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

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## News Item

# Two Additional Counties Approved for Criminal Jury Trial Pilots

*Posted: Monday, June 15, 2020*

Scott County and Blue Earth County have been approved by the Minnesota Judicial Council to begin Criminal Jury Trial Pilots. With these two approvals there are now six district courts that are conducing pilots.

“We are committed to ensuring courts are doing everything we can to make the criminal jury trial experience safe. As pilots have progressed we have been impressed with the commitment to duty shown by Minnesotans during these turbulent times,” said Minnesota Supreme Court Chief Justice Lorie S. Gildea. “The Minnesota Judicial Council will review the evaluation of all approved Criminal Jury Trial Pilots in order to understand the juror, staff, litigant, attorney, witness, and judicial officer experience. Pilot counties are meeting

important milestones already, as juries reached verdicts in both Hennepin and Ramsey counties last week."

The Minnesota Judicial Branch announced the first round of approved Criminal Jury Trial Pilot counties on June 3, 2020. Hennepin, McLeod, Olmsted, and Ramsey counties were approved by the Judicial Council after demonstrating compliance with the standards and expectations required to pursue a pilot. Those standards require courts seeking to begin a pilot to adhere to the **Minnesota Judicial Branch COVID-19 Preparedness Plan**, the **Re-Starting Jury Trials during COVID-19,** and the locally-approved **Jury Trial Pilot checklist**. 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.

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, **mncourts.gov/jurors**.

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.