

*For Immediate Release*

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## **Supreme Court amends court operations statewide to address escalating COVID cases**

FRANKFORT, Ky., Nov. 20, 2020 – The Supreme Court has issued new mandates to govern court operations as nearly all 120 Kentucky counties are now in the COVID-19 red zone.

Citing the news that 250,000 Americans have died from COVID-19 and health-care resources are becoming overwhelmed, Chief Justice of Kentucky John D. Minton Jr. said in an email to court personnel today that it is imperative to restrict court activities now to protect the public and court staff from exposure.

“As I’ve said many times over the last few months, one of our guiding truths has been the involuntary nature of most court proceedings,” he said. “People can choose whether to eat at a restaurant or go shopping, but in most instances they don’t get to choose whether they go to court. We have a responsibility to do all we can to keep people from being exposed to a potentially fatal virus.”

To address the surging cases, the Supreme Court has amended two orders to limit in-person proceedings and restrict access to judicial facilities. The first, Administrative Order 2020-71, replaces Administrative Order 2020-63 in its entirety. The second, Administrative Order 2020-72, replaces Administrative Order 2020-64 in its entirety. Both orders will become effective Monday, Nov. 30, 2020, and pertain to all 120 counties.

The new orders adopt as mandates many of the recommendations announced on Oct. 29, 2020, as counties began moving into the red zone. These including the following:

- Limiting entrance to judicial facilities.
- Requiring remote hearings in all proceedings, except as specified in Administrative Order 2020-71.
- Postponing all jury trials until Feb. 1, 2021.

- Requiring grand juries to either be conducted remotely or suspended.
- Postponing all show cause dockets until Feb. 1, 2021.
- Requiring judicial sales to be conducted either remotely or outside and in accordance with CDC guidelines.

Chief Justice Minton thanked court personnel for their continued patience and steady leadership as the court system makes its way through what will be a difficult winter. “The good news is that a vaccine is on the horizon and we’re starting to see a path out of this deep crisis,” he said. “In the meantime, we must continue to ensure justice for the commonwealth while protecting the health of our employees and the public.”

### **Supreme Court of Kentucky**

The Supreme Court is the state court of last resort and the final interpreter of Kentucky law. Seven justices sit on the Supreme Court and all seven rule on appeals that come before the court. The justices are elected from seven appellate districts and serve eight-year terms. A chief justice, chosen for a four-year term by fellow justices, is the administrative head of the state’s court system and is responsible for its operation. The Supreme Court may order a ruling or opinion to be published, which means that the ruling becomes the case law governing all similar cases in the future in Kentucky.

### **Administrative Office of the Courts**

The Administrative Office of the Courts in Frankfort is the operations arm of the state court system. The AOC supports the activities of nearly 3,400 court system employees and 406 elected justices, judges and circuit court clerks. As the fiscal agent for the state court system, the AOC executes the Judicial Branch budget.

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