



# NEWS RELEASE

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## RIVERSIDE SUPERIOR COURT HITS BENCHMARK IN CRIMINAL JURY TRIALS SINCE COVID-19 RELATED CLOSURES

SUPERIOR COURT OF  
CALIFORNIA  
COUNTY OF RIVERSIDE  
4050 Main Street  
Riverside, CA 92501

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The Riverside Superior Court reached a benchmark last week, with 50 criminal jury trials being completed and/or in progress after having been essentially shut down since the COVID-19 pandemic forced court closures in March of 2020. After the initial closures, the court immediately began developing a plan to restart criminal jury trials that would balance the constitutional rights of parties to criminal proceedings, while at the same time maintaining strict safety precautions needed in order to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 virus.

Prior to resuming the first two criminal jury trials on June 18, 2020 in Riverside and Indio respectively, the court implemented numerous safety measures after several consultations and courthouse walk-throughs with Dr. Cameron Kaiser, the Riverside County Public Health Officer. Safety measures include limited entry into open courthouse for litigants, counsel, judges and court staff, jurors, witnesses and anyone else integral to the proceeding. The court also implemented audio livestream so that hearings would be broadcast, keeping court proceedings open to the public. Social distancing is enforced in every area of the courthouse, including entry areas, clerk's offices, lobbies, elevators, hallways and courtrooms. Masks are mandatory. Plexiglas is installed in various areas of the courtrooms and clerk's offices for additional safety.

The process for summoning jurors has been modified to allow for an online qualification survey, staggered call-in times, social distancing in the jury rooms for the voir dire process, as well as social distancing measures in the courtrooms during the actual trial. Judges use their discretion to excuse jurors based on COVID-19 related health and childcare hardships, extend break times since entry and exit from court facilities often takes additional time, and requesting smaller panels and staggered times to reduce contact between jurors and courtroom staff.

*"The Court began this entire process keeping a lasered focus on the balance that must be achieved between maintaining a defendant's constitutional rights and ensuring that appropriate safety measures are in place to prevent the spread of this deadly disease. While the balance does create some obstacles, the court saw these more as opportunities to become more efficient through technology, streamlined procedures, and effective communication with justice partners." said Supervising Criminal Department Judge John D. Molloy.*

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