



SUPERIOR COURT OF CALIFORNIA COUNTY OF RIVERSIDE



Master Plan to Restore Court Services

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Master Plan to Restore Court Services

Introduction

The Riverside Superior Court is committed to protecting the health and safety of our community while performing our constitutional duties. The health and welfare of each judicial officer, employee, attorney, contractor, and member of the public that enters our facilities is paramount in the decisions that are made as the Riverside Superior Court begins to restore services.

The Riverside Superior Court is closely monitoring local, state, and federal public health directives related to COVID-19, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidelines, and will continue to update the master plan as appropriate. This master plan for restoring services is fluid and will largely depend on policy-setting and guidance from the Judicial Council of California, and local, state and federal officials; therefore, this document will be updated periodically and further refined as the phases in the plan are solidified.

Following the guidelines provided by Governor Newsom's executive orders¹ and the County of Riverside's orders by the Public Health Officer, on March 20, 2020 the court suspended all non-essential functions and is currently hearing only specific limited essential services and emergency matters due to the COVID-19 pandemic. (See [General Order 2020-20](#))

The master plan to restore court services addresses public access, court facilities and court operations.

Public Access

To reduce potential exposure to COVID-19 and reduce the number of infections and community spread of the virus, the general public has been unable to personally attend court hearings during the closure.

To allow attendance at public hearings, audio streaming capabilities are being made available in public courtrooms. An individual's ability to attend a court proceeding differs by the type of proceeding and the status of the person who wishes to attend the proceeding. Courtroom Livestreaming services are available on the court's [website](#).

For those attending live, in-person proceedings, which will start under the restoration of services plan, the following applies:

- General public must have a case on calendar to enter the courtroom.
- All attorneys entering any courthouses must show their bar card, business card with identification, or employee identification card at security screening stations.

¹ Under Governor Newsom's [Executive Order N-33-20](#), the judicial branch is deemed an essential, critical infrastructure, and includes "workers supporting the operations of the judicial system, including judges, lawyers, and others providing legal assistance".

- Witnesses will be allowed to enter and must be prepared to state which courtroom he or she will be appearing.
- Friends, family, and other companions are not allowed to enter the courthouse unless specifically permitted, e.g. victim support person.

The media may enter the court facility during this closure period. The media may enter a courtroom provided they have an approved order by the judge presiding in the case pursuant to California Rules of Court, rule 1.150 and local rule 10030. Requests for media coverage must be submitted to the Public Information Officer.

ACCESS TO COURT RECORDS

As permitted under California Rules of Court, rule 2.501, [court records](#) and/or [copies of court documents](#) are available online.

In civil and criminal cases, certified copies may be requested via our [Online Copy Request System](#). For family law and probate, the court is developing a process to facilitate online certified copy requests.

To request exhibits, individuals can contact the court's Exhibits Division by phone 951-777-3098 or via [email](#).

Public viewing stations are not available at this time as most court facilities are closed, and those that are open are only open for the filing of emergency matters. The court is actively working on restoring the public viewing stations while accommodating for social distancing once courthouses reopen.

TELEPHONE SERVICES

Limited court staff are available to answer phones and monitor and respond to [web assistance](#) email inquiries. Individuals can contact the Riverside Superior Court at 951-777-3147 or 760-393-2617. Phone hours are generally 7:30 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. until further notice; however, the traffic call center has extended operating hours from 7:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.

Self-Help

Since March 19, 2020, Riverside Self-Help Center services continue to be available via phone and email for court matters deemed essential. Self-Represented litigants can request assistance with restraining orders, emergency family law requests for orders, and emergency guardianship and conservatorship. As the court begins to restore court matters and hearings, self-help services will follow in its expansion of services and eventual resumption of assistance with Family Law, Probate, Unlawful Detainer, Small Claims and other limited Civil matters.

Riverside Self-Help Center Locations are currently closed to the public. As part of court facilities taking measures to comply with current health directives, the self-help centers must implement protocols to maintain sanitary conditions and ensure adequate social distancing before resuming in-person legal assistance.

To continue to meet public needs, Self-Help Legal Services staff will provide all services via phone and email. Additionally, educational workshops and forms review will resume over the following months through new services including online appointments with self-help staff, webinar workshops, and video conferencing.

Jury Services

In March 2020, the Riverside Superior Court discontinued summoning jurors to report due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Based upon constitutional timeframes the court began to summon jurors to serve starting on June 15, 2020. It is anticipated that a limited number of trials will start in June 2020. Court cases with approaching constitutional and statutory timeframes will be given priority and heard as needed.

The court has taken steps to ensure the safety of the jurors in response to COVID-19. The Riverside County Public Health Officer has provided the court guidance and recommendations for best-practice safety measures, including face covering requirements and the reconfiguration of jury assembly rooms, courtrooms and lobbies to ensure an environment that facilitates social distancing. Jurors will be called only when a case is ready to proceed with trial. In addition, jurors will be called in at staggered time intervals throughout the day. The panel sizes will consider the jury assembly room occupancy based on social distancing considerations. Prospective jurors will also be asked to complete an online availability form prior to reporting for jury service. This online form will help the court minimize the number of jurors reporting to the courtroom for jury selection.

Clerk's Offices

Clerk's offices at the Blythe Courthouse, Larson Justice Center, Southwest Juvenile Courthouse, Southwest Justice Center, Hall of Justice, Riverside Juvenile Courthouse, Historic Courthouse, Riverside Family Law Courthouse, and Palm Springs Courthouse are open for the filing of emergency matters until further notice. This includes:

- File or pick-up any type of restraining order
- File or pick-up a temporary guardianship
- File or pick-up a temporary conservatorship
- Request family law emergency orders (i.e. custody/visitation)
- Request other types of emergency ex parte application relief

For non-emergency matters, customers may file documents in one of three ways:

- 1) Online via the eSubmit Document Submission Portal². The eSubmit program allows court customers to electronically deliver documents to the court securely via the internet. The eSubmit fee of \$1.85 is suspended through September 30, 2020.
- 2) Mailed or delivered to the court for processing. Addresses can be found on the court's [website](#); or

² If a document [cannot](#) be electronically delivered (filed) under the California Rules of Court, the document may be mailed or placed in a drop box.

- 3) By placement in a drop box. Drop boxes are available for customers to drop off filing for submission to the clerk's office. Drop boxes are available at the following court locations:

Blythe Courthouse
Hall of Justice (HOJ)
Hemet Courthouse
Historic Courthouse
Larson Justice Center (LJC)
Palm Springs Courthouse
Riverside Juvenile Courthouse
Riverside Family Law Courthouse
Southwest Justice Center (SWJC)
Temecula Courthouse

Based on emergency orders issued by Chief Justice Tani G. Cantil-Sakauye, the period from March 17, 2020 through May 23, 2020, is a holiday for purposes of Code of Civil Procedure §§ 12 and 12a, (the "court holiday provision"). During this period the court did not file any documents other than those necessary for essential services and emergency matters. As addressed in this master plan, the court intends to rescind the court holiday provision, and clerk's offices will resume filing documents, however the resumption of filing of this will differ by case type.

Lastly, the court's reduced public service hours, 7:30 a.m. to 2:00 p.m., will remain in effect until further notice.

Court Appearances

As described in the master plan, as the court restores hearings in certain case types, some hearings will be in-person (live) and others will be telephonic. The court will be sending a notice of hearing indicating whether the hearing will be conducted in-person or telephonically.

In addition, the court is developing a notification system that would allow defendant, parties, litigants and attorneys to check-in online for live, in-person court proceedings. Through this online system, the court would be able to notify the individuals when their case is ready to be called. This would allow individuals to wait outside the courthouse for their in-person hearing and enter the court facility once the case is ready to be heard.

TELEPHONIC APPEARANCES

Pursuant to Emergency Rule 3, the court is operating through remote telephone and video technology to the greatest extent possible. The court is requiring that judicial proceedings for most case types, and court operations, be conducted remotely. This is to protect the health and safety of the public, including court users, both in-custody and out-of-custody defendants, witnesses, court personnel, judicial officers, and others.

Information and instructions for appearing telephonically are available on the court's [website](#).

Facilities

The Riverside Superior Court facilities that are currently open to the public are Blythe, Larson Justice Center, Southwest Juvenile, Southwest Justice Center, Hall of Justice, Riverside Juvenile, Riverside Family Law, Historic Courthouse, and Palm Springs. Pursuant to the order of the Presiding Judge, the remaining court locations will remain closed to the public until further order of the court.

Those who are feeling ill or experiencing COVID-19 symptoms as described by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, including but not limited to fever or chills, cough, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, fatigue, muscle body ache, headache, new loss of taste or smell, sore throat, congestion or runny nose, nausea or vomiting, or diarrhea, or have been diagnosed with COVID-19 are prohibited from entering any court facility or courthouse. ([See General Order 2020-42](#)).

Until further order of the court, face coverings are required to enter all Riverside County courthouses. The Sheriff's Department will turn away any person not wearing a face covering prior to security screening. Face coverings can be scarves (dense fabric, without holes), bandana, neck gaiter, or other fabric face covering.

The Riverside County Public Health Officer has provided the court guidance and recommendations for best-practice safety measures. The court has instituted measures to comply with the current health directives issued by local, state, and federal officials. Some of these measures include the following:

- Security screening protocols that include screening questions regarding health and wellness.
- Directing all court attendees to comply with social distancing guidelines (6-foot separation), and wear a face covering at all times while in court facilities. ([See General Order 2020-21](#))
- Limiting the number of participants present to allow for six-feet of separation in public lobby or waiting areas, clerk's offices, and jury assembly rooms.
- Limiting the number of participants in the courtrooms by maintaining a 6-foot distance from each other using courtroom layouts to facilitate that separation (e.g., stand on either sides of the "bar" or counsel table, installing plexiglass where appropriate, etc.).
- Limiting the number of persons in elevators.
- Visible demarcation of 6-foot distances where practical.
- Daily sanitation and disinfection of common and high-traffic areas.

Children's rooms located within court facilities will remain closed until further notice³.

³ Children's rooms will be available for dependency children at the Larson Justice Center, Riverside Juvenile, Southwest Juvenile, and the Southwest Justice Center.

Court Operations

CRIMINAL

Since the court closure on March 20, 2020, the Riverside County criminal courts continued to review calendars on a daily basis. Based on the court's general orders, the statewide emergency orders issued by the Chief Justice, or the adoption of the Emergency Rules under Appendix I of the California Rules of Court, the court has been issuing individual orders to continue hearings.

The court continues to hear in-custody arraignments via video for both misdemeanor and felony cases, and accept stipulations, and ex parte gun violence restraining orders. During the month of April, the court gradually resumed certain proceedings such as preliminary hearings where time has not been waived, bail hearings, priority sentencing hearings, and accepted Penal Code § 977 waivers and Own Recognizance Release Agreements.

In consultation with local justice partners, on March 30, 2020, the court began using the CourtCall remote appearance platform to conduct video in-custody arraignments. On June 29, 2020, the court transitioned to Microsoft Teams platform to conduct video in-custody arraignments.

Below outlines the plan to restore all remaining criminal services:

Phase I

For Phase I, the court added additional courtrooms in each region of the county. The additional departments will be used for in-custody and out-of-custody negotiated dispositions, and for hearings on motions and preliminary hearings. These hearings will be live, in-person hearings requiring the presence of counsel and defendants in court until a viable and constitutionally sound process is developed for conducting these hearings remotely.

In-custody felony negotiated dispositions are already being accepted countywide. Out-of-custody negotiated dispositions were added to calendars beginning May 11, 2020, although disposition paperwork could be submitted as early as May 6, 2020.

On May 1, 2020, the court started to accept misdemeanor dispositions that do not require the defendant's personal presence (Penal Code § 977). Relevant paperwork is submitted to the duty judge for review and disposition.

Phase II

On June 1, 2020, the court resumed the Master Calendar courtrooms in Riverside, Banning, Southwest (Murrieta), and Indio to facilitate case management for criminal cases that are pending trial.

On June 15, 2020, the court reopened all available criminal calendar courtrooms in Riverside, Banning, Southwest (Murrieta), and Indio. Generally, most regions doubled the number of calendar courtrooms for both felonies and misdemeanors to process the backlog in cases. This will minimize crowd size within each courtroom and decrease the number of people entering court facilities. Hearing times will be at staggered time intervals considering the courtroom occupancy based on social distancing constraints.

DEPENDENCY

The court continues to hear detention hearings, requests to re-enter foster care, emergency medical requests, psychotropic medication applications, accept restraining order applications, ex parte applications and stipulations, and issue protective custody warrants.

Below outlines the plan to restore all remaining juvenile services:

Phase I

On May 4, 2020, the juvenile court implemented the use of stipulations for dependency and delinquency cases. No court appearance is required, and a local form has been developed to facilitate the process.

In dependency, stipulations will include:

- Jurisdiction/Disposition hearings;
- 6,12,18, 24-month review hearings;
- Family Maintenance Reviews under Welfare & Institutions Code § 364;
- Post-Permanency Review Hearings;
- Non-Minor Dependents (NMD); and
- Psychotropic Medication Review

In delinquency, stipulations will include: permanency plan hearings (PPH), nonminor dependent (NMD), and regular review hearings.

In dependency, the court will also process non-emergency ex-parte requests and motions under Welfare and Institutions Code § 388 that are not solely related to placement for prima facie.

On May 15, 2020 the court issued a General Order re: Juvenile Division Emergency Reorganization. ([See General Order 2020-26](#))

Phase II

On May 18, 2020, the court opened additional juvenile courtrooms in each region of the county. Riverside opened two out of the four courtrooms - one for dependency and one for delinquency. Southwest (Murrieta) opened two out of the three courtrooms - one dependency and one delinquency. Indio opened five days a week for dependency and opened a delinquency courtroom two days a week. Hearings will be conducted telephonically or via video (as appropriate), with minimal need for parties and/or attorneys to actually appear in court.

Phase III

Beginning on June 15, 2020, the court resumed all contested matters including those with live testimony, non-expert witnesses, and expert witnesses. This included the reopening of all juvenile courtrooms for both dependency and delinquency. The court restructured courtroom calendars to avoid large numbers of persons being present in the courthouse and congregating in hallways waiting for cases to be heard.

On June 1, 2020 the court rescinded the court holiday provision as to juvenile filings, including juvenile appeals, and the juvenile clerk's office resumed filing all juvenile documents.

FAMILY LAW

Since the court closure on March 20, 2020, the family law court has continued to review and triage calendars on a daily basis. Based on the court's general orders, the statewide emergency orders signed by the Chief Justice, or the adoption of the Emergency Rules under Appendix I of the California Rules of Court, the court has been issuing individual orders to continue hearings.

The court continues to accept ex parte domestic violence restraining order requests, requests to renew restraining orders, ex parte applications and stipulations, and surrogacy petitions wherein birth is imminent.

Below outlines the plan to restore all remaining family law services:

Phase I

On April 30, 2020, Family Law began accepting stipulations from the Department of Child Support Service (DCSS) on child support matters.

On May 14, 2020 the court issued a General Order re: Family Law Division Emergency Reorganization. ([See General Order 2020-25](#))

On May 18, 2020, the court resumed live, in-person hearings on permanent domestic violence restraining orders. These proceedings are being held at open justice centers – the Hall of Justice, the Larson Justice Center, the Southwest Justice Center, and the Blythe Courthouse.

In addition, Child Custody Recommending Counseling (Family Court Services) is conducting mediation sessions either by video or telephonically. Mediations began the week of May 18, 2020 in order to prepare for Phase II Request for Order (RFO) telephonic hearings.

On May 18, 2020, the court rescinded the court holiday provision as to some family law filings, including family law appeals, and resumed filing general family law and DCSS documents.

Phase II

On June 8, 2020, the court resumed hearings on Requests for Orders (RFOs). Judicial officers have been reviewing calendars and prioritizing hearings since the closure; hearings will be heard in a manner that sets the priority matters on calendar to be heard first. All hearings will be conducted telephonically at this time.

Under emergency local rules, the court instituted processes and forms to help facilitate additional information being submitted to the court on Requests for Order (RFOs) that have been pending since the closure, including the ability to withdraw the Request for Order (motion), if appropriate.

Phase III

In Phase III, the court will implement a process for trials and contested hearings and resume in-person hearings in family law matters. Unfortunately, the court cannot project a specific date for this phase to begin but anticipates that it may be in Autumn of this year. In this phase, the court would consider reopening the Hemet Courthouse and the Riverside Family Law Courthouse.

On June 15, 2020, the court rescinded the court holiday provision as to adoption filings, and resume filing adoption documents.

On May 7, 2020, the Law and Motion Reservation System recommenced for telephonic hearings beginning on June 1, 2020. The civil clerk's office is processing and filing all documents and briefs pertaining to hearings reserved on or after May 7, 2020.

In addition, by way of [General Order 2020-15](#):

- All currently set hearings on unlimited demurrers and all pretrial motions have been vacated. New hearings on said pretrial motions and demurrers may be scheduled as needed through the Law and Motion System.
- All unlimited jury and court trials previously set have been vacated and trial setting conferences have been scheduled in their place.
- All hearings on the merits of all petitions for writ of mandate or other extraordinary relief have been vacated and status conferences have been scheduled in their place.
- All Mandatory Settlement Conferences in unlimited civil matters previously set have been vacated.
- All court-ordered mediation completion and judicial arbitration completion dates will be automatically continued 180 days.
- Certain Orders to Show Cause are being discharged in limited and unlimited civil cases. (See [General Order 2020-17](#))

All other hearings in limited and unlimited civil cases, including but not limited to case management conferences, trial setting conferences, status conferences, post-trial motions, and some orders to show cause (see [General Order 2020-17](#)), will remain on calendar. Orders on these matters will be made in chambers by judicial officers to either address the matter or continue the hearing.

Phase II

On June 1, 2020, the court rescinded the court holiday provision as to general civil and limited civil filings, including appeals, and the civil clerk's office resumed filing all civil documents⁴.

On June 1, 2020, the court resumed hearings on demurrers, all motions, status conferences, trial setting conferences, and, when necessary, guardian ad litem applications. Hearings will be conducted telephonically until further notice.

All trials will be set through a trial setting conference only, as noted above. In setting trials in unlimited and complex cases, the court will give priority to cases entitled to statutory preference and second priority to court trials.

Mandatory Settlement Conferences will be set at the trial setting conference, as noted above.

Case management orders will be made in chambers by judicial officers based on the case management statements filed by the parties.

On June 1, 2020, the court resumed issuing orders to show cause for violations of state and local rules.

⁴ This excludes documents in unlawful detainers and small claims matters.

