

**PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICE
SUPREME JUDICIAL COURT
John Adams Courthouse
One Pemberton Square
Boston, Massachusetts 02108**

CONTACT:

Jennifer Donahue/Erika Gully-Santiago
(617) 557-1114
Jennifer.Donahue@jud.state.ma.us

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**Supreme Judicial Court Issues Order Restricting Court Appearances to
Emergency Matters**

BOSTON, MA -- The Supreme Judicial Court today ordered that, because of the public health emergency arising from the COVID-19 pandemic, beginning tomorrow (March 18, 2020) and until at least April 6, 2020, the only matters that will be heard in-person in Massachusetts state courthouses are emergency matters that cannot be held by videoconference or telephone. Each of the seven Trial Court departments, in new standing orders to be issued today, will define emergency matters for their departments.

As a result of the SJC order, courthouses will be closed to the public except to conduct emergency hearings that cannot be resolved through a videoconference or telephonic hearing. Clerk's offices shall remain open to the public to accept pleadings and other documents in emergency matters only.

All trials in both criminal and civil cases scheduled to commence in Massachusetts state courts between today and April 17, 2020, are continued to a date no earlier than April 21, 2020, unless the trial is a civil case where the parties and the court agree that the case can be decided without the need for in-person appearance in court. Where a jury trial has commenced, the trial will end based on the manifest necessity arising from the pandemic and a new trial may commence after the public health emergency ends.

Courts, to the best of their ability, will attempt to address matters that can be resolved or advanced without in-person proceedings through communication by telephone, videoconferencing, email, or other comparable means.

The SJC and the Appeals Court in the coming days will offer guidance with regard to oral arguments scheduled in April in these appellate courts.

[Supreme Judicial Court Order limiting in-person appearances in state courthouses that cannot be resolved through a videoconference or telephonic hearing](#)

Updates regarding the court's response to the COVID-19 pandemic are available on the court's website: <https://www.mass.gov/guides/court-system-response-to-covid-19>

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