

## **Second Judicial District Court Cancels Legal Clinics, Takes other Measures, to combat Coronavirus**

The Second Judicial District Court's Pro Bono Committee has canceled its next two Civil and Family Law Clinics due to concerns related to the coronavirus.

While there is no evidence that the virus has affected anyone in the court, the Pro Bono Committee is taking this step out of an abundance of caution. The Pro Bono Committee is comprised of judges and staff from the Second Judicial Court and staff from New Mexico Legal Aid.

The Civil and Family Law Clinics, at which citizens get free consultations with attorneys, normally take place on the first and third Wednesdays of each month at the Second Judicial District Courthouse, 400 Lomas, NW, in Albuquerque.

The cancellations apply to the Family Law Clinic scheduled for March 18 and the Civil Law Clinic scheduled for April 1.

"This is not what we want to do given that the need for legal assistance does not go down during a pandemic," said Second Judicial District Family Court Judge Jane Levy, who also co-chairs the Pro Bono Committee. "But for the safety of the public and the staff of the court and Legal Aid, we need to skip remainder of March and the first clinic in April. We hope to resume the regular clinic schedule after that."

### **Additional Measures in Place**

In addition to these steps at the Second Judicial District Court, State Supreme Court Justice Judith K. Nakamura has announced measures that courts across New Mexico are taking to guard against the potential spread of the Coronavirus.

"The Judiciary's responsibility to ensure constitutional protections are available to those who need them has been especially important during difficult times in our history," Chief Justice Nakamura said. "We are working closely with state and local governments and taking steps to ensure that courthouses are safe for jurors, litigants, lawyers, judicial employees, judges and all members of the public."

Among the measures directed by the Supreme Court:

- Courts will limit the number of people summoned to jury duty. Typically, courts will limit jury pools to no more than 25 people. If additional jurors are needed, courts will keep them in separate rooms even if it requires lawyers to separately question jury pools.
- Jurors who have traveled to areas with a high concentration of confirmed coronavirus cases should contact their court before reporting for jury duty. Jurors who are ill will be immediately released and sent home
- Judges will postpone civil jury trials that have not yet started unless there are exceptional circumstances.
- Judges will conduct all proceedings in a way that minimizes contact among people in the courtroom including the use of telephone and technology.
- Criminal proceedings will continue.

- Out-of-state work travel is suspended for judicial employees and judges.
- The Judiciary has limited the number of inmates that may be transported from jails to courthouses for hearings.
- Courts are working with those responsible for cleaning and maintaining courthouses to ensure compliance with enhanced cleaning requirements.

The Chief Justice strongly encourages people who need to visit courthouses to follow the recommendations of health officials to protect themselves and others from the spread of coronavirus. Those include washing hands frequently with soap and water for at least 20 seconds and maintaining a safe social distance from others.

“Our courts will continue to carefully monitor developments related to the coronavirus and will take additional steps as necessary to minimize public health risks of New Mexicans who require justice services,” said Chief Justice Nakamura.