Court operations and the coronavirus

March 30,2020

Chief Judge Timothy C. Evans today entered an order that extends the postponement of many criminal and civil cases in the Circuit Court of Cook County through May 18.

The order also expands the use of videoconferencing for all court proceedings deemed necessary or emergencies during this time. The Office of the Chief Judge has been working with the justice system stakeholders – the sheriff, clerk, state's attorney and public defender – on this increased use of video appearances.

Currently, all jail detainees with bail hearings at the Leighton Criminal Court Building appear in court via video. Video has also been used in several other areas of the court. The court anticipates more use of video every day, and all matters will be conducted via video no later than April 16.

Chief Judge Evans' order also closes three court facilities from April 6 through May 18: the Chicago branch courts at 5555 W. Grand Ave., 727 E. 111th St. and 3150 W. Flournoy St. Any emergency matters in those cases will be heard at the Leighton Criminal Court Building.

"As we continue to monitor the spread of the coronavirus, these actions are needed to protect public health," Chief Judge Evans said. "Our system of justice must continue to hear all necessary and urgent matters, and today's order balances access to justice with the need for social distancing. I commend everybody in the justice system for carrying out their respective missions during this unprecedented time. Though the days ahead present more uncertainty than clarity, we will perform our respective duties safely and effectively."

Chief Judge Evans considered closing the five suburban courthouses and consolidating all suburban matters into the Leighton Criminal Court Building. But after consulting with Dr. Emily Landon of the University of Chicago Medical Center and the Executive Committee of the court, it was determined that decentralized court operations are in everybody's best interest to prevent an increased risk of spreading the coronavirus at one centralized location.

Today's order amends Chief Judge Evans' March 13 order that similarly allowed emergency matters to proceed in the Circuit Court of Cook County and postponed most cases until April 16. Chief Judge Evans' new order continues his prior moratorium on evictions or foreclosures, and none will be allowed during this time.

Just like the order entered on March 13, today's order means that no jury trials in criminal or civil matters would begin until after May 18. Individuals who have been summoned to jury duty through May 18 should not report for jury duty. They will receive a new date for service.

The court will continue to monitor the pandemic and make more announcements as needed.

March 30, 2020

The Office of the Chief Judge announced today one new case of an employee who tested positive for COVID-19. The employee works for the Adult Probation Department at the branch court at 3150 W. Flournoy St. and last reported for work on March 19.

For any confirmed reports of COVID-19 involving employees, Human Resources personnel will contact any individuals identified as having contact with the employee at the workplace and potentially exposed to the virus. The areas where the employees work have received routine cleanings/disinfection, and deep cleanings for the areas are requested.

With today's announcement, there are a total of four employees who have tested positive for COVID-19 who work under the auspices of the Office of the Chief Judge.

March 26, 2020

COVID-19

The Office of the Chief Judge announced today one new case of an employee who tested positive for COVID-19. The employee works for the Adult Probation Department on the lower level of the Leighton Criminal Court Building and last reported for work on March 16. The employee reported being asymptomatic while at work.

For any confirmed reports of COVID-19 involving employees, Human Resources personnel will contact any individuals identified as having contact with the employee at the workplace and potentially exposed to the virus. The areas where the employees work have received routine cleanings/disinfection, and deep cleanings for the areas are requested.

With today's announcement, there are a total of three employees who have tested positive for COVID-19 who work under the auspices of the Office of the Chief Judge.

March 25, 2020

COVID-19

The Office of the Chief Judge announced today that two employees have tested positive for COVID-19. The employees – an Adult Probation Department employee working on the lower level of the Leighton Criminal Court Building and an Office of the Chief Judge employee working on the 23rd floor of the Daley Center – last reported for work on March 13.

Human Resources personnel communicated with both employees to determine who they came into contact with while they were at work prior to receiving their diagnosis. Both employees reported that they were asymptomatic while at work. For any confirmed reports of COVID-19 involving employees, Human Resources personnel will contact any individuals identified as having contact with the employee at the workplace and potentially exposed to the virus.

The areas where the two employees work have received routine cleanings/disinfection, and a deep cleaning for the areas has been requested.

March 21, 2020

Bail reviews during the COVID-19 epidemic

The Circuit Court of Cook County, under the direction of Chief Judge Timothy C. Evans, has taken a series of actions since March 13 to ensure that the court operates to hear all emergency matters, including requests for bail review that balance the rights of the accused and public safety.

As announced on March 13, Chief Judge Evans entered an order that limited court operations to emergency matters effective March 17.

The order ensures that bail reviews for pretrial defendants in Cook County Jail will continue to be conducted during these limited court operations. After an arrest and initial bail hearing that results in a defendant being held in custody, a defendant has the right to ask a judge to review the bail in an effort to secure release from jail while the criminal case is pending.

Every day this week, judges conducted bail reviews throughout the county and released pretrial defendants, when appropriate, pursuant to agreement of the offices of the state's attorney and defense counsel. Judges also denied requests for release when the defendant was considered to present a threat to public safety.

Moving forward, judges will continue to be available every day, including weekends, and will hear all requests for bail reviews. To expedite the review of these cases and to help promote social distancing, defense counsel may waive the defendant's appearance in court.

"We stand ready to handle these cases on an expedited basis so that judges may balance a defendant's rights, public safety and public health," Chief Judge Evans said. "There is no precedent for the current situation in which the court is operating. I want the public to know that the judiciary is prepared to work with the other stakeholders in the justice system to conduct as many reviews of bail as they request. The judges of the Circuit Court of Cook County will continue to navigate every matter through the lens of what justice and Illinois law require."

The Leighton Criminal Court Building and the six districts in the Circuit Court of Cook County are open for in-custody preliminary hearings, arraignments, initial bail hearings, bail reviews and emergency orders of protection. Emergency civil matters are also being conducted in the Daley Center.

At the Juvenile Temporary Detention Center (JTDC), where juveniles await adjudication, there were 186 residents as of today and no positive tests for COVID-19. Reviews of detention have happened and can be had any day of the week, including weekends.

Nancy B. Jefferson Alternative School is closed pursuant to the governor's order, and JTDC residents are learning via instructional packets provided by Chicago Public Schools. JTDC residents continue to participate in cognitive-behavioral therapy and exercise/recreation activities, and they may participate via video in programs offered by the Old Town School of Folk Music and Storycatchers Theatre. Family and special visits have been canceled, but residents are permitted more time for free phone calls. Medical and mental health services continue to be provided. Increased cleaning and sanitation is being provided.

To provide further protection, all new JTDC admissions are screened for exposure to the coronavirus. Any juvenile who indicates possible exposure to the virus or has a fever will receive medical attention.

For both adult and juvenile defendants, there are some individuals who have no place to stay if released, including those who would not be welcome to stay in their family homes. Chief Judge Evans is scheduled to talk to other Cook County stakeholders on Monday to begin discussions on finding a place to stay for those who would be eligible for release but have nowhere to live.

Courts remain open to hear any matters on an emergency basis, consistent with Chief Judge Evans' order entered March 13 that postponed most matters in the Circuit Court of Cook County. For information on that order, visit:
http://www.cookcountycourt.org/MEDIA/ViewPressRelease/tabid/338/ArticleId/2736/Chief-Judge-Evans-postpones-most-cases-for-30-days-due-to-coronavirus.aspx

March 13, 2020

Chief Judge Evans postpones most cases for 30 days due to coronavirus

Many criminal and civil cases in the Circuit Court of Cook County will be postponed for a 30-day period starting Tuesday (March 17) due to the spread of the coronavirus, Chief Judge Timothy C. Evans announced today.

Court operations will proceed as scheduled on Monday (March 16). The 30-day period runs from March 17 through April 15.

Chief Judge Evans took this action after consulting with the court's 17 presiding judges, the county board president, state's attorney, public defender, sheriff, clerk of the circuit court and representatives of local bar associations.

"We are modifying court operations to protect the public, court staff and the judiciary," Chief Judge Evans said. "We will continue to identify the appropriate balance between allowing access to justice and minimizing the threat to public health. I am also asking everybody in the justice system to exercise patience and flexibility as we move forward in these unpredictable times. This is an unprecedented situation, and we may need to make more changes in the days ahead."

No jury trials in criminal or civil matters will begin in the 30 days. Individuals who have been summoned to jury duty from March 17 through April 15 should not report for jury duty. They will receive a new date for service.

Grand jury proceedings will continue during the 30 days, and the proceedings may be held in courtrooms to provide more space and distance between people. Individuals who are currently serving in grand jury proceedings must report to court.

For all adult criminal cases, all trials and many hearings scheduled for the 30 days are postponed to a future date. Hearings that will proceed in the 30 days include bail hearings, arraignments and preliminary hearings. In addition, defendants may continue to enter into plea agreements to conclude their case. Any pretrial defendant may also request a bail review during this time.

In addition, for the 30 days, low-risk and medium-risk adults on probation do not need to meet with their probation officer in person. Probation officers have contacted clients to inform them that they will schedule meetings to be held either via video conferencing or phone conversation. Clients deemed high-risk will still be required to report to their probation officers in person.

All traffic and misdemeanor matters scheduled in the 30 days are postponed to a future date.

For delinquency and criminal proceedings involving juveniles, the only matters that will occur during the 30 days are demands for trial and detention hearings that determine if a juvenile is held in custody while the case is pending.

Judges will hear cases of child abuse or neglect in which the state seeks protective custody of a child, and judges will hear emergency motions in which children are allegedly abused in foster care.

For domestic violence matters, petitioners may seek orders of protection during the 30 days. Litigants may also seek an order of protection related to an existing civil domestic relations case (such as dissolution of marriage). Emergency petitions may also be filed in child-support matters.

For the 30-day period, all civil matters not deemed an emergency by party agreement are postponed to a future date. Emergency requests in civil matters will be permitted.

No orders for an eviction or foreclosure will be entered during the 30-day period.

Civil lawsuits may still be filed in person or via electronic filing.

For the 30 days, all courthouse Children's Rooms will be closed. Individuals who have court business should not bring children to court.

After marriage ceremonies conclude Monday, March 16, judges will not perform marriage ceremonies during the 30-day period.

Though there will be fewer cases, all courthouses will remain open for the 30 days. Court employees who do not need to be in a courtroom or office will be encouraged to work remotely during this time.

In addition, the Circuit Court of Cook County is following the guidance of the Illinois Supreme Court, and signs will be posted at all courthouses to indicate that the following individuals should not enter any courthouse if they:

- Have been in any of the following countries with the last 21 days: China, South Korea, Italy, Japan, Iran; or
- Reside or have close contact with anyone who has been in one of those countries listed above within the last 21 days; or
- Have been directed to quarantine, isolate or self-monitor at home for the coronavirus by any medical provider; or
- Have been diagnosed with, or have had close contact with anyone diagnosed with, COVID-19; or
- Have flu-like symptoms including fever, cough or shortness of breath.

Chief Judge Evans understands that one of these conditions may apply to a person who plans to attend a court hearing that is permitted during the 30-day period. He is following the guidance of the Illinois Supreme Court and asking the judiciary to make reasonable accommodations and reschedule matters for individuals who cannot enter a courthouse due to one of the aforementioned reasons.

Click here for a copy of General Administrative Order 2020-01

March 11, 2020

The Circuit Court of Cook County continues to monitor state and local responses to the coronavirus and will follow guidance provided by state and local public health agencies and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Hand-sanitizing dispensers have been installed at courthouses, and cleaning crews are conducting regular cleanings with an emphasis on first-touch areas such as doors knobs and areas inside elevators and restrooms.

All employees have been encouraged to get a flu shot; wash their hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds; avoid touching their eyes, nose and mouth with unwashed hands; stay home when sick; avoid close contact with people who are sick; and clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces and objects.

If you are summoned for jury service and are experiencing any acute respiratory illness symptoms (cough, shortness of breath, headaches), flu-like symptoms, have a fever, or are coughing or sneezing, please do not report for jury service. Instead, contact the jury office on weekdays between 8:30 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. at 312-603-5879 to reschedule your service to a later date, which is typically about three months later. These are standard procedures but especially important at this time.

In addition, courthouse tours scheduled in March at the Daley Center (six tours) and the Leighton Criminal Court Building (six tours) have been postponed. Two seminars for senior citizens scheduled to occur in the Daley Center in March – one regarding Medicare fraud and one regarding veterans benefits – have been postponed.

As more information becomes available or if there are changes to court operations, we will keep you posted.

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