

*Statement***Ontario Protecting Critical Front-Line Justice Services in Response to COVID-19**

March 19, 2020

TORONTO — Today, Christine Elliott, Deputy Premier and Minister of Health, and Doug Downey, Attorney General, issued the following statement in response to COVID-19 and the government's commitment to keep communities safe while continuing to hold offenders accountable:

"The health and well-being of Ontarians is our government's number one priority. This commitment extends across the vast network of justice partners and individuals who interact with the justice system on a daily basis.

We are working around the clock with our partners to respond to this constantly evolving public health issue. Adjustments are being made throughout the justice system to minimize disruption and continue to provide seamless, responsive justice services to all Ontarians, particularly the most vulnerable members of our communities.

Technology Solutions and Prioritizing Urgent Matters

To sustain these efforts and to address health and safety concerns raised by legal service professionals, Ontario courts and tribunals are limiting in-person proceedings and making use of audio and video conferencing to hear priority matters remotely, where possible. Justice partners are working collaboratively to develop and deploy technology solutions and other innovative tools across the province to ensure urgent matters can be heard without needing to appear in person. This approach will also help to mitigate the potential impacts of possible service disruptions. Courts and tribunals are also deferring non-urgent matters until they can be managed safely and securely.

Ontario's judges and justices of the peace continue to prioritize critical matters such as criminal and child protection proceedings. There is strong collaboration across the system to ensure that urgent and priority legal matters continue to be heard before our courts and tribunals.

All Tribunals Ontario in-person proceedings, including at the Local Planning Appeal Tribunal, Landlord and Tenant Board and Human Rights Tribunal of Ontario, are postponed and will be rescheduled at a later date. Where feasible, alternative hearing options such as written and telephone hearings will be considered. Front-line counter services will be closed until further notice.

We are also working very closely with our partners and colleagues in Ontario's court systems to ensure Ontarians can see justice done while also prioritizing the protection of public health in the province. The following actions have been taken across the justice system:

- The Superior Court of Justice has suspended all regular court operations until further notice, while continuing to hear urgent matters during this emergency period.
- All sittings of the Small Claims Court in Ontario are suspended until further notice.
- The Ontario Court of Justice has established procedures to reduce the number of people who attend court in-person for criminal and family matters. All non-urgent matters have been adjourned.
- All *Provincial Offences Act* matters scheduled up to and including April 3, 2020 will be adjourned and rescheduled to a later date. Tickets, fines or other court business may be handled online.
- The Court of Appeal has suspended all scheduled appeals until April 3, 2020. During this period, urgent appeals will be heard based on either the written materials or remotely.

Keeping People Safe

We are committed to ensuring Ontarians remain safe and secure during this challenging time and are looking at all tools to help individuals and families stay in their homes. As part of this approach, the Ministry of the Attorney General has applied for a court order to suspend the enforcement of eviction orders. Tribunals Ontario will not issue any new eviction orders until further notice. Sheriff's offices have been asked to postpone any scheduled enforcement of eviction orders currently set for this week.

We want to thank our partners at the Superior and Ontario Courts of Justice, Tribunals Ontario, and the front-line workers across our justice system who are working hard to keep everyone safe and healthy while maintaining the administration of justice in our province.

Ontario takes the health and safety of court users, staff and the judiciary very seriously. As this public health situation evolves, the government is committed to providing Ontarians with safe and reliable access to critical front-line services, including supporting the delivery of justice at its courthouses and tribunals. We are closely monitoring developments and will continue to provide updates as the situation evolves."

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- Visit Ontario's [website](#) to learn more about how the province continues to protect Ontarians from COVID-19.
- Ontarians can file [family](#), [civil](#) or [small claims](#) online
- [Superior Court of Justice](#)
- [Ontario Court of Justice](#)
- [Tribunals Ontario's new policy for hearings](#)
- [Legal Aid Ontario for information updates](#)
- For more information about online tools and services for legal professionals, visit the [Law Society of Ontario](#) and [LAWPRO](#).

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