

SUPREME COURT

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

THE RHODE ISLAND JUDICIARY'S RESPONSE TO CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19)

Question: Are the courthouses closed in Rhode Island?

Answer: In short, the answer is no. The continued changes to the Supreme Court Clerk's operations can be found in Executive Order 2020-13. For all other courts, the continued changes to operations such as trials, grand jury matters, in-person hearings, and remote hearings, are set forth in Executive Order 2020-012. Eviction filings may be heard by the District Court after June 1, 2020. The District Court will establish a protocol for handling the evictions matters which can be found on the Judiciary's website.

The Judicial Records Center and Fogarty Judicial Annex were closed to the public on March 17, 2020. To conserve resources and critical supplies needed to fight the COVID-19 virus, McGrath (Washington County) and Murray (Newport County) Judicial Complexes were closed on April 1, 2020 and will re-open on Tuesday, September 8, 2020. Please see the "Contact Information" on this page to contact the respective courts if needed.

Question: How is the Rhode Island Judiciary implementing social distancing in the courthouses?

Answer:

1. Space capacity limits for judicial buildings, courtrooms, and public space shall be revised to be consistent with social distancing policies and best practices. The courts shall adhere to these capacity limits when scheduling in-person hearings and other matters.
2. Everyone entering a judicial building shall be subject to verbal screening for COVID-19 exposure or symptomology.
3. Every person entering a judicial building shall be expected to wear a face covering or mask. At the discretion of the judicial officer presiding on each case, masks need not be worn while participants in a court hearing are testifying, provided social distancing can be maintained.
4. Only those judicial officers, attorneys, essential personnel, litigants, witnesses, and other necessary parties who pass verbal screening shall be allowed to enter the judicial buildings.
5. All proceedings taking place within a judicial building shall be conducted in a manner which adheres to the directives issued by the Governor and the

Department of Health with respect to social distancing and crowd restrictions to the greatest extent possible

6. Members of the media who wish to access a judicial building shall be permitted to do so with the approval of the presiding judicial officer and/or by coordinating with the Director of the Judiciary's Office of Community Outreach and Public Relations by contacting cberke@courts.ri.gov. Members of the media shall be subject to the screening protocols in place at each judicial building prior to entry and access may be limited depending on the capacity limits that are set. If physical entry to a judicial building is denied to a member of the media, alternative means of access shall be made available to members of the media.

Question: How do I file papers with the court?

Answer: Filings can be made through the electronic filing system or by mail or other means, as allowed by the rules or administrative orders of each court.

Each court will develop procedures for in-person filings that limit foot traffic to and within judicial buildings to the greatest extent possible. The procedures will be published on the Judiciary's website not later than June 1, 2020.

Question: How does the public access the court hearings?

Answer: The public health crisis necessitates that all judicial buildings be limited to the public to the greatest extent possible. Entry into a courthouse for the purpose of an in-person proceeding shall continue to be limited to attorneys, parties, witnesses, and other necessary persons as determined by the judge presiding over the proceeding. Public access to all court proceedings normally open to the public shall be available by telephonic or other means. Information regarding public access is available on the Judiciary's website or by contacting the appropriate clerk's office for further information.

Question: How can I meet payment dates or court-imposed deadlines?

Answer: The courts may reinstitute payment deadlines with notice to the parties. Parties can make payments online on the Rhode Island Judiciary Public Portal at <https://publicportal.courts.ri.gov/PublicPortal>. If parties are unable to pay remotely, in-person payments shall be made during regular court hours.

All filing deadlines which would have expired between Marth 17, 2020 and May 17, 2020 shall be extended to May 29, 2020. All deadlines occurring after May 17, 2020 shall not be extended unless upon motion duly made and granted by the appropriate court and in accordance with the rules of each court.

Question: What if my pleading requires a notarized signature or my hearing requires an in-person oath or affirmation?

Answer: Any rule that may be interpreted to require administering any oath or affirmation in-person may be relaxed to allow such oaths or affirmations to be administered remotely by available technologies, including videoconferencing or teleconferencing, provided such remote administration is not otherwise prohibited by any statutory or constitutional provision. Notarial acts shall be governed by the Remote Online Notarization guidelines promulgated by the Secretary of State and available at www.sos.ri.gov.