

PRESS RELEASE FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
MARCH 17, 2020

Presiding Judge Thomas M. O'Shaughnessy announced that the judiciary in Vermilion County is taking action in response to the 2019 Novel Coronavirus [COVID-19] pandemic. The judges have been monitoring responses to COVID-19 and following guidance provided by state and local public health agencies and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. This is an evolving situation with daily, if not hourly, changes.

The Illinois Supreme Court recommended that courts avoid large gatherings and practice "social distancing," and advised all courts that non-essential in-person court proceedings may pose a risk to participants, court staff, and the public. Courts have been authorized to avoid risk by rescheduling court events to a later date, especially jury trials and large docket calls, or alternatively, by holding proceedings via telephone or video remote appearance where possible.

The Rita B. Garman Vermilion County Courthouse performs essential governmental and judicial functions and operations, and, accordingly, must remain open for business, but beginning tomorrow, March 18, it will do so with limitations, and restrictions.

Judge O'Shaughnessy states, "Out of an abundance of caution and concern for the health and well-being of the citizens of Vermilion County, and consistent with the recommendations of the Illinois Supreme Court, as well as the County Health Department, many of the civil and criminal cases in Vermilion County will be postponed and suspended beginning on Wednesday, March 18, 2020 and continuing through Friday, April 17, 2020. Essential proceedings will still occur. But in a manner consistent with a policy of mitigating the impact of COVID-19. We are attempting to keep the courts available to the fullest extent, but remain cognizant of the need to secure public safety."

An administrative order entered by Judge O'Shaughnessy restricts access to the courthouse. If a person has traveled to China, Italy, Iran, Japan, or South Korea (or any other place to which travel restrictions have been placed by agencies of the federal government) within the last 21 days; resides or has had close contact with someone who has traveled to one of these areas within the last 21 days; has been asked to self-quarantine by any hospital, clinic, physician, or health agency; or has been diagnosed with, has had contact with, anyone who has been diagnosed with COVID-19; or has flu-like symptoms including fever, cough, or shortness of breath, he/she must not enter the courthouse. Instead, he/she should telephone the Court Administrator at (217) 554-7830 for instructions.

The administrative order also ensures that a judge will be available during all regular business hours to hear all matters determined by the court as emergencies and/or essential.

Cases That Are Postponed: The administrative order continues/postpones all hearings scheduled through April 17 in the following categories of cases and the parties are directed not to appear:

- Non-emergency civil matters, including civil jury trials
- Law Magistrate (LM), including evictions
- Small Claims

- Miscellaneous Remedy, including Expungements
- Probate
- Chancery, including mortgage foreclosures
- Adoption
- Domestic Relations, Family, and Child Support Cases
- Tax
- Some Felony matters, including jury trials for defendants who are not in-custody and who have not demanded a speedy trial (Defendants are advised to contact their attorney to confirm the status of their hearings)
- Traffic
- Misdemeanor
- Conservation Violation
- Ordinance Violation
- Juvenile Abuse, Neglect, and Dependency (JA) (except as outlined below)
- Juvenile Delinquency (JD) (except as outlined below)

All hearings in these cases are continued to a date to be authorized by the judge presiding over the division and notice will be sent to the last known address of each party. Litigants are directed to ensure that their mailing address on file with the Circuit Clerk is updated and current. Attorneys and litigants should also monitor cases rescheduled on the County's website: www.vercounty.org.

Matters determined by the court to be emergencies will be heard in-person or by telephone conference on a case-by-case basis. Attorneys and self-represented litigants should contact the Court Administrator at (217) 554-7830 for purposes of requesting the scheduling of an emergency matter.

Pleadings in all civil cases, including motions and agreed orders, may continue to be E-filed in the manners consistent with Supreme Court Rules.

Cases To Be Heard As Scheduled: The following court proceedings/hearings will be held as scheduled, with appearances expected for all litigants, unless the travel or health appearance restrictions apply, all of which are deemed "essential matters":

- All bail and bond review hearings and arraignments
- Hearings related to violations of supervision and probation for in-custody defendants
- Subpoena Returns for in-custody defendants
- Other criminal law matters with the defendant in-custody at the discretion of the judge presiding over the division
- Criminal Felony jury trials for defendants in custody and/or who have filed speedy trial demands
- Specialty Courts (Drug, Mental Health, and Veterans' Courts)
- Grand jury proceedings
- Motions involving Statutory Summary Suspension
- Juvenile shelter care and detention hearings, and adjudicatory hearings for in-custody minors
- Mental Health hearings

- Petitions for Emergency and Plenary Orders of Protection, Stalking/No-Contact Orders, or Civil No-Contact Orders
- Emergency hearings on family matters as scheduled by the Court Administrator after approval of the judge presiding over the division

Defendants may continue to enter into plea agreements to conclude their cases.

Jury Service: Trial by jury is a constitutional right, and as such, the court system cannot function without juries. The court shall, however, minimize the need for jurors to be summoned to the courthouse. While some jurors will still be summoned, reducing the numbers summoned will create a less congested environment and increase the personal space available for summoned jurors.

A juror summoned for jury service, who is experiencing acute respiratory illness symptoms (cough, shortness of breath, headaches), flu-like symptoms, fever, or are coughing or sneezing, should contact the Jury Commission Coordinator on weekdays between 8:30 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. at (217) 554-7845 and report these symptoms. Jury duty service will be deferred to a later date.

Probation: a plan has been implemented by the Director of Probation Services, Tom Gregory to limit in-person contacts and suspend certain large group meetings. Probation officers will contact clients to schedule meetings which be held by telephone conversation. Probationers deemed high-risk may still be required to report to their probation officers in person.

Traffic Tickets: The public should be reminded that certain traffic tickets may still be paid by mail, online, or at the Circuit Clerk's window. For more information, call: (217) 554-7720.

Courthouse Events/Travel: All scheduled courthouse trainings, educational events, and all non-essential travel are canceled until further notice.

State's Attorney Office and Public Defender Office: These offices will remain open but will be subject to the determination of the State's Attorney and the Public Defender regarding face-to-face appointments.

Juvenile Detention: The Detention Center may implement emergency visitation and transport procedures for minors held at the detention center, in order to minimize potential exposure to COVID-19. Non-essential personnel/visitors may be denied access to the facility to ensure the health and safety of minor detainees and detention center staff.

Marriages and Civil Unions: The court will continue to perform marriage and civil union ceremonies in the courthouse. However, only the two individuals being married or joining in a civil union are permitted to attend the ceremony. Additional people, including family and friends will be denied access to the courthouse, and not allowed to attend the ceremony.