

The Virgin Islands Consortium

District Court Sets Protocols in Response to Coronavirus Pandemic

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Staff Consortium **March 19, 2020**



Aerial shot of the St. Croix District Court . By. ERNICE GILBERT/ VI CONSORTIUM

The District Court of the Virgin Islands said late Wednesday that it is monitoring the outbreak of the Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) and has taken steps to protect its employees and the community.

The court said it will remain open and therefore personnel have been asked to practice good cold and flu season hygiene, and disinfectant products have been obtained and distributed. Court personnel have also been strongly urged to stay at home if they are suffering from any cold or flu- like symptoms, the court said.

The District Court also urged legal practitioners to adopt similar practices and to inform the court promptly if a practitioner who has appeared in court develops symptoms or tests positive for COVID-19, or if they believe that a scheduled in-person hearing requires the presence of a person who has tested positive for COVID-19 or has been in contact with an individual who has tested positive for COVID-19.

Further, the District Court has issued two general orders that inform of building access and court operations in response to COVID-19. The first order precludes access to the Almeric L. Christian Federal Building and Courthouse on St. Croix and the Ron de Lugo Federal Building and Courthouse on St. Thomas to: individuals who have been asked to self-quarantine because of exposure to COVID-19 or travel to a country or region with the outbreak; persons who reside with or have had close contact with someone who has been advised to self-quarantine by any doctor, hospital, or health agency; persons who have been diagnosed with, or have had known contact with anyone who has been diagnosed with COVID-19; and persons experiencing symptoms of respiratory illness such as fever, severe cough, or shortness of breath.

The second order continues all civil and criminal jury and bench trials in both Divisions of the Court from March 18, 2020 through April 16, 2020, pending further Order of the Court; provides that the time period of March 18, 2020 through April 16, 2020 will be “excluded time” in criminal matters for Speedy Trial Act purposes; suspends the convening of the grand juries and precludes the empanelment of new grand juries in both Divisions of the Court from March 18, 2020 through April 16, 2020; maintains all deadlines set by Federal or Local Rules or Court Orders, including, but not limited to scheduling orders in all civil and criminal cases; and encourages the parties to utilize teleconference, videoconference, and other similar means that facilitate the effective accomplishment of assigned tasks without compromising the health and safety of those involved. Similarly, the Court will conduct conferences and hearings telephonically when it is practicable and efficient to do so.

The District Court hopes that these procedures will allow the Court to protect the health and safety of its employees and the public while allowing it to continue to accomplish its mission to fairly administer justice. Additionally, the Court will consider implementing additional measures as circumstances warrant. The District Court will update the public as events develop and will give as much notice as possible if an escalation of its response becomes necessary. Please check the District Court website regularly for any updates.