

Message from the Director of the Division of Workers' Compensation to NJSBA Workers' Compensation Section

As per my Notice to the Bar of March 16, 2020, all workers' compensation court calendars are suspended until April 6, 2020, and the N.J. workers' compensation courts are closed to the public and non-essential court personal.

Litigants, attorneys, and witnesses who are scheduled to appear for a workers' compensation matter from March 17, 2020 through April 3, 2020 should not appear in workers' compensation court and should await notice of a rescheduled court date.

Only emergent motions for Medical and Temporary Benefits filed electronically will be heard by the Chief Judge, telephonically.

Court filings continue to be accepted electronically through COURTS On-line.

Please note that the Division of Workers' Compensation is currently operating with a skeleton crew of six essential people (the Chief Judge and five staffers, who are all telecommuting from their homes).

At this time, all Division of Workers' Compensation phones are offline. Emergent court related questions may be email to the Chief Judge. All COURTS Online technical questions should be sent to courts@dol.nj.gov. All special compensation questions should be sent to Melpomene Kotsines, Administrator, Office of Special Compensation Funds at melpomene.kotsines@dol.nj.gov

The decision to close the NJ workers' compensation courts to the public was not a decision that was taken lightly. It was only done after consulting with the Governor's office, the NJ Commissioner of Labor, the NJ Department of Health, and in accordance with the recommendations of President Trump and the CDC. The action taken by the Division of Workers' Compensation is consistent with those taken by Chief Justice Rabner in Superior Court and Municipal Court.

The Division's number one goal is to limit the exposure and spread of the deadly SARS-CoV-2 virus (which leads to COVID-19) to judges, court staff, attorneys and their staff, litigants, witnesses, court reporters, security officers, and all other members of the public.

Many members of the Bar have asked about holding non-emergent matters electronically or by teleconference. However, during the acute phase of this health crisis, we fear that even holding non-emergent matters in such a manner may have the unattended consequence of exposing attorneys and their staff, as well as judges, court staff, and court reporters to the virus which may lead to serious illness or even death.

Please note the Division will reevaluate such electronic and telephonic solutions if this health crisis extends past April 6, 2020.

The Division apologizes for the inconvenience you and your clients experience as a result the State of New Jersey's efforts to protect the public from the spread of the SARS-CoV-2 virus, and we thank you for your understanding and cooperation.

Please share this with the members of the Executive Committee of the Workers' Compensation Section of the NJ State Bar Association.

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