

News

Pennsylvania Supreme Court Closes Courts to the Public Statewide

News Article

March 18, 2020

In an effort to further restrict potential COVID-19 exposure within the courts, the Pennsylvania Supreme Court today announced that all Pennsylvania courts – including trial and intermediate appellate courts – are closed to the public for non-essential functions through at least April 3, 2020.

The statewide court closure also includes magisterial district courts, Philadelphia Municipal Court, and Pittsburgh Municipal Court, Arraignment Division.

In addition, the Court has suspended all time calculations and deadlines relevant to court cases or other judicial business through April 3, 2020. The Court has also authorized and encouraged the use of advanced communication technology to conduct emergency court proceedings.

In the Courts of Common Pleas, the Order outlines essential functions as:

Emergency bail review and habeas corpus hearings;

Gagnon 1 hearings;

Bench warrant hearings pursuant to Pennsylvania Rule of Criminal Procedure 150;

Juvenile delinquency detention;

Juvenile emergency shelter and detention hearings;

Temporary protection from abuse hearings;

Emergency petitions for child custody;

Emergency petitions for guardianship;

Civil mental health reviews (50 P.S. §302)

Any pleadings or motions relating to public health concerns and involving immediate and irreparable harm; and

Any other function deemed by a president judge to be essential consistent with constitutional requirements.

In addition, court calendars, scheduling notices, subpoenas or other court orders compelling appearance by any attorney, litigant or other participant in non-essential cases are continued or postponed until further order.

Except for ongoing trials, jury and non-jury trials (both criminal and civil) are suspended and jurors do not need to report for duty on or before April 3, 2020.

The Court has offered the following guidance to magisterial district courts, Philadelphia Municipal Court, and Pittsburgh Municipal Court, Arraignment Division (minor courts) with regards to essential functions:

Preliminary arraignments (bail setting) for bailable cases;

Criminal case filings and subsequent processing;

Preliminary hearings for incarcerated persons only;

Issuance of search warrants; and

Emergency protection from abuse petitions.

The Court's Order also directs that, during the period of judicial emergency, no eviction, ejection or other displacement from a residence based on failure to make payment can be made. It also suspends Rule of Criminal Procedure 600 in all judicial districts.

Unless otherwise designated by a President Judge, all other cases pending are postponed.

Minor courts are directed to accept payments by mail, electronically (online), or by telephone where possible.

Additional information about the impact of COVID-19 on court operations is available online, at [@pennsylvaniacourts](#) and [@PACourts](#).