

'Virtual' Court Opens in 4th, 8th and 9th Judicial Districts

By **Michael Marciano** | April 02, 2020 at 06:43 PM

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, administrative judges for New York's Fourth, Eighth and Ninth Judicial Districts announced this week that virtual court operations will be up and running in all covered municipalities starting April 6.

Administrative Judge Felix J. Catena of the **Fourth Judicial District** said videoconferenced hearings will take place for all courts within Clinton, Essex, Franklin, Fulton, Hamilton, Montgomery, Saratoga, Schenectady, St. Lawrence, Warren, and Washington counties for essential proceedings.

"For the health and safety of our court employees and those who enter our courthouses, we have implemented temporary measures designed to reduce exposure to the coronavirus," Catena said. "We initially consolidated all court proceedings into central locations, reduced the maximum occupancy of all courtrooms, waiting rooms and meeting rooms in court facilities, and adjourned all nonessential matters for a minimum of 45 days, allowing only designated judges and essential staff to report to the courthouse for work. Now, as the pandemic intensifies, there is a need to further reduce courthouse density. Accordingly, the Fourth Judicial District will begin hearing all essential matters virtually."

Likewise, **Eighth Judicial District** Administrative Judge Paula L. Feroletto announced virtual court proceedings would be held for all Supreme, Surrogate, Family, County, City, and Town and Village courts for essential matters for Erie County starting April 3, and expanding to the district's other counties—Allegany, Cattaraugus, Chautauqua, Genesee, Niagara, Orleans and Wyoming—on April 6.

For the **Ninth Judicial District**, Administrative Judge Kathie E. Davidson announced virtual court operations would begin April 6 for all courts within Dutchess, Orange, Putnam, Rockland and Westchester counties for the protection of court personnel and the public. "We are now providing the ability for all court users to appear remotely, thereby reducing the risk of spreading the coronavirus," she said.

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On March 16 and 17, Catena, Feroletto and Davidson all postponed nonessential functions in their district courts as they consolidated operations into individual centralized locations. The courts are now allowing judges, litigants, attorneys and some staff to appear by video conferencing. A minimal court staff, including security, will remain at the courthouses to receive papers, answer phones and conduct other essential court functions.

While proceedings are open to the public, uniformed staff will strictly monitor and may limit access to maintain appropriate social distancing in accordance with current public health authorities' guidelines and the occupancy limit of the courtrooms.

"These are challenging times for everyone," Davidson said, "but the courts will remain open and prepared to provide the essential services that the public deserves. We will continue to monitor the COVID-19 situation and adjust our procedures as appropriate."

In addition, due to the suspension of civil statutes of limitation by the governor's Executive Order 202.8, all new court filings, either e-filed or hard copy, that are not essential matters, will not be accepted.