



UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT

WESTERN DISTRICT OF WASHINGTON
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March 6, 2020

Press Release from the United States District Court for the Western District of Washington.

Inquires can be directed to District Court Executive William M. McCool at (206) 276-0566.

Chief Judge Ricardo S. Martinez issued today General Order 01-20:

COURT OPERATIONS UNDER THE EXIGENT CIRCUMSTANCES CREATED BY COVID-19 AND RELATED CORONAVIRUS.

This General Order is being issued in response to the recent outbreak of Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) in Western Washington, which has been home to the first reported domestic case of the disease and some of the first significant community impacts from school and business closures. As of the date of this Order, there have been over 50 confirmed cases of COVID-19 in King County and over 70 in the State of Washington. Although for many this disease appears to cause only flu-like symptoms, for others it can pose a serious risk, and ten people in this District have died.

In February of this year, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (“CDC”) issued “Interim Guidance” recommending that all employers consider how best to decrease the spread

of COVID-19, including the review of guidance from state and local health officials.¹ On March 5, 2020, Public Health – Seattle & King County issued a recommendation that individuals at higher risk (*e.g.* those over 60 years of age, those with underlying health conditions, those who are pregnant) stay at home and away from large groups of people. Employers were also advised to maximize telecommuting and to “feasibly avoid bringing large groups of people together.”²

Given the significant number of identified and projected cases of COVID-19 in this District and the severity of risk posed to the public, and given the above public health recommendations from local public health authorities, it is hereby ORDERED that, effective Monday, March 9, 2020:

- 1) All civil and criminal matters scheduled for an in-Court appearance before any district or magistrate judge in the Seattle or Tacoma Courthouses, including any associated deadlines, are CONTINUED pending further Order of the Court;
- 2) All grand jury proceedings in this District are CONTINUED pending further Order of the Court;
- 3) With regard to criminal matters, due to the Court’s reduced ability to obtain an adequate spectrum of jurors and the effect of the above public health recommendations on the availability of counsel and Court staff to be present in the courtroom, the time period of the continuances implemented by this General Order will be excluded under the Speedy Trial Act, as the Court specifically finds that the ends of justice served by ordering the continuances outweigh the best interests of the

¹ *Interim Guidance for Businesses and Employers to Plan and Respond to Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19), February 2020*, <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/specific-groups/guidance-business-response.html> (last updated February 26, 2020).

² *Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) Public Health Recommendations to Protect our Community*, <https://kingcounty.gov/depts/health/communicable-diseases/disease-control/novel-coronavirus/protection.aspx> (last updated March 5, 2020).

public and any defendant's right to a speedy trial, pursuant to 18 U.S.C. §3161(h)(7)(A);

- 4) Case-by-case exceptions to the continuances provided herein may be ordered for non-jury matters at the discretion of the Court after consultation with counsel;
- 5) This Order does not affect the Court's consideration of civil or criminal motions that can be resolved without oral argument.

The Seattle and Tacoma Courthouses remain open. Staff in the Clerk's Office will be available by telephone, mail will be received, and intake desks remain open for filings. Electronic filings may still be made through the CM/ECF system. The public is encouraged to continue utilizing Court services while following all applicable public health guidelines.

The Court will vacate or amend this General Order no later than March 31, 2020.

Dated this 6th day of March 2020.

RICARDO S. MARTINEZ
CHIEF UNITED STATES DISTRICT JUDGE