Administrative Office of the Courts

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Jury trials in criminal and civil cases to resume in New Mexico

SANTA FE – Jury trials can resume starting next month subject to approval by the New Mexico Supreme Court of plans by courts for protecting the public health and safety as courthouse operations expand.

An order issued today by the Supreme Court lifts the suspension on jury trials in criminal and civil cases that has been in place since March. Courts may resume jury trials between June 15 and July 15.

"As our state gradually reopens, courts can safely resume jury trials as local conditions permit," said Chief Justice Judith K. Nakamura. "Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, New Mexico courts have worked diligently to protect the health of people entering a courthouse. In resuming jury trials, our courts will rigorously follow COVID-safe practices developed by public health authorities."

Before courts can recommence jury trials, the chief judge in the judicial district must submit individualized plans for Supreme Court approval that detail the operating procedures and precautions implemented for courts in that district. These include steps for safeguarding jurors, lawyers, witnesses and others during a trial, how to maintain minimum 6-foot physical distancing of people in courtrooms and jury selection rooms, and the use of plexiglass dividers and other protective barriers in a courthouse.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, courts have implemented safety measures recommended by the New Mexico Department of Health (NMDOH) to minimize the risk of exposure to the coronavirus. These include:

- Requiring masks and protective face coverings for anyone entering a court building.
- Health screening of courthouse visitors, including temperature checks, to determine whether they exhibit possible coronavirus symptoms.
- Limiting the number of people in locations throughout a courthouse to ensure proper social distancing.
- Frequent cleaning and disinfecting in judicial buildings, especially high-touch surfaces such as doors, tables, counters and courthouse seating.

Also today, the Court issued an order that will add 30 days to the payment deadline imposed by a magistrate, metropolitan, district or municipal court for fines and fees due between May 30 and June 30, 2020. People with questions about their payment deadline should contact the court that imposed the penalties.

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