

March 24, 2020

Dear Oregon lawyers:

Thank you for your patience and support while our courts work to implement Chief Justice Order 20-006 and consider your suggestions for changes to that order. I fully recognize the need for access to justice - especially in times of turmoil and emergency, and vital role that lawyers and courts play in providing that access. We have received and are in the process of reviewing your many suggestions, and I expect to issue a new CJO on Friday, March 27.

I want to let you know what you can anticipate in that updated CJO. First, the new CJO will extend until further order of the Chief Justice. At this time, I expect that it would remain in effect at least through the end of April. This will provide some longer-term certainty in how courts will be operating. Second, the new CJO will continue postponing most trials and in-person hearings, with a few adjustments in response to comments from the bar and the courts. The new CJO will, consistent with the Governor's "Stay Home, Save Lives" Executive Order 20-12, define social distancing to be six feet rather than the current three feet between participants. Our courts are now in the process of extending that protection.

The Oregon Judicial Department (OJD) also is asking that the legislature grant the Chief Justice the authority needed to postpone additional trials and hearings, to suspend time requirements in both criminal and civil cases, and to provide for more telephonic or remote hearings. The legislature understands the need, and the Bar has been tremendously helpful. I will inform you about the enactment of that legislation and my exercise of that authority as soon as possible.

As you wait for the new CJO, I want you to know that our courts are working nonstop to do everything they can to protect both the rights and the health of those who use our courts. Although paragraphs 12 and 13 of the Governor's Executive Order requiring closure of state buildings to the public does not apply to the courts, we intend to act in accordance with her "strong encouragement" to adhere to the policies underlying her directives. Thank you for your advice about how best to do that, and for the critical role that you play in providing. We need your advice, and we also need your encouragement and support. These are tough times. Please continue to extend your thanks to all who toil with you in the fields of justice and hold us in your hearts as we hold you.

With appreciation,

Martha Walters
Chief Justice