

News Advisory

From the Rhode Island Judiciary



State courts to cancel sessions next week

March 13, 2020: Beginning Monday, March 16, Rhode Island state courts will remain open during the COVID-19 public health emergency, but all court calendars will be canceled for one week, Supreme Court Chief Justice Paul A. Suttell announced today.

This applies to the Supreme Court, Superior Court, Family Court, District Court, Workers' Compensation Court and Rhode Island Traffic Tribunal. Court staff are to report to work as usual.

There will be no jury trials next week. The courts will be able to handle any and all emergency matters including but not limited to domestic violence petitions, temporary restraining orders, bail, and arraignments for charges of serious crimes.

Consistent with guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Governor Raimondo, and the Rhode Island Department of Health, the Judiciary is taking these steps to reduce the number of people in its courthouses to mitigate the potential for spreading the virus.

The courts will continue to explore case types that would be favorable for remote hearings and next week will reassess options for limited court operations after March 20.

While the courts will be open, Chief Justice Suttell strongly urged that members of the public not appear at the courthouse if they have been directed to self-monitor for coronavirus by a medical authority or an employer, if they have been diagnosed with the coronavirus, or if they have serious flu-like symptoms such as fever, cough and shortness of breath. Likewise, if persons do not have business with the courts, they are encouraged not to enter.

“Given the amount of people who typically enter our courthouses each day, it is vital that we do what we can to minimize that number while still fulfilling our constitutional duty and statutory responsibility to provide the public with access to justice,” he said. “Our courts will continue our mission of providing access and dispensing justice during this public health emergency to the extent that the matters coming before the courts are essential.”

The Judiciary has scheduled an average of 2,300 cases every day statewide over the past month. At the Judiciary's three busiest courthouses – Garrahy Judicial Complex, Licht Judicial Complex, and the Traffic Tribunal – a total of nearly 7,000 people pass through security at the entrances each day.

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