

News Release



New Jersey Courts

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Supreme Court Order Opens Municipal Courts for Business

Many New Jersey municipal courts will begin remote proceedings today, holding court sessions by video or phone, under an order issued by Chief Justice Stuart Rabner.

In-person municipal court sessions had been suspended in mid-March so that the courts could conform with social distancing guidelines put in place to slow the spread of COVID-19. Only certain matters, such as those that involved public safety, were permitted to continue.

A follow-up order allowed municipal court cases to proceed with the consent of all parties starting April 24, with all municipal court sessions resuming on May 11 “to the extent possible, based on facilities, technology and other resources.” The order applies to all case types.

“Municipal courts are vital to our state’s justice system” Chief Justice Rabner said. “This is another step in expanding virtual proceedings to allow court business to continue, safely, wherever possible.”

Most public interaction with the New Jersey court system is through the state’s 515 municipal courts, which handle approximately six million cases a year.

Some municipal courts are working with their respective municipalities to make the transition to virtual court easier. For example, in Jersey City, court users can download a form on the municipal website to register for court. Court administrators schedule the cases, and defendants receive an email with instructions on how to participate virtually.

Since the form was made public last week, 90 defendants registered to schedule their cases, Jersey City Chief Municipal Judge Carlo Abad said. The court is scheduled to hear 15 of those cases this week, he said.

Judge Abad also developed a training video to teach other municipal court judges how to conduct remote proceedings through Zoom and Microsoft Teams.

“The feedback has been great,” Judge Abad said. “It’s being well received by the other judges and the prosecutors.”

The Supreme Court order also makes it easier for the public to respond to fines and infractions online.

Starting Monday, May 11, defendants can now use NJMCDirect.com, the municipal court online payment system, to resolve not only motor vehicle violations but also disorderly persons offenses and other ordinance violations where the defendant has been placed on a time payment plan. The Supreme Court also relaxed court rules to make it easier for defendants to enter a plea by mail.

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