



Sixth Judicial District Court

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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District and magistrate courts in Grant, Hidalgo and Luna counties to resume jury trials

DEMING – Jury trials in magistrate court cases will resume beginning next week in the Sixth Judicial District of Grant, Hidalgo and Luna counties.

Jury trials in district courts in the three counties will restart in mid-July. Throughout the district, courts have implemented precautions to protect the health and safety of jurors and all others who enter courthouses during the COVID-19 pandemic.

“The Sixth Judicial District and Magistrate Courts are proud to have received approval from the New Mexico Supreme Court to resume our jury trials using social distancing and an array of safety procedures for maximum protection against the virus. Jury trials are the hallmark of the American justice system, and we appreciate each potential juror who comes to court to uphold his or her civic duty to ensure that justice is served,” Chief Judge Jennifer E. DeLaney said.

Magistrate courts will initially conduct jury trials in the district courthouses in their respective counties. This ensures proper physical distancing – a minimum of six feet separating people in courtrooms and other locations throughout a courthouse.

Among the COVID-safe practices by the courts:

- Masks are required for anyone entering a courthouse. Jurors, lawyers, litigants, witnesses, judges and court staff will wear masks during trials and other in-person court proceedings.
- Temperature checks and health question screening of jurors and other people to ensure someone with COVID-19 symptoms does not enter a court facility.
- Protective plexiglass installed where physical space is limited, including areas between judges and witnesses in some courtrooms and in court clerk offices.
- Reducing the number of prospective jurors that must report to a courthouse at any one time for jury selection for trials.
- Jurors selected for a trial will receive a cloth mask and hand sanitizer. Throughout courthouses, hand sanitizer is available in public areas.

- Jurors will be seated in the juror box and gallery of a courtroom to maintain proper spacing. Jurors will be brought into a courtroom by seat number so they do not pass by another juror to reach their seat.
- Courthouse floors are marked with red tape for visual aids to maintain social distancing and signs are posted throughout court buildings. Areas leading into courthouses also are marked to separate people waiting to enter.
- Chairs and benches have been marked or removed in public areas in courthouses to provide proper physical distancing.
- Expanded cleaning and disinfecting of all areas in judicial buildings, particularly high-touch surfaces such as doors and railings. Courtrooms will be cleaned after each hearing.

New courtroom procedures also provide safeguards against the spread of coronavirus. Among the changes:

- Lawyers may communicate with their clients by text messages on a cell phone, two-way radio headsets or exchanging paper notes to maintain proper physical distancing at courtroom tables.
- Attorneys will no longer approach the judge's bench to speak privately with the judge outside the hearing of jurors. When such "bench conferences" are needed, lawyers and the judge will meet in a nearby courtroom or in the judge's chambers to ensure proper physical spacing.
- Witnesses in a jury trial held in a magistrate court building will be asked to wait in their vehicles until called by cell phone to testify by court staff or their attorney.

Magistrate and district courts will coordinate the scheduling of jury trials in district courthouses. The first priority will be conducting criminal jury trials for defendants in jail, followed by other criminal jury trials and civil case jury trials.

Through at least July 14, magistrate courts in Silver City and Bayard will hold trials in the Grant County Courthouse in Silver City. The Lordsburg Magistrate Court will conduct jury trials at the Hidalgo County Courthouse in the community. The Deming Magistrate Court will hold jury trials at the Luna County District Court in the community.

Jury trials in civil and criminal cases statewide were suspended in March by the Supreme Court to help control the spread of COVID-19. Jury trials can resume on a district-by-district basis between June 15 and July 15 subject to approval by the Supreme Court of plans by courts for protecting the public health and safety as courthouse operations expand.

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