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PRESS RELEASE
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Chief Justice Rhys S. Hodge today signed an administrative order implementing additional precautionary measures throughout the Judicial Branch of the Virgin Islands to help minimize exposure to the COVID-19 coronavirus. The new measures implement the revised guidance issued by the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommending that gatherings of ten or more people be avoided for the next fifteen days.

Effective 5:00 P.M. on Wednesday March 18, 2020, all in-person proceedings scheduled to commence on or before April 1, 2020, before any judicial officer in any Judicial Branch facility are postponed, and no new proceedings will be scheduled. The only exception to the suspension of in-person proceedings are Advice of Rights and Stalking and Domestic Violence matters, which will continue to be heard in-person subject to limitations set by the Presiding Judge of the Superior Court. On March 16, 2020, the Presiding Judge announced that Advice of Rights will only take place on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays at 9:00 AM.

To reduce the likelihood that the coronavirus will spread within Judicial Branch facilities, Chief Justice Hodge has authorized all judicial officers and court employees to work from a remote location, subject to limitations that may be adopted by the Presiding Judge of the Superior Court and the Administrator of Courts. All judicial officers will continue to perform their judicial duties even if working from a remote location, including issuing rulings in matters that were previously argued or which do not require a hearing. In addition, judicial officers may at their discretion conduct emergency proceedings through remote communications such as video or telephone conference.

The Office of the Clerk of the Superior Court and the Office of the Clerk of the Supreme Court shall remain open to accept filings, and will have sufficient personnel available for that purpose. However, the the Clerk of the Superior Court shall suspend issuance of new marriage licenses and in-court marriage ceremonies. Individuals who have already applied for marriage licenses but have not yet picked them up will have their licenses mailed to them unless alternate arrangements are made with the Clerk's Office. Individuals who have not yet applied for a marriage license but need one immediately due to exigent circumstances may make arrangements with the Clerk's Office to appear through an approved method of remote communication.

The precautionary measures in today's administrative order are in addition to those the Judicial Branch adopted on March 13, 2020, which continue to remain in effect. The public is reminded that as of March 13, 2020, all persons who have been diagnosed with COVID-19, have had contact with anyone who has been diagnosed with COVID-19, have been asked to self-quarantine by a doctor, hospital, health provider, or public health official, or who have visited China, South Korea, Japan, Italy, Iran, New Rochelle, New York, or other locale that has been

placed in quarantine have been prohibited from entering any courthouse or other facility operated by the Judicial Branch. In addition, Judicial Branch facilities shall not be used to host any functions open to the public other than court proceedings and certain meetings approved by the Administrator of Courts. As it relates to the Superior Court Rising Stars Youth Steel Orchestra, for the safety and security of program staff, the children they serve, and parents, practice and performance sessions remain suspended.

“The Judicial Branch has closely monitored the spread of the coronavirus,” Chief Justice Hodge said. “Although we have adopted these precautionary measures to protect litigants, attorneys, witnesses, jurors, court staff, and the public from the coronavirus, the courts of the Virgin Islands remain open. We will reassess these measures as more information becomes available.”

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