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For immediate release

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State's Public Defenders asking NM Supreme Court to postpone all trials, allow telephonic hearings

Confined populations, their attorneys need extra precautions

SANTA FE, NM — The New Mexico Law Offices of the Public Defender on Sunday asked the state's Supreme Court to immediately postpone all trials across the state and allow all but the most essential hearings to be held telephonically in an effort to limit the spread of the coronavirus.

“This is a very difficult decision because all public defenders care deeply about safeguarding our clients’ rights to speedy determination of their cases, but in a health emergency like this one, the safety of our clients and our court community is of the highest concern,” Chief Public Defender Bennett Baur said. “If this virus gets into one of our jails, the conditions are such that it could spread rapidly in close quarters, and many people in jail are already in poor health.”

Baur on Sunday also asked for discussions on release of some inmates and other steps to limit spread of the virus.

LOPD’s requests join dozens of other public defense offices around the country seeking immediate and urgent change in procedures to protect vulnerable inmates and public defender employees who are bound by the constitution to represent indigent people facing criminal charges.

For more information, contact Chief Public Defender Bennett Baur at (505) 629-3011 or LOPD media contact Maggie Shepard (505) 690-4529.