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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Maine Judicial Branch Announces Reduction in Court Hours and Adjustments to Operations as Part of COVID-19 Response

Portland ME – The Maine Judicial Branch today updated the measures being taken to reduce the number of people coming into state courthouses. These changes are intended to ensure that the most urgent court proceedings identified in the Supreme Court's Emergency Order dated March 13, 2020 and revised March 18, 2020 (the Emergency Order) may continue, while the exposure of the public and Judicial Branch staff to potential contagion is reduced.

> *"Leadership in the Maine Judicial Branch is committed to reducing the exposure of the public and court staff to the virus. At the same time, we are working to assure that the courts remain available to those members of the public who need immediate access to justice to address their personal safety, the safety and care of children at risk of harm, and the liberty interests of those who are or may become incarcerated,"* said Chief Justice Leigh Saufley

ANNOUNCING REDUCED COURT HOURS

New court hours. In every region, court hours have been adjusted and reduced for the upcoming week. The current schedule can be found here https://www.courts.maine.gov/covid19/court-hours.html

Don't come to court without checking courthouse schedules. Because changes in court hours may occur daily, any person intending to go to a Maine courthouse should check the website here https://www.courts.maine.gov/covid19/court-hours.html before traveling to the court or call 207-753-2999.

HEARINGS

- Any hearings that must be held, either fully or partially in a courthouse, will be managed in a way that promotes social distancing. **Video appearances will be encouraged in all cases.**
- Promoting social distancing may require the change of hearing times. Please c**heck with the local court to confirm your hearing time before you travel to the courthouse.** The list of local courthouse numbers may be found on the Judicial Branch website at https://www.courts.maine.gov/maine_courts/index.shtml. You

may also call 207-753-2999.

REDUCING COURTHOUSE FILING OF DOCUMENTS
While the Emergency Order remains in effect, judicial leadership has **approved the use of email to send motions to the court in criminal, child protection, and mental health matters, with hard copies to be forwarded by mail.**

INCREASED USE OF VIDEO PROCEEDINGS
In the limited proceedings that continue to be addressed in the courts, every effort is being made to use video appearances rather than have litigants or lawyers come into courthouses.

Criminal Proceedings

- Almost all first appearances of those who have been arrested, bail reviews, and other non-trial hearings that address the liberty interests of those who are or may become incarcerated are being conducted by video.
- Judicial Branch OIT staff has designed a new process for video appearances in criminal matters that will now allow those county jails that have not been able to participate in video appearances to do so. The cooperation and collaboration among the Sheriffs, the Maine Prosecutors Association, and the Criminal Defense Bar, through MACDL and MCILS has been key to these improvements.

Child Protection and Mental Health Proceedings
Video appearances in child protection and mental health proceedings are in the works.

DEFERRED JURY TRIALS
The Emergency Order deferred all jury trials and provided that:

- All civil and criminal jury trials are deferred until after May 1, 2020 at the earliest.
- Grand jury sessions will not be held until after May 1, 2020.

FINES, FEES, RESTITUTION, AND ATTORNEY FEE REIMBURSEMENTS
Fines and fees can be paid on-line, eliminating the need to come to a courthouse. Here is the site for on-line payments. https://www5.informe.org/online/courts/fines/

For those unable to pay their fines and fees at this time, several steps have been taken by Order dated March 16, 2020:

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- An order will be posted on March 23, 2020 extending fine payment deadlines to a date in May, 2020.
- All warrants for failure to pay fines, fees, restitution, or attorney fees have been vacated.

MEETINGS
Most court trainings, meetings, conferences and gatherings have been cancelled. If you had planned to attend such a gathering, check the court's website for updates.

IF YOU ARE SICK OR HAVE BEEN EXPOSED TO THE VIRUS

Do not go to any courthouse if you are sick, if you have the virus, or if you know that you have been exposed to the virus. If have questions about whether you should go to a courthouse, please call 207-753-2999. For general inquiries concerning the Judicial Branch's response to the COVID-19 outbreak, contact info@courts.maine.gov.

Please visit the Judicial Branch's webpage at
https://www.courts.maine.gov/covid19.shtml
for the latest information about the Judicial Branch's response to COVID-19 and related court orders can be found.