

COVID-19: *The Family Law Courts One Year Later*

Our family law universe changed on March 16, 2020, when California Governor Gavin Newsom issued a directive to close nonessential businesses and for citizens to shelter in place in response to a growing threat now known as the COVID-19 virus.

The COVID-19 shock wave hit all businesses, activities and individuals, including our family law litigants' access to the courts. For a period of time, the courts were completely shuttered. The courts are now opening to the public in a limited and cautious fashion. Most courts, including Alameda and Contra Costa County, still use video platforms for court appearances. Mediation through Family Court Services continues to use the same social distancing video services.

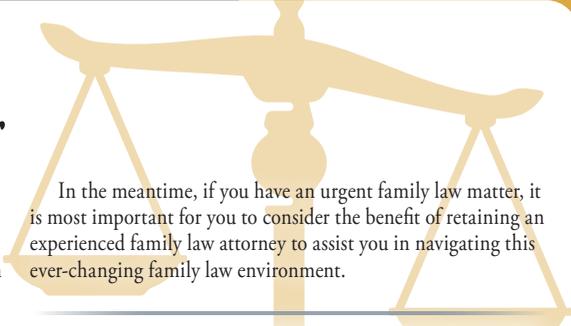
Some court buildings are open to the public on a limited basis for getting records and filing pleadings. It's best to check the county court website for developing details concerning access.

Pleading drop boxes placed outside the family law courthouses in both of these counties continue to operate for counsel as well as self-represented parties. A drop box will enable parties to submit pleadings to the court for the court's review and filing.

The court clerks and court personnel cannot practice law, and therefore, they cannot change, correct or modify any pleadings that are submitted to the court. If submitted pleadings lack information or are incorrectly filled out, those pleadings will be rejected and returned. The painful and frustrating result will lead to emergency pleadings being rejected, timetables being missed and other actions that could seriously damage a litigant's case and delay the protections that they seek.

The courts continue to suffer date backlogs because the number of court personnel serving departments and other court administrative duties remains curtailed. In Alameda County, a number of court personnel retired or took medical leave and the court is unable to replace them due to a hiring freeze. These administrative complications not only burden the court but also burden and delay litigants trying to move their case through the court process.

It is everyone's hope that by the time we reach the end of this year, with the increase of vaccines and immunization, our courts' functionality will return to a semblance of what it was like before this terrible virus hit our nation.



In the meantime, if you have an urgent family law matter, it is most important for you to consider the benefit of retaining an experienced family law attorney to assist you in navigating this ever-changing family law environment.

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