



NEW JERSEY STATE BAR ASSOCIATION

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April 14, 2020

VIA EMAIL

Honorable Glenn A. Grant, J.A.D.
Acting Administrative Director of the Courts
R.J. Hughes Justice Complex
25 W. Market Street
Trenton, New Jersey 08625

Re: Early Settlement Panels

Dear Judge Grant:

I am following up on Carolann Aschoff's April 1st letter requesting the suspension of all early settlement panels until they can be conducted in-person at the courthouses once again. The New Jersey State Bar Association joins in that request.

The Court is to be commended for the extraordinary efforts it has undertaken to keep New Jersey's courthouses open and the system of justice operational. Early settlement panels, however, hold a unique position within that system. They are conducted by volunteer attorneys as a means to facilitate the settlement of divorce proceedings. The NJSBA is proud of the work the panelists perform on a pro bono basis, and are confident the panelists are willing to try to assist the Court in whatever way they can. For all of the reasons noted in Ms. Aschoff's letter, however, the NJSBA agrees that it would be unfair to ask those panelists to coordinate and manage virtual settlement panels when they are trying to coordinate and manage their own practices, clients and personal concerns in these trying times.

The NJSBA believes the litigant concerns raised by Ms. Aschoff are valid, as well. Many litigants are already dealing with stressful situations and will likely not be in a position to readily agree to any settlement terms. Moreover, they may not even have the technological means to participate in a panel proceeding, which will lessen the value of the proceeding and add more stress to the litigants.

There is nothing, of course, preventing parties who are willing and able to come to an agreement from settling their differences outside of the early settlement program. Attorneys can facilitate that process on their own through whatever means are appropriate in a given case.

Accordingly, again, the NJSBA urges the Court to consider the views of the early settlement program volunteers as expressed in Ms. Aschoff's letter and suspend all early settlement panels until they can be conducted in-person at the courthouses once again.

Thank you again for your consideration of this request.

Respectfully Submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Evelyn Padin". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Evelyn Padin, Esq.
President

cc: Kimberly A. Yonta, Esq., NJSBA President-Elect
Angela C. Scheck, NJSBA Executive Director