to Hold Criminal Jury Trial Pilots

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Additional counties are anticipated to apply to pilot criminal jury trials in the coming weeks.

The Minnesota Judicial Council has approved four counties to begin holding criminal jury trials, as part of a pilot project. Hennepin, McLeod, Olmsted, and Ramsey counties have complied with the **Minnesota Judicial Branch COVID-19 Preparedness Plan**, implemented recommendations for **Re-Starting Jury Trials during COVID-19,** and submitted locally approved **Jury Trial Pilot checklists**. The three documents address changes to facilities and protocols that must be followed to meet social distancing and safety needs, and were developed with the Minnesota Department of Health.

"The right to a trial before a jury of our peers is promised in the U.S. Constitution. The Minnesota Judicial Branch has implemented detailed safety measures to maintain social distancing, follow guidance from health officials, and ensure that jury trial pilot locations are operating in a safe and responsible manner. Jurors are understandably eager to know the safety measures that will be implemented to protect them and their loved ones. I encourage all who are summoned to review the safety plans courts are following, and to remember the vital role jurors perform in our justice system," said Minnesota Supreme Court Chief Justice Lorie S. Gildea.

Jurors in the approved pilot counties should respond to their jury summons as required.

When additional pilot counties are approved by the Judicial Council, updates will be made on the **Jury Service webpage of the Minnesota Judicial Branch website**.

Each juror will be provided with a paper mask when he or she arrives at a courthouse each day. If they wish, jurors may supply their own face coverings. Additionally, Minnesota Department of Health social distancing guidelines will be followed in each courthouse, including when and where jurors assemble, participate in voir dire, listen to proceedings, deliberate, and move throughout the courthouse. Guidance will be available in each courthouse for how to follow social distancing in seating and elevator use. Where necessary, partitions and physical barriers have been set up in each courthouse to ensure that traffic flow and interactions are taking place safely.

Executive Order No. 20-63 exempted the Minnesota Judicial Branch from the limits on gatherings. As such, the Chief Justice's order addresses the process for limited resumption of criminal jury trials. Additional guidance will be posted on the Jury Service webpage, **mncourts.gov/jurors**, and distributed with paper summons.

District courts approved by the Judicial Council were permitted to apply to pilot criminal jury trials under the **order** issued by Chief Justice Lorie S. Gildea on May 15, 2020. No other jury trials shall be held in criminal cases before July 6, 2020, other than the counties approved to conduct pilots. Additionally, no jury trials shall be held in civil cases before September 1, 2020.