

## ESSEX COUNTY PROBATE & FAMILY COURT

**Disclaimer:** The following is offered of an informational summary of court operations based on our interpretation of data provided by the Court and other sources. This summary should not be relied upon as it provides general information and may not include the most accurate or up to date procedures at this time.

**IMPORTANT NOTE:** All courts, including Essex PFC, are constantly adjusting their procedures during the coronavirus crisis. Please contact the Court for up to date information.

For specific questions about Essex PFC operations, please contact the Court by email at [correspondences@jud.state.ma.us](mailto:correspondences@jud.state.ma.us) or by phone SALEM: (978) 740-4143, LAWRENCE: (978) 686-9692.

- i. On March 23, 2020, the Essex Court issued a letter to the Members of the Bar.
- ii. Locations
  - Lawrence – closed (but check for updates)
  - Salem – all permissible court business shall be directed to the Salem courthouse.
- iii. Emergencies / Abuse Prevention Orders / telephonic hearings
  - A specific process for screening emergencies is not delineated in the procedure letter. *Suggestion:* contact the clerk for the judge in the first instance.
  - All pleadings are being filed, scanned, and docketed before litigants and counsel enter the courtroom. No physical files are being brought into the courtroom.
  - Limited telephonic hearings on emergencies are being conducted. Currently, the Registry is obtaining the telephone number of the moving party and the courtroom calls that number when the matter is ready to be heard.
  - Abuse Prevention Orders/209A:
    - a. ***Initial Return Date Hearing:*** Court is attempting to contact both parties in order to conduct a telephonic hearing. If we are unable to reach the parties or if service has not been made, the case is being continued for another 10 days.
    - b. ***One Year Review:*** will be scheduled for a day after May 1<sup>st</sup>.

iv. New Non-Emergency Filings/ E-filing

- Will not receive a hearing date now. They will be scheduled once the Court resumes normal operations.
- To the extent possible pleadings should be filed by e-filing or by emailing them to [correspondences@jud.state.ma.us](mailto:correspondences@jud.state.ma.us).

v. Specific Events/Misc.

- Contempts – continued generally from March 16<sup>th</sup> until further notice.  
\*\**note*: filing a motion for the emergency enforcement of an outstanding order, while titled a Motion, is still a contempt and will be treated as such.
- All matters (from March 16<sup>th</sup> until further notice) are continued other than those set forth in the exceptions of Standing Order 2-20.
- Drug Screenings – suspended.
- Service of Process:
  - a. If you are concerned you will be unable in the current circumstances to effectuate service in the traditional manner, you must file a Motion for Alternate Service that provides for and requests a specific alternate method of service which is reasonably calculated to notify the other parties (text, email, social media, overnight mail or other) and which meets due process requirement in our current circumstances.
  - b. If you meet the standard for allowing alternate service, specifically detail the alternate service you request directly in the email so that we may simply allow your motion if the requested service meets the standard