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ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE of PENNSYLVANIA COURTS

NEWS FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Pennsylvania Supreme Court Directs Local Courts to Restore More Operations

HARRISBURG – In an Order issued today, the Pennsylvania Supreme Court directed county courts to restore a wider range of operations, while giving priority to critical matters and remaining focused on protecting the health and safety of court users, personnel and the public.

"Courts play a central role in our constitutional democracy, and it's important to ensure that they are available to those seeking vindication of their rights or resolution of disputes," said Pennsylvania Supreme Court Chief Justice Tom Saylor. "The COVID-19 health emergency has forced everyone to adapt, and courts have quickly adjusted to handle a wide range of matters remotely."

"While the Court has extended the judicial emergency through June 1, 2020, in order to provide President Judges with authority to address varying local conditions, we recognize the need to move beyond emergency matters to a much broader range of court functions. We do so, however, giving priority to our most critical functions and in a manner consistent with public health and safety."

With the exception of speedy trial calculations under Rule of Criminal Procedure 600, the statewide suspension of time calculations and deadlines provided for in the courts previous orders will end effective May 11, 2020. President Judges are given substantial discretion in the enforcement of deadlines, with due regard for public safety.

The Court's previous orders regarding dispossession of property are extended until May 11, at which point they will end. As today's order notes, however, there may be restraints on some actions related to dispossession of property imposed by other sources, including the federal CARES Act.

Jury trials (both criminal and civil) remain suspended and will be scheduled for a date in the future.

In an effort to ensure access to open courts in light of remote proceedings, the Supreme Court continues to encourage the use of advanced communication technology that permits access for the public and press.

In addition to identifying the same critical functions outlined in previous orders, the Court's Order provides the following guidance:

<u>Safety of Judges, Court Staff and Users</u>

- Court leaders must implement and maintain procedures that limit potential COVID-19 exposure, including restricting in-person access to court facilities;
- Subject to constitutional limitations, any state or local rule that impedes a judge's ability to utilize available technologies to limit in-person contact is suspended through June 1, 2020; and
- For proceedings that must be held in person, appropriate safety measures, consistent with federal and state executive guidance, should be employed. All courts are encouraged to consider deciding matters on the papers and/or to conduct proceeding through the use of advanced communication technologies, to the extent constitutional requirements can be satisfied.

Court Filings and Time Limitations and Deadlines

- Suspension of time calculations and deadlines outlined in the Court's previous Orders will end May 11, 2020;
- Prior orders related to payments to Magisterial District Courts are extended until May 11, 2020.
- Court filings should be by means other than in-person delivery whenever possible;
- Self-represented litigants or attorneys who believe the enforcement of time deadlines pose a danger to health and safety may file a certification with the court for consideration;
- Attorneys are encouraged to conduct depositions remotely; and
- Deposition of and required appearances for doctors, nurses, or other healthcare professionals substantially involved in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic are suspended through June 1.

Additional information about the impact of COVID-19 on court operations is available online, at @pennsylvaniacourts and @PACourts.

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