

**E-mail to Michigan Trial Courts**  
**Tuesday, March 10, 2020**

Colleagues,

The Michigan Supreme Court and State Court Administrative Office are carefully monitoring developments regarding the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) and are working closely with the Executive Branch on the response effort. As we consider preparations for COVID-19 arriving in Michigan and its potential impact on the judiciary and state courts, we are keenly focused on our three fundamental obligations: to protect the health of litigants, judicial branch employees, and the public using court facilities; to maintain critical judicial branch functions; and to provide appropriate judicial input to the process of protecting the public.

There is much information available online regarding COVID-19 and important guidance on how to prepare. To this end, I encourage you to review [SCAO's COVID-19](#) webpage. There are helpful links there to the [State of Michigan](#), [National Center for State Courts](#), and [Centers for Disease Control](#) webpages. For example, our [website](#) includes a link to the Index of [SCAO-Approved Forms for Use in Commitment or Testing for Infectious Disease](#) and the [Public Health Law Benchbook for Michigan Courts](#). The attached COVID-19 Resources document includes additional links and the Court Closure Model LAO . The judiciary's COVID-19 page will be regularly updated with important information especially relevant to courts and how we plan to continue operations.

Our executive leadership team developed these recommendations to help your court prepare and act appropriately in a crisis:

**GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Establish communication with funding unit, local emergency management coordinator, and county health department COVID-19 point person(s).
- Follow CDC advice for hand washing with soap and water, use of hand-sanitizer, and cleaning customer and work spaces.
- Identify work-related exposure and health risks to employees and take steps to reduce such exposure.
- Identify essential employees and equipment they may need if a state of emergency is declared (i.e., cell phones/laptops).
- Conduct assessment of employee readiness for remote work and enhance capacity to the extent practicable.
- Establish emergency personnel contact lists. If you already have them, make sure they are updated.

**DOCKET MANAGEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Consider adjourning hearings with vulnerable persons, for example:

- Individuals age 60 and over are at risk, especially if already medically compromised
  - Adult guardianship proceedings
- Develop plan for remote hearings, including but not limited to:
  - All arraignments
  - Mental health trials
  - Guardian ad litem proceedings

#### IF GOVERNOR WHITMER DECLARES AN EMERGENCY

- Comply with advice from state and county health departments
- Coordinate with funding unit on any potential disruption of business
  - Develop internal and external communications plan
  - Effectively communicate options for potential business interruption to court staff and to the public
- Implement plan for remote hearings whenever possible
- Adjourn hearings with vulnerable persons
  - Do not default or bench warrant individuals for failing to appear during period of emergency
- Adjourn jury trials
  - Civil jury trials should be adjourned.
  - Criminal jury trials should be adjourned unless defendant is in custody or there have been other long delays.

#### IMMEDIATELY INFORM YOUR SCAO REGIONAL ADMINISTRATOR:

- If court business is interrupted
- If any COVID-19-related activity affects your courthouse (e.g., COVID-19 quarantine order)

We welcome any questions regarding the judicial branch's response to COVID-19. Please send them to me and we will post answers on our website. In addition, if needed, we will hold a webinar to update Chief Judges, Court Administrators, and Probate Registers on the status of our response plans. Thank you for your hard work to protect the public and keep our courts running.

Warmly,

*Bridget Mary McCormack*  
Chief Justice