



Press Release

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Alaska Courts Remain Open for Business

174,952 Hearings Held Since March

Anchorage, Alaska, November 18, 2020 - Since the start of the pandemic, courts in Alaska have been open every business day, performing essential judicial branch functions. Dedicated court staff and judges have kept the doors open to the public and held hearings and bench trials almost continuously after a brief pause at the beginning of the pandemic for some proceedings.

While most jury trials have been suspended, all other case types have moved ahead. Jury trials are certainly important, but it is important to understand that the vast majority of cases are resolved without a jury trial. Judges' dockets are full of cases involving divorce, custody, Child in Need of Aid, juvenile delinquency, protective orders, mental health commitments, guardianships, estates, small claims, minor offenses and civil lawsuits of all types. Judges are hearing criminal matters that can be conducted remotely including arraignments, bail hearings, change of plea hearings, sentencing, and bench trials decided by a judge without a jury.

From March through October of 2020, the court system held 174,952 hearings, including 65,661 hearings in Anchorage alone, including 44,528 criminal cases and 19,420 civil cases as well as small claims and minor offense matters. They also held 3,530 trials. During this same time period statewide judges issued 63,054 rulings on motions and orders, and disposed of 19,549 petitions,

Courts statewide are using technology to ensure that Alaskans have remote access to justice. Judges are holding hearings by phone and videoconference. The court has also moved more services online including the ability to file new cases and motions by email, make bail payments online, and pay filing fees online. We have also used Zoom to hold presumptive death trials, grand jury proceedings, and jury selection in a juvenile delinquency trial with participants on video. Our appellate courts are hearing oral arguments for appeals in criminal and civil cases via Zoom and live-streamed for public access on KTOO's Gavel Alaska and on the court's [YouTube Channel](#).

The court's website [COVID-19 response](#) section is regularly updated as operations change due to the pandemic. It includes [courthouse safety precautions](#), [FAQs about changes](#) due to the pandemic, and special orders from the chief justice and presiding judge. Some court locations are doing customer service by appointment, including Anchorage, Fairbanks, Nome, Kotzebue, and Utqiagvik. Before going in-person to your local courthouse, check the [directory](#) to understand how it is providing customer service during the pandemic.

The Alaska Court System remains committed to our mission of providing an accessible and impartial forum for the just resolution of all cases that come before us, and to decide such cases in accordance with the law, expeditiously and with integrity. We encourage the public to continue to access the courts during the COVID-19 pandemic by remote methods.

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