

Peter C. Lange  
Presiding Judge-Municipal Courts

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April 27, 2020

Dear Mayors and Governing Body Members:

The Municipal Courts are confronting a new reality as a result of the Covid-19 crisis. The virus has severely disrupted all of our lives and sickened many causing great hardship. Municipal court staffs are doing our part to address the needs of the public. Please accept this letter as a brief update on municipal court operations in light of the Covid-19 restrictions and protocols.

From the time of the emergency declarations until the present, normal municipal court sessions have been cancelled to avoid public crowding and potential exposure to the virus. Since the closure of in person court sessions, many of the courts have experienced an increase in “out of court” activities and the Judges and staff have been uninterrupted in handling such matters as emergency requests for restraining orders, requests for emergency protection orders and calls for probable cause and summons and warrant decisions in criminal complaints.

Chief Justice Rabner has now ordered that, starting April 27, 2020, municipal court sessions may be conducted with the consent of all parties. Effective May 11, 2020, with appropriate notice to the parties, municipal court sessions can resume in individual municipal courts. All sessions may only proceed in a virtual (video or phone) format.

As a result of the social distancing restrictions and guidelines and in order to ensure the health of the court users and staff, your municipal employees are having to dedicate themselves to operating the court and processing complaints in different ways. The operation of our courts is integral to a functional civil society.

Your Municipal Court staff has been working to develop ways to adjudicate matters without conducting in person court in your municipal facility. Consistent with the direction of the New Jersey Supreme Court and the Rules of Court, your Judge and Municipal Court staff have trained and worked together to establish new procedures and methods for serving your community’s needs. These expanded and new ways of conducting municipal court operations take advantage of the ability to adjudicate matters through the expanded use of plea affidavits and virtual court technologies available in your municipality.

In fact, your court is now operational and taking advantage of plea by mail procedures and virtual solutions for adjudicating matters. Those efforts are ramping up as we recognize that this way of operation is likely here to stay for at least the short-term future if not longer. Be assured that these procedures and virtual solutions will allow your judge and staff to conduct court operations during the emergency and into the future.

While this is a challenging time, the courts must adjust while preserving the rights of individuals. There may be beneficial consequences. Continuing to operate in alternative ways may have benefits including reducing the costs associated with courtroom use and the need for courtroom security, parking, cleaning and other resources.

On behalf of the judiciary, I would like to thank the Mayor and Governing Body for your support and allowing us access to the court offices so that the court staff could maintain operations and serve the public interest.

Regards,

*/s/ Peter C. Lange*

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