

# News Release



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For immediate release: **July 28, 2020**

## **Municipal Court Changes Allow for Case Resolution Without In-Person Appearance**

The public can now ask a prosecutor to review their matters and may be able to resolve their case without having to appear in person, under a recent change to municipal court operations in New Jersey.

The Judiciary's Online Dispute Resolution (ODR) program, which started in mid-May in approximately 30 municipal courts, allows court users to dispute a charge and provide information or evidence to municipal prosecutors online.

"These changes are part of a larger effort to make our municipal court system more efficient and more accessible," said Chief Justice Stuart Rabner. "Court users should not have to find childcare or take a day off from work to travel to the courthouse to speak to a prosecutor and try to resolve traffic offenses or routine matters."

The ODR program applies to 37 traffic offenses, such as speeding, failure to have an insurance card, or failure to yield, where defendants commonly provide additional documentation and seek a reduced charge before pleading guilty.

Court users can make their requests for review to the municipal prosecutor through NJMC Direct. After reviewing the case, the prosecutor can offer a lesser charge or decline to change the charge.

If a lesser charge is accepted, the matter will be reviewed by a judge for approval. If approved, the defendant does not need to go to court.

If the prosecutor declines to offer a lesser charge, or the judge does not approve the new charge, a hearing date is scheduled for the defendant to appear remotely.

Additional courts will offer the program over the next several weeks as the program expands statewide.

Under a second change that went into effect on April 27, 400 minor offenses were added to the Statewide Violations Bureau Schedule. The new offenses include some minor traffic and parking matters as well as state Fish and Game and Weights and Measures violations. For these, defendants can plead guilty and pay online without having to go to court.

In one of the Judiciary's first actions to reduce municipal court appearances to reduce the spread of COVID-19, the Supreme Court on March 16 relaxed court rules that had required only those with "undue hardship" to plead guilty by mail to certain offenses in municipal court.

Plea-by-mail does not apply to serious offenses, including those resulting in the likelihood of a driver's license suspension, jail time or community service.

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