

OFFICE OF THE DEPUTY GOVERNOR CIRCULAR NO. 4 of 2020

FROM: Deputy Governor

TO: Attorney General
Financial Secretary
Cabinet Secretary
Permanent Secretaries
Heads of Department
All Public Officers

DATE: 19th March, 2020

**SUBJECT: CONTINUITY OF OPERATIONS ARRANGEMENT FOR SUPREME COURT, MAGISTRACY AND THE ROYAL VI POLICE FORCE
(In light of the Coronavirus Pandemic)**

Good day public officers,

The Judicial Branch of Government remains a vital component of the administration of justice in the Territory. Given the significant role that legal practitioners and law enforcement play in this regard, their health and safety and that of those they serve during this time must remain a priority. As Deputy Governor, I am cognisant that the administration of justice is of utmost importance in any society, but I take interest in the well-being of the men and women who work diligently and serve on the frontline to ensure law and order in the Virgin Islands. Equally, I am mindful of the persons who make contact with our judicial entities every day; they too must be protected.

As there continues to be concerns associated with the global spread of the 2019 Novel Coronavirus, and to ensure the well-being of our Judiciary, its clients and law enforcement officers, the Cabinet of the Virgin Islands on 19th March, 2020 has decided on the following **Continuity of Operations Arrangement For Supreme Court, Magistracy and the Royal VI Police Force.**

Please note the steps being taken by the Courts in preparation for the Coronavirus and its possible impacts:

1. All civil cases will be rescheduled on a staggered basis beginning 17th March, 2020 to minimize large crowds; and persons will be admitted to the premises only when their matter is called;
2. The array of jurors will not likely be recalled for the remainder of this session because of proximity issues.
3. The criminal judge will continue to facilitate the scheduling of matters administratively on paper;
4. As far as it is practicable, cases will continue in the Civil and Commercial Courts applying staggered listings and controlled numbers;
5. Urgent matters will always be heard by video link, if not in person, across all divisions of the Court;

6. Should the need to increase the level of mitigation arise, cases will be heard by video link (as is being done today and tomorrow in the Commercial division to accommodate counsel from the UK who could not attend due to the quarantine measures);
7. The court office will remain open to the public unless otherwise instructed using similar controls. Extra measures are being put in place to continue critical searches, filing of certain matters and scheduling of cases and case management by electronic means with the assistance of Headquarters and Department of Information Technology;
8. There will be very few hearings and court sessions are likely to be restricted to administrative matters only;
9. For the Civil Court, the intention is to have staggered hearings to avoid unnecessary contact; and
10. Arrangements are also being made for calls to the Bar, where a number of family members would normally be invited to attend. No more than three immediate family members would be allowed to attend in person, but arrangements will be made for other family members to follow by video link.

The public is asked to note that the actions that are relevant to the Supreme Court are also relevant to the Magistracy. Details for legal practitioners are attached to support this Circular.

I realise that the following Policy will come with expected questions, you are therefore invited to contact the Registrar General, Mrs. Erica Smith-Penn at ErSmith-Penn@gov.vg. Your full cooperation is expected as we continue to inform, guide and protect public officers and the Territory at large.



David D. Archer, Jr.
Deputy Governor

Attachment: Supreme Court Notice 6 of 2020