PRESS RELEASE

New York State
Unified Court System

Hon. Lawrence K. Marks
Chief Administrative Judge

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By Week's End, All Courts Outside NYC Will Have Begun Phase Two of Gradual Return to In-Person Operations

NEW YORK – As New York continues its steady recovery from the COVID pandemic, Chief Judge Janet DiFiore and Chief Administrative Judge Lawrence K. Marks today announced that, by week's end, courts in every judicial district outside New York City will have begun Phase Two of a gradual return to in-person operations.

Starting today, courts in the Third Judicial District (Albany, Columbia, Greene, Rensselaer, Schoharie, Sullivan and Ulster counties) and Ninth Judicial District (Dutchess, Orange, Putnam, Rockland and Westchester counties) will enter Phase Two; followed tomorrow by courts in the Tenth Judicial District (Nassau and Suffolk counties).

"As we progress toward fuller in-person court operations across the State, our foremost priority remains protecting the health and safety of all those who work in and visit our courthouses," Chief Judge DiFiore reiterated.

Over the past two weeks, judges, chambers staff and support staff in courts in the previously mentioned judicial districts−which have all met the Governor's safety benchmarks−have been returning to their courthouses.

The goal of Phase Two is to safely increase courthouse foot traffic in a gradual manner, so that the Court can select matters that require an in-person appearance while continuing to maximize virtual appearances, as follows:

- Essential family matters will be conducted in-person and heard by the assigned judge.
- Criminal, juvenile delinquency and mental hygiene law proceedings pertaining to a hospitalized adult will be held virtually and heard by the assigned judge.
- Non-essential matters will continue to be held virtually and heard by the assigned judge.
- Mediation/alternate dispute resolution will be conducted virtually.

Steps implemented during this second phase to encourage physical distancing and reduce the number of people in any given room in courthouses include staggering case types, court calendars and courtroom use. During Phase Two, non-judicial staffing levels will minimally increase 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 measures that will remain in place to protect the health and safety of judges and staff, attorneys, litigants and members of the public, include:

- Non-employee 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.

Individuals with court-related questions are encouraged to call their designated county courthouse.

Additional legal information and resources can also be found at the following websites:

LawHelp: https://www.lawhelpny.org/resource/coronavirus

CourtHelp: 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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