

Chief justice tweaks executive order about Minnesota's courts

Thursday, March 26: In response to the governor's Executive Order, 20-20, which directs all Minnesotans to stay-at-home, Minnesota Chief Justice Lorie S. Gildea has issued an order making minor amendments to the order and establishes the following:

- Attorneys and those who support hearings permitted under the order are exempt from the stay-at-home emergency;
- Judges and staff required to be present for the operation of in-court hearings are exempt from the stay-at-home order;
- The state court administrator is directed to review the policy regarding audio records and is authorized to make temporary modifications to the required audio recording system and authorized operators. The order directs that any temporary measures must still ensure an audio back-up recording system necessary for any transcript production.
- The order is amended to provide that parties and attorneys may appear remotely for hearings.

All other provisions of the order are still in effect.

With courts closed, digital tools are available for some services

Thursday, March 26: While access to Minnesota court-houses will be limited until at least Wednesday, April 22, many services and online tools are available for the public to get their questions answered and complete documents for their cases. The statewide self-help center accepts calls at 651-435-6535, Mondays through Fridays, from 8:30 a.m. to 4 p.m., and also responds to email questions sent through its contact form. Find basic information about more than 40 common legal topics, court forms, videos and tutorials, and more.

Guide & File – An online interview tool for certain case types, Guide & File is a free, online, mobile friendly interview tool that asks simple questions and uses the answers to complete the appropriate court forms. It also gives helpful information throughout the interview to explain legal terms and concepts. The resulting forms can be printed or may be electronically-filed with the court.

Litigants who plan to file by paper are asked to contact the court for the current process for filing paper copies. Guide & File is available for the following case types: conciliation court; eviction; affidavit of service (for conciliation court and evi; restraining orders (orders for protection and harassment restraining orders); and starting a divorce with children.

Additional information, including frequently asked questions (FAQs), tools and resources, and a list of all the interviews, are available through the Guide & File Help Topic.

Fillable Smart Forms – Fillable Smart Forms can be used to make it easier to complete forms and electronically file. Responses in Fillable Smart Forms can auto-populate to fields that ask for the same information, “hide” questions that do not apply, and allows for longer answers in some answer fields. Fillable Smart Forms reduce extra and unnecessary pages, and can easily be saved and prepared for eFiling. The forms can also be printed and completed on paper.

eFile – Documents may be submitted to the court electronically using the eFile and eServe system. More information about eFiling is available at www.mncourts.gov/efile, with helpful training materials on the eFile and eServe training tab.

Contact the eFile Support Center with questions or for support at 612-902-9585, or 1-844-918-1724 for those calling long distance from a land line phone. Support is available Mondays through Fridays from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Contacting the Court – In order to make it easy for the public to find their county-specific district court information, an easy-to-find drop-down menu has been added to the Minnesota Judicial Branch COVID-19 webpage. Each court's phone number and email contact form, along with any court-house-specific information, will show up based on the county.

Diocese of New Ulm extends mass suspension to April 13

Wednesday, March 25: Bishop John LeVoir announced on Wednesday, March 25, that “based on the most recent information received by local, state, and federal health authorities for slowing the rapid spread of the coronavirus (COVID-19), I have made the difficult decision to extend the suspension of all public masses in the Diocese of New Ulm through April 13, 2020.”

Easter this year is Sunday, April 12, meaning this suspension until Monday, April 13, will cover Holy Week. “All Catholics in the diocese remain dispensed from the obligation to attend Sunday Mass during this time,” added LeVoir.

DPS-DVS offices closing; driver's licenses to be extended

Friday, March 27: B The Minnesota Department of Public Safety Driver and Vehicle Services division is closing all exam stations statewide beginning Friday, March 27, at the close of business to follow Gov. Tim Walz's executive order for Minnesotans to stay home and slow the spread of COVID-19. Offices will stay closed through Friday, April 10.

Independently owned and operated deputy registrar and driver's license agent offices that provide driver and vehicle services will also be closed during this time. Many offices have already closed due to COVID-19 concerns. Minnesotans will not have access to a number of services, including renewing their driver's licenses or ID cards, during this time.

Driver's Licenses and ID Cards – Once it reaches his desk, Gov. Walz is expected to sign a bill passed by the Minnesota Legislature that includes an extension for Minnesotans whose driver's licenses or ID cards expire during this time. The bill extends the expiration date for any valid driver's license, instruction permit, provisional license, operator's permit, limited license, and farm work license that would expire during the peacetime emergency.

The expiration dates for these licenses will be extended for two months after the month the peacetime emergency ends.

REAL ID – The U.S. Department of Homeland Security is extending the REAL ID full enforcement deadline to Oct. 1, 2021. The deadline was originally set for Oct. 1, 2020, but is being delayed by one year due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This gives Minnesotans more time to apply for a REAL ID or enhanced driver's license or ID card.

Vehicle Registration – Minnesotans will still be able to renew vehicle registrations online and by mail during the peacetime emergency. As such, there are no extensions for expired or expiring vehicle registrations. Renew vehicle registration for a car, pickup under one ton, or SUV online at drive.mn.gov. U.S. Bank charges a separate service fee of 2.49 percent for all credit card transactions. ACH (electronic check) payments have a separate service fee of \$1.50.

Mail your vehicle registration by sending the bottom half of your renewal notice with your check or money order made payable to DVS Renewal to: DVS Renewal; P.O. Box 64587; St. Paul, MN 55164-0587.

Minnesotans have until the last day of the expiration month to renew their vehicle registration. They must display their registration stickers by the 10th of the following month. For example, Minnesotans whose vehicle registration expires in April have until April 30 to renew their registration and until May 10 to display the new stickers on their license plates.

Road Tests – Anyone who has a Class D, commercial driver's license (CDL), or motorcycle road test appointment scheduled during this time will receive a cancellation notice by email or text message. DPS-DVS is committed to making sure anyone affected by these road test cancellations is able to obtain a new appointment as soon as possible. Once normal operations resume, DPS-DVS will call, email, or text those affected to offer the first available day and time for their road test.

DVS Public Information Center – DPS-DVS staff will continue to be available to answer questions submitted to DVS using the driver and vehicle services contact forms. The DPS-DVS Public Information Center staff will also be answering phone calls during its normal Monday-Friday business hours, but staff will be very limited from Monday, March 30 through Friday, April 10, so it may be difficult to get through.

Other Services – The Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development will continue to process and print refund checks during this time. DPS-DVS will continue to mail monthly registration renewal notices to Minnesotans.

Governor issues four orders, allows greater weights for trucks

Friday, March 27: Gov. Tim Walz signed Executive Orders 20-21, 20-22, 20-23, and 20-24 providing support and greater flexibility for health care providers, commercial drivers, local governments, and constitutional officers in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic. Executive Order 20-23 will keep health care workers in the workforce by giving health-related licensing boards flexibility in licensing requirements, so COVID-19 related lapses in continuing education requirements don't impact health care professionals' ability to provide licensed care. It allows health care professionals to temporarily defer continuing education requirements, allows emergency medical service providers to complete continuing education through distance learning, and extends temporary permits for nurses.

Executive Order 20-22 allows the state auditor to work with local governments to adjust reporting deadlines for various financial reports, to prevent municipalities from having to divert resources that should be used to respond to communities' critical needs during the COVID-19 peacetime emergency.

Executive Order 20-21 amends Executive Order 20-07 to allow constitutional officers to implement leave for both classified and unclassified employees and to reassign and redeploy staff as needed.

Executive Order 20-24 provides hours of service and weight restriction relief for commercial vehicle drivers hauling livestock. It will help ensure producers and retailers maintain supply of essential products.