

For Immediate Release:

September 6, 2011

Court Locations Adjust Public Office Hours

Changes Intended To Help Reduce Delays

Thirty-eight Massachusetts courts, facing case backlogs and staff shortages, will adjust the hours of clerks and registers offices beginning September 19, 2011, in order to reduce processing delays. The scheduling of court sessions will not be affected by the changes in office hours and access will be available for emergency matters. This reduction in counter and telephone hours will provide uninterrupted time for staff to prepare cases for court sessions and execute court orders, as well as to complete filing, docketing, scanning and other case processing.

Current staffing levels, caseloads and public concerns about extended backlogs compelled the decision to adjust office hours. The Trial Court has lost 1,167 people, a 15 percent reduction in staff since 2007, causing delays in many courts. A budget reduction of \$85M over three years required implementation of a hiring freeze, which has not allowed the court to fill vacancies.

“Our severe staffing reductions require an adjustment in some public office hours so that employees can more effectively serve those who depend on the courts,” said Chief Justice for Administration & Management Robert A. Mulligan. “Court staff have made remarkable efforts to deliver timely justice during three years of significant budget and staff cuts. However, almost one third of courts now need some uninterrupted time to address backlogs and reduce delays, as already done by courts in other states.”

Departmental chief justices worked with strained local courts to develop plans that would minimize public inconvenience and avoid adverse impact on court users. Departments had previously deployed a range of strategies to implement technology and share staff across courts, utilize administrative office staff and interns, and centralize some functions. They will monitor the impact of the restricted hours and assess its effectiveness in improving operations.

The decision to reduce hours at some locations means that during the specified hours staff will be unavailable to answer general telephone inquiries or to assist the public in the clerk’s office. Telephone messages and signage at each location will provide information about the adjusted hours and emergency access information. The judicial response system which provides round-the-clock coverage for emergency situations will be unaffected.

The changes in public office hours will occur as detailed on the following page.

Changes in Court Office Hours

District Court

Attleboro, Barnstable, E. Brookfield, Fall River (telephones only), Haverhill, Lowell, Malden, Palmer, Taunton, Waltham, Woburn, Wrentham (civil open Thursday)

o Counter and phone coverage restricted 1:30 to 3:30 p.m. Monday through Friday

Natick/Framingham

o Counter and phone coverage restricted 1:00 to 2:00 p.m. Tuesday and Thursday

Lawrence, Lynn, Newburyport/Ipswich (telephones only), Somerville, Springfield, Stoughton, Uxbridge, Westborough

o Counter and phone coverage restricted 1:30 to 3:30 p.m. Monday, Wednesday & Friday

Court sessions still will begin at 9:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m.

Restricted access applies to any business except:

Persons seeking emergency restraining orders, harassment prevention orders, mental health emergencies, warrants

Housing Court

Western Division

o Counter and phone coverage restricted 12 Noon to 2:00 p.m. Monday through Friday

Scheduled matters will continue to be heard throughout the day.

o Satellite sessions cancelled the first week of each month in Northampton, Pittsfield and Greenfield. Emergency matters during this week will be handled in Springfield. These satellite sessions will continue the other weeks of the month.

Juvenile Court

Springfield Session of the Hampden County Division

o Counter and phone coverage restricted 8:30 to 9:00 a.m. and 4:00 to 4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday.

Land Court

o Counter and phone coverage restricted 8:30 to 10:00 a.m. Monday through Friday

Court sessions will be held as scheduled throughout the day.

Probate and Family Court

All divisions

o Registry Counter and phone coverage restricted after 3 p.m. Monday through Friday

Applies to any court business, except emergency restraining orders and other emergencies.

Court sessions still will begin at 8:30 a.m.