Administrative Office of the Courts

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Courts, health officials and attorneys work together to prepare for possible isolation and quarantine cases

SANTA FE – The Judicial branch of government, the Department of Health and attorneys across New Mexico are working collaboratively to prepare for the possibility that state authorities may request court orders to isolate or quarantine individuals posing a public health threat during the COVID-19 outbreak.

The state Supreme Court organized online training for judges and attorneys this week on provisions of state law allowing the department to petition a district court for orders to isolate or quarantine people during a public health emergency.

A training session will be held today for nearly 90 attorneys who volunteered through the state Bar of New Mexico to represent individuals who become the subject of a public health isolation or quarantine order. Two judges in each judicial district have been designated by the Supreme Court to hear public health emergency cases and they received training on Wednesday.

"This is a good example of partners in our justice system coming together in this public health emergency and preparing for rarely used legal actions that state health officials could take to protect New Mexicans from exposure to people infected with COVID-19," said Justice C. Shannon Bacon.

Justice David Thomson said, "By having a trained group of judges and lawyers on call to handle public health cases, New Mexico's court system can respond quickly if state authorities seek a quarantine or isolation order to help control the spread of coronavirus."

The Department of Health (DOH) has worked with New Mexico courts to plan for isolation and quarantine cases, including helping with training and to develop forms for orders and pleadings in possible isolation and quarantine cases.

“This has been a great process, and we appreciate the time and attention that the judges have given to this issue,” said Chris Woodward, assistant general counsel at DOH. “The New Mexico courts play an essential role in protecting the health and safety of the public during this public health emergency, and we at the Department of Health are thankful for the dedication that the courts have shown to this cause.”

Those conducting the training sessions were Woodward; Rob Schwartz, a University of New Mexico School of Law professor who teaches health law and is a member of the UNM Board of Regents; Sidney Barrett of Taos, retired general counsel of the Georgia Department of Public Health; Ron Bratton, an Albuquerque attorney; and Second Judicial District Court Judges Nancy Franchini and Clay Campbell.

For news updates on the Judiciary’s ongoing response to the COVID-19 pandemic, visit the New Mexico Courts website and follow our Twitter feed @nmcourts.

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