



DISTRICT COURT JUDGES  
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To: All Persons with Interest in District Court Operations

From: G. Galen Braddy, Chief District Court Judge

Date: January 5, 2021

Re: Resumption of Operations for District Court and Splitting of Criminal Court Calendars

The emergency directive given by Former Chief Justice Cheri Beasley postponing non-essential, in-person court proceedings for 30 days, beginning Monday, December 14, 2020 is set to expire on January 13, 2021. At the current time, I am not aware of a new or forthcoming emergency directive to extend the postponement of non-essential courts. As a result, district court intends to resume the court schedule on January 14, 2021.

Please note that all persons are to continue to exercise social distancing, mask wearing, and compliance with COVID courtroom capacity limits. We encourage citizens to handle matters when feasible on-line and encourage Web-Ex hearings when parties consent.

For the past nine months, the Pitt County Criminal Clerk's office has worked diligently to pull numbers, split calendars, and continue thousands of cases in an effort to minimize the number of cases/defendants on a court docket. However, this is no longer a feasible solution. Henceforth, in order to address courtroom capacity, **the rule for Criminal calendars through June 2021 will be that defendants whose last names begin with A-M report at 9:00am and defendants whose last names begin with N-Z are to report at 2:00pm on their day of court.** There will be ONE calendar for the criminal court but admittance to the courtroom at 9:00am and 2:00pm will be based on LAST name of the defendant.

Attorneys are encouraged to advise their clients whose appearance is unnecessary (cases being handled via waivers) not to report on their court date. Should a case be resolved by plea or hearing, attorneys may instruct their clients to report at an assigned time outside of the 9am or 2pm calendar call (ie: 11am) which is agreeable with ADA whereas defendants have likely dispersed from the courtroom. For probable cause court, it would be advantageous for attorneys to continue matters prior to the assigned court date if they know a resolution will not be reached in efforts to eliminate large calendars as well as limit folks from coming to court who are not needed in the courtroom.

As there are victims involved in criminal court cases, it would be advisable for the District Attorney's office to notify victims of the new admittance policy for criminal court matters. This would eliminate victims from appearing at 9am when the defendant does not need to be in court until the 2pm session of court. Continued efforts to advise unrepresented defendants of the resource of E-Citation available through the NC Courts website for resolution of traffic tickets have proven to be beneficial to address the backlog of traffic cases and numbers of people in court.



To assist with notification to defendants regarding the splitting of criminal court, local TV stations will be asked to make a broadcast to the public instructing people with **criminal court cases whose last names begin with A-M report at 9:00am and whose last names begin with N-Z to report at 2:00pm on their scheduled court date**. NC Courts will be provided information for publication on the NC Courts website. Distribution of information through social media will be utilized.

Unfortunately, there will continue to be people who report to the courthouse for a criminal court outside of the times noted. It is suggested that defendants who seek admittance to the courthouse for criminal court at 9:00 am but whose last names begin with N-Z be asked to return to court at 2:00pm and/or to contact their attorney or the public defender's office for further instructions. Likewise, victims for criminal court matters should be told to call the District Attorney's office for reporting information.

Lastly, there is no perfect solution for the handling of criminal calendars due to the volume of cases while maintaining social distancing and compliance with courtroom capacity. We must however eliminate long lines of people outside the courthouse awaiting entry at all costs to combat the further spread of the virus. The blanket rule to divide criminal courts based on defendant's last name seems the most feasible at this time. Further modifications to this policy will be implemented as warranted. In advance, I appreciate the cooperation and understanding of all those involved as we proceed in these challenging times.

