

Oregon Chief Justice issues court guidelines to respond to COVID-19

(Salem, Ore.) Oregon Chief Justice Martha L. Walters today issued guidelines to courts in the state Judicial Department on how to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic.

“Oregon’s judicial branch is committed to ensuring that we protect public safety and the rights of all Oregonians while we respond to emerging health concerns,” Walters said. “We are implementing our emergency plans and will continue to provide critical services while we take appropriate safety precautions. We understand that many people may need the assistance of the courts and we are doing all we can to provide services in a safe environment.”

The guidelines issued by Walters, after consultation with trial courts, recommend that those courts:

- Postpone jury trials that are not time-sensitive. This will reduce the number of people called for jury service and limit large-group gatherings in courthouses.
- Continue to conduct jury trials that are already underway and jury trials that are time-sensitive because they are subject to strict legal timelines or involve people held in jails.
- Promote settlement of cases and other alternatives to going to trial.
- Limit large-group gatherings and practice social distancing for all court functions – jury orientation, jury and other trials, hearings, interactions with court users, and internal meetings.
- Promote telephone, video-conferencing, and ‘remote’ court appearances.
- Enhance cleaning of courtrooms, public spaces, and work spaces.
- Caution jurors, the public, attorneys, judges, and staff who are feeling ill or are in higher-risk groups to avoid coming to the courthouse.
- Work with bar organizations and local public safety agencies to ensure coordinated responses.

Walters previously provided guidance to courts to limit large-group meetings and conferences and restrict in- and -out-of-state travel.

Specific decisions about implementing these guidelines will be made by the presiding judge and trial court administrator in each county. More specific information about these local actions will be posted on individual court web pages, which can be accessed through ‘Find a Court’ at www.courts.oregon.gov/courts

OJD will continue to closely monitor developments regarding COVID-19 and will consider additional measures as needed.

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