

# *News Advisory*

From the Rhode Island Judiciary



## **Wakefield, Newport courthouses to reopen**

**September 4, 2020:** The state courts next Tuesday, September 8, will reopen two county courthouses that were closed five months ago in response to the COVID-19 public health crisis.

The courthouses are the McGrath Judicial Complex in Wakefield (Washington County) and the Murray Judicial Complex in Newport (Newport County), which have been closed to the public since April 1.

The courthouses will reopen with the same measures in place in Providence County and Kent County to limit crowds and encourage social distancing. Verbal health screenings will take place at courthouse entrances and cloth facial coverings will continue to be required in the buildings. The number of scheduled hearing has been reduced to minimize foot traffic. These steps are consistent with federal and state public health guidelines. Entry will be limited to persons with direct involvement in a court case.

The courts have turned increasingly to teleconferencing and videoconferencing technology using telephone lines and the WebEx video application to facilitate hundreds of court hearings and conferences. That is in addition to the hearings that Superior Court and District Court judges and magistrates have continued to conduct using their longstanding closed-circuit videoconferencing connections to the Adult Correctional Institutions for hearings with inmates in criminal matters.

While the county courthouses were closed in Newport and Wakefield, the court system itself never shut down. Matters from those two counties were transferred to Kent County in the interim. The number of court hearings taking place has been significantly reduced statewide, but it was especially true in Washington County and Newport County. The closure was also an effort to conserve resources and critical supplies to combat the pandemic.

# # #