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Supreme Court Authorizes Resumption of In-Person Criminal Jury Trials and Grand Jury Proceedings

Criminal jury trials will resume in person next month, under a Supreme Court order issued Tuesday that revises juror service based on the easing of COVID-19 restrictions in New Jersey.

The Court's [order](#) directs the resumption of in-person criminal jury trials beginning June 15, with cases that involve detained defendants receiving the highest priority. Civil trials will continue to be conducted in a virtual format, unless an assignment judge determines there are compelling circumstances to warrant an in-person trial. For example, cases that involve a plaintiff whom doctors have determined has a limited life expectancy will be prioritized for in-person trials.

The order, signed by Chief Justice Stuart Rabner, states, “The Judiciary throughout the COVID-19 pandemic has been guided by the recommendations of public health authorities, including the New Jersey Department of Health (DOH). Today, based on positive trends statewide, key public health indicators regarding COVID-19 in New Jersey are encouraging.”

In a [separate order](#), also issued Tuesday, the Court directed the resumption of in-person grand juries on or after June 15, with each county to have at least one in-person panel in place by Aug. 1. The in-person panels would also be permitted to meet in non-court locations. Grand jury selections will continue to be conducted in a virtual format.

For criminal trials, jury selection will be virtual for the first phase and will be in person for the final phase. Jury selection for civil trials will remain remote.

All in-person court events will be conducted with appropriate health precautions, including face masks and social distancing. For remote events, the Judiciary will

provide electronic devices and related support to jurors who need such assistance to participate.

Since March 16, 2020, judges at all levels of the New Jersey courts have conducted nearly 181,000 remote court events involving 2.4 million participants. In addition, with training and support from the Judiciary, more than 6,000 jurors have participated in virtual jury trial selections since the start of the pandemic.

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