

For immediate release: **May 25, 2021**

New Jersey Supreme Court Dismisses Nearly 300,000 Old Municipal Court Cases

The New Jersey Supreme Court has dismissed approximately 300,000 minor municipal court matters involving active driver's license suspensions, imposed at least 27 years ago, for defendants who failed to appear in court.

The [order](#), released today, addresses old, unresolved, minor municipal court cases related to arrest warrants and license suspensions in the interest of fairness and as a more appropriate use of limited public resources.

The dismissals involve active driver's license suspensions issued to defendants who had failed to appear in court prior to Jan. 1, 1994. In the matters where arrest warrants also were issued for failure to appear, driver's license suspensions or revocations will be rescinded, and arrest warrants will be recalled.

Types of cases dismissed in this first phase include parking and motor vehicle offenses, violations of municipal ordinances, and other minor municipal matters. More serious offenses, such as driving while intoxicated, reckless driving, major traffic violations, disorderly and petty disorderly persons offenses, refusal to submit to a chemical test, and indictable offenses, are not eligible for dismissal.

The approximately 1.7 million municipal cases identified for possible dismissal include nearly 1.4 million matters involving a driver's license suspension. Because of the large number of cases involved, they will be considered in five phases. Municipal prosecutors will continue to have the opportunity to review and object to the proposed dismissal of cases within their jurisdiction.

A searchable database to determine whether a particular case has been dismissed can be found at njcourts.gov. The site also contains a set of Frequently Asked Questions, details on which charges are included in the dismissal order, and an

explanation of how a defendant can, if necessary, contact the New Jersey Motor Vehicle Commission to restore a suspended driver's license.

In March 2017, Chief Justice Stuart Rabner formed the Supreme Court Committee on Municipal Court Operations, Fines and Fees to review practices of the local courts and recommend ways to improve the integrity of their operations while preserving and strengthening judicial independence.

On Jan. 17, 2019, the Supreme Court dismissed 787,764 unresolved, minor municipal court complaints in which an arrest warrant for the defendant's failure to appear remained active and had been ordered prior to Jan. 1, 2003. That order did not specifically include dated, unresolved, minor matters in which a defendant's driver's license was suspended. This new order addresses those cases, as well as cases in warrant status.

Chief Justice Rabner said in the 2019 order that open outdated warrants "raise questions of fairness, the appropriate use of limited public resources by law enforcement and the courts, the ability of the state to prosecute cases successfully in light of how long matters have been pending and the availability of witnesses, and administrative efficiency."

Friday's order notes that "the same concerns apply to ongoing driver's license suspensions for dated, unresolved, minor municipal court matters."

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