



A LETTER FROM THE LOS ANGELES COUNTY PUBLIC DEFENDERS UNION AND THE LOS ANGELES COUNTY ASSOCIATION OF DEPUTY DISTRICT ATTORNEYS

March 21, 2020

Hon. Kevin C. Brazile, Presiding Judge
Hon. Sam Ohta, – Presiding Criminal Judge
Los Angeles Superior Court
210 W. Temple St.
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Your Honors:

This letter is being written on behalf of AFSCME Local 148, the Los Angeles County Public Defender Union (“Local 148”), and the Association of Deputy District Attorneys (“ADDA”). We are the exclusive bargaining representatives of the majority of criminal attorneys employed by the County of Los Angeles. As you are no doubt aware on March 19, 2020, Governor Newsom announced the implementation of a “stay at home” order due to health concerns created by the spread of the COVID-19. Governor Newsom stated that within 8 weeks it is estimated that 56% of all Californians will be infected with this contagious and potentially deadly disease. Furthermore, our unions along with the unions for Deputy Sheriffs, security personnel, court administration staff, child support attorneys, court reporters, and interpreters signed a letter calling for urgent action and implementation of additional health and safety measures and social distancing protocols. In our March 19, 2020 letter, we provided detailed proposals for critical areas of need. Nevertheless, the Los Angeles Superior Court (“LASC”) elected to resume operations on March 20, 2020.

Upon arrival in court on Friday March 20, 2020, hundreds of impacted employees encountered unsafe and unsanitary conditions. Despite the best efforts of LASC, social distancing protocols and health and safety measures fell short. Continued operation of LASC without time to implement health and safety measures and implement social distancing protocols put everyone at serious risk. Furthermore, we are learning of plans to close more courtrooms and consolidate existing matters into fewer courtrooms. This is contrary to the recommendation by public health authorities to increase social distancing and limit the number of individuals in public gatherings.

We call on LASC for a temporary shut-down of the courts, with limited exceptions for the most urgent public safety matters and to review cases for the safe release of qualifying vulnerable individuals from local/county jail custody. During this temporary shut-down, we request that LASC meet with public health authorities, relevant administrations, elected leaders, and impacted labor unions to discuss resolving potential issues before court operations resume. We call on LASC to resume operations only when health and safety measures and social distancing protocols can be implemented and enforced.

The members of ADAA and Local 148 recognize that we have a duty to our clients (both individual criminal defendants and the citizens of the State of California) and we will continue to appear in courtrooms to diligently represent our respective clients. Despite our members' commitment to public safety and to our ethical mandates, we want to go on record to advise that we view LASC's decision to keep these courtrooms open in their present conditions as irresponsible and dangerous.

The continued operation of LASC puts at risk the safety and lives of our members, our members' families, our clients, and the general public. It is particularly frustrating that these decisions are being made at the last minute and without any input from the attorneys who are being seriously impacted by these actions.

For the health and safety of all the citizens of the County, we request that you please close these courts now. We welcome the opportunity to discuss these urgent matters before court operations are scheduled to resume on Monday, March 23, 2020.

Respectfully,

Nikhil Ramnaney

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