IN THE SUPREME COURT OF THE STATE OF ALASKA

SPECIAL ORDER OF THE CHIEF JUSTICE

ORDER NO. 8183

Update regarding COVID-19 and Jury Trials

The spread of COVID-19 has continued across the state since jury trials were first suspended on March 16, 2020. Many school districts have announced that the school year will begin without in-person attendance. The Municipality of Anchorage recently issued an order that prohibits all indoor gatherings involving more than 15 people. These developments suggest that it would be unduly challenging to require jurors and other participants to gather for purposes of trial. Therefore, under the authority of Supreme Court Order 1957,

IT IS ORDERED:

1. Jury trials remain suspended until at least November 2, 2020. The period of this delay, beginning March 16, will continue to be excluded in computing the time for trial under Alaska Criminal Rule 45(d). When this suspension is lifted, the time for trial will continue to be tolled for the time necessary to permit an orderly transition and scheduling. This suspension does not apply to proceedings (such as presumptive death trials) in which videoconference trials have been approved. The continuation of this suspension will be reviewed on or shortly after September 18.

2. A presiding judge may allow a jury trial to proceed in exceptional circumstances.

3. The chief justice may approve jury trials in pilot projects to test health and safety procedures.

4. All trials shall be conducted with strict adherence to social distancing, face coverings, and other health requirements imposed by government health mandates, presiding judge orders, and administrative bulletins. To promote social distancing, the public may be required to participate by teleconference, videoconference, or video feed.

DATED: August 6, 2020

Joel H. Bolger
Chief Justice

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