

Superior Court of the State of Washington for Snohomish County

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Snohomish County Superior Court Suspends Jury Trials

Due to COVID-19, Judges want to ensure safety of public and staff

EVERETT, Snohomish County, November 18, 2020—Today, the Snohomish County Superior Court announced the suspension of jury trials until at least January 8, 2021.

The following statement was released by The Honorable Bruce I. Weiss, Presiding Judge, Snohomish County Superior Court:

The rising number of COVID-19 cases in our state and local community causes great concern to our court. Effective immediately, Snohomish County Superior Court will suspend jury trial activities through January 8, 2021. This has been a very difficult decision to make, but it is the right decision based on the extraordinary circumstances that we currently face.

On November 15, 2020 Governor Inslee announced a new set of restrictions for the State of Washington based on the rising number of COVID-19 cases. Over 2,000 new cases per day were recorded over the weekend of November 14th and November 15th. The current trend and number of cases ‘...puts us in a more dangerous position as we were in March,’ Inslee reported. Inslee established new restrictions for indoor social gatherings, decreased capacity in restaurants and retailers, and other crowd-limiting measures.

On November 17, 2020 a media briefing was convened by the Snohomish County Health District in relation to the rising COVID-19 numbers. Dr. Chris Spitters of the Snohomish County Health District described the rise as ‘explosive,’ expressing fear over the rising utilization of hospital capacity as well as the steady increase of COVID-19 related deaths. The media briefing went on to say that our health care system is at serious risk of being overwhelmed by COVID-19 cases, causing other hospital services to be deprioritized, thus resulting in more deaths.

Changes in behavior are needed to combat the current spike in COVID-19 cases. The Superior Court is not exempt from the need to take steps to push the curve down and keep people safe. Temporarily suspending jury trials is the most responsible course of action for our court to take at this moment. The

safety and well-being of our community demands it. While the court has made significant modifications to jury trial operations in order to keep jurors safe, holding these trials still requires the court to gather large groups of Snohomish County citizens together indoors. The current rate of COVID-19 cases in our community would push our safety measures to their breaking point. It is simply not worth the risk at this time.

The court would like to recognize and thank everyone who has participated in jury duty since July 2020 when our court resumed jury trial operations during the COVID-19 pandemic. We will be carefully monitoring COVID-19 cases this winter and will continue to keep the community informed of any other modifications that are necessary to keep our residents safe, while also providing access to justice.

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