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NEWS

CORONAVIRUS: What to do about court matters during pandemic



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CENTRAL Queenslanders with matters before the courts need to be aware of changes to how courts will operate during the Coronavirus pandemic.

As of Monday, March 23, the Magistrates courts in Rockhampton, Yeppoon, Bowen, Proserpine, Emerald, Blackwater, Woorabinda, Clermont, Moranbah, Gladstone, Bundaberg, Childers, Mackay, Sarina and Biloela will be operating differently.

Defendants, or their legal practitioners, can appear via telephone, email, letter or electronic adjournment request in any matters.

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Legal Aid is offering free advice and assistance over the phone during this period. Phone the Legal Aid hotline on 1300 651188 or visit - www.legalaid.qld.gov.au/Home.

New guidelines will be issued in such an event.

Magistrate Cameron Press, who created the guidelines, said they were designed to ensure magistrates courts continued to provide courtroom services as far as possible while facilitating social distancing by significantly limiting the number of persons in court.

Defendants or their lawyers wanting to appear by telephone must email a request to do so and the request:

1. Must be received prior to 8.30am on the day the matter is listed; and
2. Include a telephone number by which the person can be contacted. The court will contact that number on the day between 9am and 4pm.

See factbox at bottom for contact details of each courthouse.

Pleas of guilty and sentences

Depending on the type of charge when matters are mentioned, the presiding magistrate may accept pleas of guilty if requested to do so and impose a penalty/sentence upon conviction.

Hearings

All matters currently listed for a contested hearing or intended to be listed for a contested hearing will be adjourned to a date at least three months in advance for mention only.

All parties will be notified in writing of the new mention date.

On that new mention date those matters will be allocated new hearing dates.

If there is urgency for a contested hearing the party should make a request in writing or email for the court's consideration.

Domestic Violence Applications

Courts will continue to deal with these applications as usual. Parties can request to appear by phone.

For process of making such request see **Appearances in Court** above.

As for contested Domestic Violence Applications and their hearing dates see **Hearings** above.

Urgent Domestic Violence Applications will be heard at the discretion of the presiding magistrate.

Urgent QCAT Applications

Will continue to be heard as usual. For appearance by phone see **Appearances in Court** above.

URGENT - pleas, bail applications, traffic charges or applications

Request for these matters should be in writing or by email and include reason/s for urgency.

Parties will be advised of the Magistrate's decision regarding an urgent listing.

Prisoners appearing via video link

Prisoners will continue to be eligible to appear by video in court.

Prisoners in correctional centres are only to be brought to the court for appearances in extraordinary circumstances.

to COVID-19.

Legal Aid CEO Anthony Reilly said Legal Aid Queensland had suspended its face-to-face duty lawyer services (crime, domestic and family violence, family law and child protection) as a precautionary measure for its staff, private lawyers who do legal aid work and the public.

"Instead, we are working with State Magistrates Courts and the Federal Circuit Court and Family Court of Australia to provide these services via telephone and video link," Mr Reilly said.

"Please note, this suspension is only in relation to face-to-face duty lawyer services, and for the moment, representation services will continue with clients being screened.

"The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Service (QLD) LTD (ATSILS) advises that all pre court and court circuits into the communities of Woorabinda and Yarrabah have been suspended immediately due to the potential health vulnerability of our people in remote communities.

"ATSILS is committed to supporting efforts from all levels of government to reduce the spread of COVID-19 to communities.

"In addition to travel restrictions to our remote communities, ATSILS has looked to limit travel by staff to and from communities in other regions of the state (including urban and regional) for non-essential purposes, where options such as tele/videoconference or postponement are reasonable alternatives.

"In addition, prearranged events requiring people to travel to or from communities have been deferred indefinitely.

"Several remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities have started to restrict access to their community for non-essential travel."

CEO Shane Duffy said ATSILS continued to provide essential services with increased caution to protect staff and the community of which it serviced from the potential spread of COVID-19.

"We have a response plan in place to increase protection for our staff, clients and communities and are continually implementing business continuity arrangements to minimise disruption to service delivery," he said.

ATSILS will continue to monitor this rapidly evolving situation related to COVID-19 and update staff, clients, community and stakeholders of any further service delivery adjustments accordingly.

For further information regarding access to legal services during this time please contact an ATSILS office in your region: www.atsils.org.au/contact/

Email: info@atsils.org.au

Call: 1800 012 255 - Free call 24/7 for urgent criminal law matters.

Central Queenslanders can still access free legal advice despite the outbreak of COVID-19 virus.

While many businesses close their doors or limit customer numbers, Central Queensland Community Legal Centre has implemented its COVID-19 Continuity Plan, which has been developed to reduce impacts and risks of the virus.

CQCLC president Rick Palmer said the centre's solicitors continued to provide services from the office and by using videoconferencing, Facetime and telephone for people who would normally attend outreach clinics throughout CQ.

"These alternatives will ensure people across the region continue to have access to free legal advice while the COVID-19 pandemic continues," he said.

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"We have taken this threat seriously but realise our services are essential, especially for some of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged people in our region."

To book a free half-hour legal advice appointment, phone CQCLC on 1800 155 121 or via the 'chatbot' at the top of the homepage at www.cqclc.org.au

COURTHOUSE	EMAIL ADDRESS	PHONE NUMBER
Biloela	Courthouse.Biloela@justice.qld.gov.au	07 48871700
Blackwater	Courthouse.Blackwater@justice.qld.gov.au	07 4986 2500
Bowen	Courthouse.Bowen@justice.qld.gov.au	07 4793 5300
Bundaberg	Courthouse.Bundaberg@justice.qld.gov.au	07 4326 2800
Childers	Courthouse.Childers@justice.qld.gov.au	07 4326 3801
Clermont	Courthouse.Clermont@justice.qld.gov.au	07 49831233
Emerald	Courthouse.Emerald@justice.qld.gov.au	07 4843 9300
Gladstone	Courthouse.Gladstone@justice.qld.gov.au	07 48991200
Mackay	Courthouse.Mackay@justice.qld.gov.au	07 4889 8400
Moranbah	Courthouse.Moranbah@justice.qld.gov.au	07 49417633
Proserpine	Courthouse.Proserpine@justice.qld.gov.au	07 4945 6300
Rockhampton	Courthouse.Rockhampton@justice.qld.gov.au	07 48871700
Sarina	Courthouse.Sarina@justice.qld.gov.au	07 49561820
Springsure	Courthouse.Springsure@justice.qld.gov.au	07 49841433
Yeppoon	Courthouse.Yeppoon@justice.qld.gov.au	07 4939 5385
Blackwater	Courthouse.Blackwater@justice.qld.gov.au	07 4986 2500



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