

PRESS RELEASE



SUPERIOR COURT OF CALIFORNIA COUNTY OF IMPERIAL

Court Announces Court Closure – Re: COVID-19 Emergency

El Centro, California – On March 18, 2020, the Superior Court of California, County of Imperial decided to effectively close and reduce court operations. This “closure” will be in effect beginning Monday, March 23, 2020, through and including Tuesday, March 31, 2020. The Brawley and Winterhaven courthouses will be closed completely during this time. The main El Centro Courthouse will be open **only** for the limited services to those required to protect the rights of children in our juvenile system, individuals who are in custody, issuance of restraining orders, as well as any orders necessary to protect the public.

In an effort to move as expeditiously as possible while still accommodating the County’s ability to assist the Court in reducing public contact, leadership of the Superior Court met on March 12 and 16, 2020 with the County Executive Officer and representatives of the District Attorney’s Office, Public Defender’s Office, County Counsel, and others. All were in general agreement with the Court’s proposed actions which were announced on March 16th (see Press Release of March 16, 2020).

On Tuesday, March 17th, after 5:00 pm, the Court received correspondence from the County Executive Officer including the County Medical Officer’s orders regarding COVID-19. This information was reviewed immediately by the Presiding Judge and Court Executive Officer and resulted in a meeting, which was held at the earliest possible time, with all Judicial Officers on March 18. At that meeting, the Presiding Judge announced that he had decided to exercise his authority to close the Court to all but emergency matters.

On March 18, 2020, the Presiding Judge requested and received an Emergency Order from Hon. Tani G. Cantil-Sakauye, Chief Justice of California and Chair of the Judicial Council of California pursuant to Government Code section 68115. The Emergency Order grants the Presiding Judge the necessary powers to close and reduce court operations. It also extends certain statutory deadlines, hearing and filing dates, which has now taken place with General Order 2020-1 effective March 19, 2020 through April 17, 2020. (Available on Court’s website at www.imperial.courts.ca.gov.)

This Court has been monitoring this situation since it began by meeting with justice partners and continually monitoring what other State courts are doing. A greatly increased sanitizing program for all court locations began March 16th and will continue throughout this emergency.

Courts are a symbol of justice to the citizens and residents of this county, state and nation. They stand as the final resort for the people. Closure of courts at any time undermines the faith people have in our system of government and the protections provided by the constitutions of this state and nation. Therefore, this action is not taken lightly but does ensure that the constitutional rights of residents of this county are protected which is why we remain open for emergency orders necessary to protect the public.

MARCH 23, 2020 THROUGH MARCH 30, 2020

THE COURT WILL BE AVAILABLE FOR:

- The main El Centro Courthouse will be open **only** to persons who have restraining order paperwork or other emergency requests filled out and ready to file and to law enforcement for emergency orders, search warrants, and critical arrest warrants where public safety is concerned.
- Phone service for payments and inquiries regarding jury service and scheduling of court cases.
- In-Custody Arraignments will be held via video conference.
- Emergency Hearings

THE COURT WILL BE CLOSED FOR:

Civil

- All civil proceedings will be rescheduled.
- All Unlawful Detainer (UD) matters will be rescheduled.

Criminal

- Criminal proceedings including out-of-custody arraignments, readiness, pre-trial motions, and sentencing.

Family

- Family court department is closed.
- All family court counseling and mediation matters will be rescheduled.
- The Access Center will be closed.
- All clinics and workshops will be cancelled.
- All family support matters will be rescheduled.

Jury

- No jury trials will be held for at least the next thirty (30) days. Jurors who have received a summons will not be ordered to report but will be required to call in once to meet their yearly service requirement.

Juvenile

- All juvenile dependency and delinquency matters will be continued, unless emergency hearing is required.
- All adoption and citation calendars will be continued.

Probate

- All probate hearings will be continued.

Small Claims

- All Small Claims matters will be continued.
- The Small Claims Advisor will not be available.

Traffic

- All traffic matters will be rescheduled.