

*** For Immediate Release ***

On Friday, March 20, the Washington Supreme Court issued a new emergency order outlining required procedures in response to the COVID-19 public health emergency. As our state's highest court, the Washington Supreme Court's order is binding on San Juan County courts. In response to this new directive, San Juan County Superior and District Courts have amended their emergency orders to postpone almost all in-person proceedings. Amended orders are posted on the courts' websites.

The Washington Supreme Court order postpones all civil and criminal jury trials until after April 24, 2020. This matches what was already ordered in San Juan County Superior and District Courts. Anyone summoned for jury duty before April 27 will be excused from service.

The new orders postpone all non-emergency civil matters until after April 24, 2020, unless they can be heard without the parties coming to court in person. All infractions and small claims hearings are postponed. Written civil motions that can be filed and considered by the judge without oral argument will still be considered.

Emergency civil matters, like protection order and no-contact order hearings, will still go forward; however, they must be held by telephone. Superior Court is allowing hearings in family law cases to occur by telephone. Adult Drug Court also will continue to occur, but by telephone only.

All criminal matters where the defendant is not currently held in jail will be postponed until after April 24. For defendants who remain in jail until the case is resolved, some hearings will still be conducted: first appearances, plea hearings, motions, and sentencing hearings will be held, but the court must allow telephone or video conferencing unless it is impossible.

Normally, the court will not change or reduce a defendant's bail unless circumstances have significantly changed. The San Juan County courts acknowledge that the COVID-19 public health crisis creates a significant change in circumstances. Both Superior and District Courts will hear in-custody defendants' motions to reconsider bail on short notice.

For any matters that still need to be filed with the court, both courts now have options available to file documents by email or fax, instead of submitting paper documents to the clerk's offices.

Due to the number of people facing economic hardship during this crisis, San Juan County District and Superior Courts will not penalize anyone who cannot make payments under court-ordered payment plans. Anyone who misses a payment between March 16 and April 24 will not be found delinquent or in contempt.

Finally, as announced previously, the District Court Clerk's Office is limiting the hours the front counter is open to the public to between 10 am to 2 pm. Anyone who needs to file a petition for a protection no-contact order can still ring the bell for service during normal business hours, 8:30 am to 4:30 pm. Anyone who needs to make payments for parking tickets, infractions, or court cases is encouraged to use the payment deposit box.

The Superior Court Clerk's Office will remain open, but it has suspended passport acceptance and notary service. Everyone is encouraged to conduct their business by telephone, fax, or email if possible. Anyone

who comes to the office must remain outside the office so that staff can serve clients one at a time. Payments can be made electronically through OfficialPayments.com, by mail, or put into the Clerk's drop box outside the door. Clerk's fees for filing by fax and for presentation of ex parte orders are waived at this time.

Superior Court Administration and Juvenile Court Services offices are closed to in-person communication. Superior Court Administrator Jane Severin may be reached at 360-370-7480 and JaneS@sanjuanco.com. Juvenile Court Services may be reached at 360-370-7440.

San Juan County Superior Court, District Court, Juvenile Court Services, and the County Clerk want to provide access to the courts while acknowledging the severity of the public health crisis we face. It is our duty to minimize all in-person contact as much as we can to slow the spread of COVID-19 and to protect the public, court and clerk staff, attorneys, and parties. **We ask for your help to slow the spread of COVID-19 by limiting your court contact to those matters that are essential at this time.**