



# Press Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
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## **Washington County courts open, in-person appearances suspended through March 31**

JONESBOROUGH — The Tennessee Supreme Court issued an order Friday, stating that all Tennessee courts will remain open amid COVID-19 concerns, but all in-person judicial proceedings will be suspended until March 31.

Exceptions to the suspension of in-person court proceedings will be handled by the local trial judges to protect constitutional rights of criminal defendants and to conduct emergency hearings to relieve abuse and emergency child custody hearings.

Chief Justice Jeff Bivins declared a state of emergency for the judicial branch on Friday. This applies to state and local Tennessee courts, including appellate, trial, general sessions, juvenile and municipal courts. The judges, county mayors, sheriffs and court personnel of the First Judicial District held an emergency meeting on Saturday to implement the Supreme Court's order in Carter, Johnson, Unicoi and Washington Counties. The implementation in the four counties went smoothly Monday.

You may view the Supreme Court order, as well as a similar order from Chancellor John C. Rambo, online at [www.washingtoncountyttn.gov](http://www.washingtoncountyttn.gov) under COVID-19 updates.

In Washington County, all in-person appearances are now suspended through the end of March. Judges and court clerks will continue to do their jobs with proceedings to continue via telephone, video, teleconferencing and email when possible.

To reduce social interactions, no spectators will be allowed in court during this time period. Currently, no jury trials are in process in the First Judicial District.

Cases will be continued and court calendars will be adjusted to accommodate. Each day, notices will be posted on the front doors of the George Jaynes Justice Center to indicate those updated court calendars. Persons with upcoming court hearings are encouraged to call the Circuit Court Clerk or Clerk and Master's offices to check on the status of their cases.

The Chief Justice's order includes several other provisions to help alleviate problems caused by suspending non-essential, in-person proceedings. For example, deadlines set forth in court rules, statutes, and administrative rules, including statutes of limitations, that are set to expire between March 13 and March 31 are extended through April 6 and orders of protection that would expire between March 13 and March 31 are extended until April 6.

This does not impact administrative courts within the executive branch nor does it impact federal courts.