

News Release



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STUART RABNER

Chief Justice of the New Jersey Supreme Court

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For immediate release: **May 14, 2020**

Judiciary Launches Virtual Grand Jury Pilot Program

Virtual grand jury proceedings will convene within the next two weeks in Bergen and Mercer counties, under [a Supreme Court order](#) signed today by Chief Justice Stuart Rabner.

The pilot program, which is expected to begin “as soon as practicable,” will be used to determine whether the Judiciary expands remote grand juries to additional counties and state grand jury proceedings. Cases will be presented to a grand jury only if the defendant gives consent to proceed in a remote format.

The technology will be similar to the formats the Judiciary currently uses for virtual hearings but will employ additional security measures.

“In the past two months, much of the work of the courts has continued through virtual operations,” Chief Justice Stuart Rabner said. “That same technology will now be used to continue grand jury proceedings remotely, in a manner that protects the public while safeguarding the rights and privacy of defendants, witnesses, victims, and jurors.”

The pilot program stems from a recommendation of a working group formed by the state Supreme Court that includes representatives of the Attorney General’s Office, the Office of the Public Defender, the County Prosecutors Association of New Jersey, the American Civil Liberties Union, the New Jersey State Bar Association, and the private defense bar, in addition to judges and court staff.

“Our state is facing an unprecedented crisis, and we need to examine solutions that we might not consider in ordinary times,” said Attorney General Gurbir S. Grewal. “I’d like to thank Chief Justice Rabner and Acting Administrator Grant for their boldness and their creativity as we work together to safeguard our criminal justice system during this difficult time.”

There are 1,400 defendants currently detained in county jails awaiting indictment along with additional defendants on pretrial release.

To date, the Judiciary has conducted more than 23,000 virtual proceedings involving more than 189,000 participants. Based on current guidance from the New Jersey Department of Health, the COVID-19 virus is expected to continue to disrupt normal court operations in the months ahead.

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