



Press Release

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Jury Trials Update for Dillingham and Naknek

Dillingham, Alaska, October 7, 2020 On September 24, 2020, Chief Justice Bolger issued [Special Order 8194](#), allowing misdemeanor jury trials to resume in the Dillingham court on November 2, 2020. All jury trials have been suspended statewide since March due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. The Alaska Court System has been planning to restart jury trials for cases involving lower level crimes where six jurors will hear the evidence presented usually over a time period of no more than a few days.

The number of COVID-19 cases in Dillingham has been relatively low, but the numbers have increased recently. The jury pool for the court is not limited to Dillingham residents, but includes residents of several surrounding villages, none of which have had any positive cases. The Dillingham court has developed procedures to reduce the risk of exposure to COVID-19. For example, in an effort to limit the number of people who come to the courthouse, an online questionnaire will help determine who is eligible to serve as a juror for a particular case. When the time comes to report to the courthouse, court staff will meet each juror at their car to begin the jury selection process. From their vehicles, jurors will fill out another questionnaire and then be excused until they receive a phone call from court staff. If jurors need to return to the courthouse, they will be given a specific time to arrive when they will be questioned individually instead of as a large group.

The court will strictly adhere to CDC recommendations and state and local mandates. All persons in the courthouse must wear a mask. In addition, the courtroom will be reconfigured to accommodate social distancing of at least six feet for all participants and Plexiglas shields will be located in the courtroom where people need to speak or testify. Extra cleaning will occur during the trial and at the end of each day.

Across the Bay, the Naknek court is not large enough to hold a jury trial that allows for proper social distancing. Therefore, the Chief Justice's Order designates the Dillingham court as the trial location for Naknek cases.

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