

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

GREENBORO, NC May 22, 2020 – The Politburo, a group comprised of the Senior Resident Superior Court Judge John O. Craig, Chief District Court Judge Teresa H. Vincent, District Attorney Avery Crump, Clerk of Superior Court Lisa Johnson-Tonkins and Chief Public Defender John Nieman met about extending greater access to the Guilford County Courthouses in light of Chief Justice Cheri Beasley’s order that was effective March 16, 2020, implementing measures designed to curb the spread of COVID-19 and minimize the risk of exposure caused by crowded sessions of court. Said order is expected to expire on June 1, 2020.

Even after Chief Justice Beasley’s order, the Guilford County Courts have remained open for cases where due process rights were triggered. In addition to criminal court, Superior Court judges resolved issues remotely, when it was appropriate to do so. Furthermore, District Court judges created opportunities for attorneys to submit remote hearing requests for traffic and family law cases. Beginning June 1, 2020, District and Superior courts will expand access to the courts as described in the memo issued on May 14, 2020, by Senior Resident Superior Court Judge John Craig, and Chief District Court Judge Teresa H. Vincent. Access to the Administrative Memo; District Court protocols and related forms are on the North Carolina Administrative Office of the Courts at [www.nccourts.gov](http://www.nccourts.gov) or the Family Law website at <http://www.guilfordcountydistrictcourt.com/2020.html>.

Criminal Superior Court sessions, which mainly deal with felony crimes, will start each day at 9:30 am. Defendants should go on the website [nccourts.org](http://nccourts.org) and follow the prompts to the Guilford County criminal calendars to see if they are on a daily calendar. If they do not see their name posted on one of the daily calendars, they should contact their attorney, who will advise them if they have an upcoming court date. At first, we will be handling only guilty pleas, probation violations, and pretrial motions. We will not hold any jury trials until September 1.

In civil court sessions for Superior Court, we will also call a daily calendar for the hearing of motions, and some of these may be done remotely by video conferences. But the fact that no jury trials will be scheduled until after September 1, combined with daily motions calendars, should keep the numbers manageable.

Finally, the week of June 15 is usually kept open, with no scheduled court, so that the judges, Assistant District Attorneys, Assistant Public Defenders, and other staff can attend continuing education conferences. But since all of them have been cancelled or postponed, we are scheduling two criminal sessions of Superior Court that week: one in High Point and one in Greensboro. I have signed an administrative order and sent it to the attorneys to notify them that we intend to use that week to good advantage to work on the backlog.

Guilford County District Courts will continue to conduct hearings dealing with due process implications such as first appearances, secure custody, and non-secured custody hearings in Delinquency & Department of Human & Health Services courts, criminal court, and Domestic Court. Also, beginning on June 1, 2020, Guilford County Courts will be expanding access to civil courts, criminal, traffic, child support courts, as well as magistrates' small claims courts. Courts sessions will start at 9:00 am. However, to manage the number of individuals in court, criminal and traffic matters will be heard only by the request of an attorney. All district court traffic and criminal cases involving self-represented individuals will be continued until after June 30, 2020. Defendants may inquire about court dates by contacting the Clerk of Superior Court or [www.nccourts.gov/services](http://www.nccourts.gov/services). Any litigant represented by an attorney should contact their attorney regarding their court date. Lastly, District Court Judges' Office normal office hours of 9:00 am to 5:00 pm will resume on June 1, 2020.

The Clerk of Superior Court will expand access to the public beginning June 1, 2020 from 8:30am until 5:00pm Monday through Friday in Greensboro and High Point, with the exception of the Greensboro Estates Division which will close to the public on Wednesdays at 2pm.

Estate and Special Proceedings Offices will resume hearing In-person hearings unless a remote Hearing is deemed needed. Foreclosure hearings will commence on or after June 15, 2020 pursuant to local Administrative Order.

Potential Jurors will begin to receive summonses sometime in July unless they are being called for Grand Jury Service.

The District Attorney's Office is currently open to the public from 9 am – 2 pm. Beginning Tuesday, May 26<sup>th</sup> the District Attorney's office will be open to the public from 8:30 am – 5:00 pm. Visitors will be required to wear face masks.

The District Attorney's Office will continue to use Electronic Compliance and Dismissal (ECAD), which is a new web-based solution that is part of the larger initiative to modernize the North Carolina court system. The application delivers a fast, convenient means of requesting dismissals online for certain traffic offenses and potentially avoiding a trip to court. Please visit [onlineservices.NCcourts.org](http://onlineservices.NCcourts.org) for list of offenses allowing a request for dismissal. (Rolled out statewide in the summer 2016.)

The District Attorney's office is also allowing offenders to request speeding reductions online. Online request for reduction of speeding is the latest addition to the suite of online services offered as part of eCourts, the larger initiative to modernize the North Carolina court system. This service provides the public a fast, convenient means of requesting reductions for speeding offenses online and potentially avoiding a trip to court. Please visit [onlineservices.NCcourts.org](http://onlineservices.NCcourts.org) for the primary eligibility requirements for requesting a reduction of speeding online. (Rolled out statewide in October 2017.)

Currently, speeding and other traffic matters of offenders with attorneys are being handled through WebEx. This is the second week for this virtual court, and it has run smoothly.

Starting with the month of June, courtroom activities will be expanded to include the publication of daily calendars in courtrooms 4C and 3C (GB) and courtroom 4C (HP), for Administrative hearings involving those charged with felony offenses who have been indicted in the last several months. Their cases have been transferred to Superior Court and several procedural matters must be addressed.

1. Court will begin at 9:30 every day. Defendants can learn when they are scheduled for court by contacting the Clerk's Office or checking online.
2. Those appearing on the published calendar are in Superior Court for the first time with regard to the charges on the calendar. The presiding Superior Court Judge will inform the defendant of the nature of the charges and the defendant's potential punishment.
3. The defendant will be expected to address arrangements for counsel at the hearing. A defendant can waive consideration for appointed counsel and hire their own attorney, or complete an affidavit proving indigency and seek appointment of an attorney or represent themselves.

4. A number of cases will be added on each day for those defendants already represented by an attorney who are prepared to plead guilty as part of a negotiated agreement. The attorney representing the defendant will contact their client and communicate when they are expected to be in court.
5. There will be strict enforcement of social distancing requirements and other measures to ensure the safety of the public and those who work in the courtroom.

The Public Defender's Office will be open to the public in Greensboro between 8:30 am and 5:00 pm and in High Point from 8:30 am to 1:00 pm on a restricted basis beginning Tuesday, May 26. Clients and the public must wear masks when entering the waiting area. The everyone is advised to call the Greensboro office at 336-412-7777 and the High Point office at 336-822-6723 to get information about court dates and contact information for their attorney.

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