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Supreme Court Dismisses Old Municipal Court Warrants in Minor Matters

The New Jersey Supreme Court has ordered the dismissal of more than 780,000 minor municipal court matters that have gone unresolved for 15 years or more.

[The order](#), effective today, follows a report by a three-judge panel that recommended the dismissals in the interests of fairness and a more appropriate use of limited public resources.

[Among the 787,764 municipal court matters eligible for dismissal](#) are minor motor vehicle offenses, penalty enforcement actions, and violations of local ordinances and fish and game regulations. The order also recalls the warrants for failure to appear in court on those offenses. More serious offenses – such as driving while intoxicated, reckless driving, major traffic violations, disorderly and petty disorderly persons offenses, and indictable offenses – were not considered for dismissal and have not been dismissed. One of the matters dismissed dates back to 1976.

Court-ordered driver's license suspensions or revocations in cases that have been dismissed also will be rescinded under the order. License restoration fees or other requirements of the New Jersey Motor Vehicle Commission would still be in effect.

Additionally, the order instructs a Supreme Court committee to examine whether the Judiciary should consider offenses more than 10 years old for dismissal and whether it should expand the types of matters eligible for dismissal. That committee also would be responsible for developing a process for periodically reviewing and dismissing old unresolved municipal court matters.

Chief Justice Stuart Rabner said in the order that open outdated warrants “raise questions of fairness, the appropriate use of limited public resources by law enforcement and the courts, the ability of the state to prosecute cases successfully

in light of how long matters have been pending and the availability of witnesses, and administrative efficiency.”

In March 2017, Chief Justice Rabner formed the Supreme Court Committee on Municipal Court Operations, Fines and Fees to review practices of the local courts and recommend ways to improve the integrity of their operations while preserving and strengthening judicial independence. It released [its report](#) in July. On the same day, the Supreme Court also adopted a series of rule changes that provide for limitations on monetary sanctions against defendants who fail to pay or fail to appear in municipal court.

Within days of the release of the municipal court operations report, Chief Justice Rabner established a panel of three assignment judges – Ronald E. Bookbinder, Ernest M. Caposela and Yolanda Ciccone – to conduct hearings in the northern, central and southern regions of the state to give the public the opportunity to argue that these cases should not be dismissed.

[The panel’s report](#) is available at www.njcourts.gov.

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