



---

March 20, 2020

**PRESS RELEASE**  
Press Release No. 2020-0005

Chief Justice Rhys S. Hodge today signed an administrative order suspending all non-essential Judicial Branch services effective Monday March 23, 2020 and adopting interim procedures for matters before the Superior Court of the Virgin Islands and the Supreme Court of the Virgin Islands. The suspension of non-essential services was taken in response to additional guidance issued by the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and other public health authorities, as well as the request of Governor Albert Bryan, Jr. to suspend all non-essential services throughout the Government of the Virgin Islands.

Pursuant to the administrative order, the following functions have been designated as essential services and shall continue: the acceptance of filings by the Clerk of the Superior Court and the Clerk of the Supreme Court; the filing and service of orders, opinions, judgments, and other court-issued documents; and Advice of Rights, Arraignments, and Stalking and Domestic Violence matters in the Superior Court, as well as emergency hearings in family matters subject to the approval of the Presiding Judge of the Superior Court. All other Judicial Branch functions are classified as non-essential. The administrative order further directs the Administrator of Courts, in consultation with the Chief Justice, the Presiding Judge, and other senior Judicial Branch leaders, to designate which Judicial Branch employees are essential personnel who shall continue to work and may be required to work from a Judicial Branch facility. Those classified as non-essential personnel may continue to work from a remote location or may be placed on paid administrative leave if their job duties relate to a suspended function or are otherwise not amenable to remote work.

Due to the suspension of non-essential services, and in order to further reduce the spread of COVID-19, the Chief Justice adopted several interim procedures to govern proceedings in the Supreme Court and the Superior Court. All deadlines in pending Supreme Court appeals which have not yet passed shall automatically be extended by fourteen (14) days or to April 27, 2020, whichever is longer. The period from March 23, 2020, through April 26, 2020, shall also be excluded from the calculation of time for certain deadlines, including the time to file a notice of appeal. With respect to Bar Admissions, the issuance of certificates of good standing and the processing of applications for admission to the Bar, whether regular, special, or *pro hac vice*, are suspended. However, all individuals whose special or other admission to practice law in the Virgin Islands is set to expire on or after March 23, 2020, shall automatically be extended by fourteen (14) days or through April 27, 2020, whichever is earlier, except for individuals ordered suspended or disbarred, who shall receive no extension. In addition, all hearings before the Board on Professional Responsibility, the Board on the Unauthorized Practice of Law, the Commission on Judicial Conduct, and the Committee of Bar Examiners are suspended, with all deadlines

in proceedings before those agencies automatically extended by fourteen (14) days or through April 27, 2020, whichever is longer. The Office of Disciplinary Counsel may continue to receive grievances and other documents if they are filed electronically, and may respond to such documents, but the physical facilities of the Office of Disciplinary Counsel shall be close to the public.

With respect to the Superior Court, all deadlines in pending cases which have not yet passed shall automatically be extended by fourteen (14) days or to April 27, 2020, whichever is longer, and the period from March 23, 2020, through April 26, 2020, shall be excluded from the calculation of time to effectuate service of process. All temporary restraining orders, injunctions, and stays set to expire on or after March 23, 2020, shall automatically be extended by fourteen (14) days or to April 27, 2020, whichever is longer. Moreover, all orders of foreclosure and orders of eviction not yet executed by March 23, 2020, shall automatically be stayed through April 27, 2020.

Although the Office of the Clerk of the Superior Court shall continue to accept filings, in order to reduce unnecessary public interactions, all pleadings, motions, briefs, complaints, petitions, or other documents may be filed by email to [superiorcourtefile@vicourts.org](mailto:superiorcourtefile@vicourts.org). The administrative order delineates the specific procedures that govern email filing, but all emailed documents shall be official court records and equivalent in every way to a document conventionally filed in-person with the clerk. To effectuate the filing by email procedure, the administrative order further provides for electronic service of all documents other than service of process on a complaint or other initiating document, and provides that the Clerk of the Superior Court shall electronically serve all orders, opinions, judgments, and other court-issued documents on all attorneys and unrepresented parties.

The administrative order also modifies certain procedures related to discovery in civil cases. All previously-scheduled depositions may occur as scheduled, and new depositions may be scheduled, but parties are encouraged to agree to postpone such depositions if possible. Any deposition that is held must be conducted telephonically, by video conference, or other remote connection, with no attorneys or stenographers physically present with the deponent. Notaries and other persons qualified to administer an oath in the Virgin Islands may swear the deponent remotely, provided that they can positively identify the deponent through the remote connection. All other civil discovery shall proceed under existing rules without modification. A judicial officer, however, may modify these procedures in any particular case.

These measures are in addition to those the Judicial Branch adopted on March 13, 2020, and March 17, 2020, which continue to remain in effect to the extent not superseded by today's administrative order. The public is reminded that since 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 joined the Executive Branch, as well as state governments across the country, in suspending all non-essential operations to prevent the spread of COVID-19." Chief Justice Hodge said. "Although we have adopted these necessary limitations, both the Superior Court and the Supreme Court remain

open for the acceptance of filings, and judicial officers remain available to issue rulings on emergency matters. We will continue to monitor the spread of COVID-19 and guidance issued by public health authorities, and reassess these measures as more information becomes available.”

**For more information, contact:**

Regina Petersen, Administrator of Courts  
Judicial Branch of the Virgin Islands  
P.O. Box 590  
St. Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands 00804  
Tel: (340) 774-2237 · Fax: (340) 774-2258 · TTY: (340) 693-4118  
[Regina.Petersen@viccourts.org](mailto:Regina.Petersen@viccourts.org)