

COVID-19 UPDATE: MESSAGE TO USERS AND STAKEHOLDERS OF THE MASS. TRIAL COURT FROM CHIEF JUSTICE PAULA M. CAREY AND COURT ADMINISTRATOR JON WILLIAMS

We are reaching out to our many and varied external stakeholders to bring you up to date on what is happening at the Massachusetts Trial Court.

During the pandemic, though courthouse doors may have been closed, staff in every Massachusetts Trial Court department have been hard at work. Thousands of hearings have been conducted remotely by judges and staff across the state. Pleadings continue to be reviewed, files delivered, hearings rescheduled, emergency and non-emergency hearings held, evidence submitted, and orders and judgments entered and communicated to parties and counsel.

Our COVID-19 Court Operations Committee is doing great work to coordinate efforts across all court departments to prepare for the gradual reopening of courthouses to begin on July 13th. Subcommittees are providing valuable assistance through their work on five critical areas that need particular focus: technology, facilities/security/probation, jury, internal communications and external communications.

The Trial Court has prioritized safe operations statewide and developed a reopening plan based on health and safety precautions to protect staff and the public. The Court Operations Committee is also coordinating the expansion of capacity for virtual, remote operations, since most hearings will continue to be held by videoconference and phone.

Local courts are developing reopening plans based on health and safety guidance, as well as the unique circumstances of each location. Department leaders will confirm the safety measures taken to accommodate occupancy constraints. Security is gearing up to provide entry screening and coordinating protocols with Sheriffs and other law enforcement partners.

On July 13th, courthouses, courtrooms, and the clerks and registers offices will open for some case types and will look different. Social distancing signage will encourage everyone to maintain six-foot distances. Judges, clerks, staff and court users will wear masks in the presence of others. Plexiglass sneeze guards will be in place on public counters.

Other changes needed as we move forward include increased communication by phone and email, virtual court hearings, expanded use of e-filing and e-Courts, video-conferencing, and staggered scheduling — all changes to minimize in-person contact and keep everyone safe.

New practices to keep staff and court users safe include:

- Entry health screening questions
- Limited occupancy of courtrooms, public areas, holding cells, and all spaces
- Provision of personal protection equipment to staff based on job responsibilities; masks will be provided to court users who forget them.

We encourage you to regularly check the Trial Court's COVID-19 Response page on [mass.gov](https://www.mass.gov) for updates on court operations related to reopening plans of courthouses throughout the state. We will continue to communicate with you and we welcome your comments and suggestions regarding courthouse operations. Please send them to: CourtReopening@jud.state.ma.us. Case-specific questions should be directed to the appropriate contact for the Trial Court Department with jurisdiction of that case.