



Supreme Court
STATE OF LOUISIANA
New Orleans

CHIEF JUSTICE
BERNETTE J. JOHNSON Seventh District

JUSTICES
WILLIAM J. CRAIN First District
SCOTT J. CRICHTON Second District
JAMES T. GENOVESE Third District
MARCUS R. CLARK Fourth District
JEFFERSON D. HUGHES III Fifth District
JOHN L. WEIMER Sixth District

JOHN TARLTON OLIVIER
CLERK OF COURT

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March 12, 2020

Dear Chief Judges:

Both the Center for Disease Control and the Louisiana Department of Health have advised people to take precautions in light of the COVID-19 virus (coronavirus) outbreak, and Governor John Bel Edwards has declared a public health emergency. In light of these developments, I wanted to assure you that we are monitoring the situation closely and we offer the following advice and recommendations.

First and foremost, we must handle this public health crisis in a way that protects the health and safety of everyone at our court facilities, while at the same time, to the extent possible, maintains access to the courts. In meeting these strategic goals, the courts are strongly encouraged to implement social distancing strategies to slow and possibly prevent exposure of the COVID-19 virus. As such, our courts are strongly encouraged to:

- Restrict court settings to emergency and time-sensitive settings;
- Stagger the scheduling of dockets to reduce the number of people in a space at the same time;
- Stagger essential court staff in attendance for court hearings to limit the pooling of people unnecessarily in a space at the same time;
- Encourage employees that can work remotely from home to do so; and

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- Expand the use of audio and/or video conferencing in meeting, discovery conferences, scheduling conferences, bail settings, first appearance settings (where possible) hearings on post-convictions (to reduce unnecessary travel on detention centers and inmates).

Minimizing the number of people entering the courts is essential to slowing and preventing the spread of the COVID-19 virus outbreak. While you are in the best position to know what is optimal for your court, we recommend that all civil and criminal hearings and jury trials be continued, if possible, except as determined by the courts in regards to cases where speedy-trial motions have been filed in pre-trial detained individuals' cases to avoid violation of any constitutional rights. You may also wish to consider reducing the size of your jury pools for the time being.

Attached is an initial communication that we forwarded to our employees. For your information, the Louisiana Supreme Court will remain open for filings and other court business, while allowing non-essential employees to work remotely. Oral arguments scheduled for next week will be rescheduled. My "State of the Judiciary" address and reception, previously set for Tuesday, March 17, 2020, will also be rescheduled. If you adopt any orders affecting your court, please email them to us at rgunn@lasc.org so we may post them on the Supreme Court website.

We will be posting information and resources on the Supreme Court website at www.lasc.org. In addition, attached are some sample court Orders and notices. Additional resources are below:

Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) | CDC
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>

Coronavirus (COVID-19) | Department of Health | State of Louisiana
<http://ldh.la.gov/coronavirus/>

Preparing for a Pandemic: An Emergency Response Benchbook and Operational Guidebook for State Court Judges and Administrators - Courthouse Facilities - National Center for State Courts
<https://ncsc.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/facilities/id/194/>

Coronavirus Information | Office of Governor John Bel Edwards
<https://gov.louisiana.gov/index.cfm/page/89>

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Gov. Edwards Declares Public Health Emergency in Response to COVID-19 |
Office of Governor John Bel Edwards
<https://gov.louisiana.gov/index.cfm/newsroom/detail/2400>

Our collective cooperation and implementation of these recommendations are essential in slowing and preventing the spread of the COVID-19 virus outbreak. Thank you in advance for your cooperation.

Yours very truly,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Bernette J. Johnson". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'B'.

Chief Justice Bernette Joshua Johnson

Attachments

cc: Justices
Judges
Court Administrators