



## PRESS RELEASE

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To: Local Media

From: Hector X. Gonzalez, Jr., Court Executive Officer

Date: March 20, 2020

Re: Superior Court's Plans in Response to COVID-19

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Despite the fact that to date Tuolumne County does not have a reported case of Coronavirus, the Court takes seriously the potential risk to the public, staff, parties and justice partners. For that reason, the Court is taking a proactive approach to minimize public interaction in our court facilities but still maintain a level of operation needed to provide the judicial services to our community. Yesterday the Governor issued an order directing California residents to stay home. However, there is an exception in the Governor's orders for essential government services. This means that a person who needs essential services can leave his or her home to get those essential services. Businesses and government agencies who are providing essential services can remain open. Courts provide essential services. **For that reason, persons who have court appearances or other business with the court, such as filing legal papers, are not subject to Governor Newsom's recent order.** Accordingly, at this time our court locations will remain open but will operate with preventative actions being taken by the Court. However, if you will do not have official business with the Court then you should respect the Governor's order and not come to court.

To have the authority to carry out some of the actions listed below, the Court requested an Emergency Order from the Chief Justice of the California Supreme Court. The Emergency Order was approved on March 19, 2020, for the effective period of March 23, 2020 through April 22, 2020. The Court, using information provided by the County Public Health Department, is closely monitoring the Coronavirus outbreak. If the Coronavirus situation worsens in our county, the Court will reassess its response and may take further emergency actions.

If warranted, a new Emergency Order will be timely requested to extend the period of time the preventative actions will continue, and/or add any other actions that may become necessary.

Below are the preventative actions that have been implemented:

## **Preventative Actions**

1. The Court requested an Emergency Order from the Chief Justice of the California Supreme Court allowing it to take emergency steps from 3/23/20 until 4/22/20. In the request, the Court sought authority for actions that may be implemented in the future, if necessary, and for actions to be taken immediately. Below are the actions the Court will take immediately.
2. Beginning 3/23/20 and until 4/22/20, all jury trials will be rescheduled and persons summoned for those trials do not need to report for jury duty. The Court will be notifying persons summoned that they do not have to report for jury duty.
3. On a case-by-case basis, for uncontested court cases where possible, the Court will continue the matters to a date past 4/22/20.
4. For all court cases that need to proceed, where possible the Court will do the following:
  - a. Allow persons to appear for court cases telephonically using CourtCall.
  - b. Allow only 25 persons in the Courtroom at any time, all other persons will be sent to another Courtroom for the matter to be heard or asked to return at a later time.
5. Beginning 3/19/20, the Court's civil counter at the Historic Courthouse at 41 W. Yaney Ave., Sonora, will be closed to the public and all persons needing to do civil filings will be directed to use the civil drop box or go to the criminal counter at the Court's building located at 60 N. Washington Street, Sonora. The criminal counter at our Washington Street location has a window and intercom system which protects both the public and the staff from possible coronavirus exposure. Persons needing civil forms for divorce, small claims and other civil

matters may pick those up at the first floor of the Historic Courthouse where a table in the public lobby has the forms available for the public.

6. Beginning immediately, the Self Help Center will be physically closed to the public and all persons needing self help assistance will be directed to call the Self Help number to receive assistance by phone.
7. Beginning immediately, the Court will stop providing mediation services in person. Instead, persons will be provided mediation services by phone, video or online.
8. Beginning immediately, guardianship and conservatorship interviews and/or investigations will be rescheduled and/or done via video/Skype/phone alternatives.
9. Beginning immediately, for all non-mandatory appearance citations, like traffic tickets, where the defendant requests to appear, appearance dates will be set 90 days out.

For further information contact:

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