



## Second Judicial District Court and Bernalillo County Metropolitan Court

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### **Courts implementing new procedures for criminal cases in response to IT disruptions affecting the Metropolitan Detention Center**

ALBUQUERQUE – Courts in Bernalillo County are implementing new procedures to ensure that hearings in criminal cases move expeditiously for defendants in custody at the Metropolitan Detention Center while the county resolves IT system disruptions from malware.

The Second Judicial District Court and Bernalillo County Metropolitan Court collaborated with the county, Law Offices of the Public Defender and the District Attorney's Office on the procedures to ensure that hearings can continue until the county's network is back in operation.

Particularly during the pandemic, inmates typically would remain at the jail and appear at hearings remotely through audio-video conferencing connections with the courts. However, the disruption in Bernalillo County's IT network, which includes the Metropolitan Detention Center, has forced the courts to enact different procedures.

"This is a positive example of what our justice partners can accomplish when we come together to solve problems," Second Judicial District Court Chief Judge Marie Ward said today.

To ensure hearings continue:

- The District Court has made secured space available at its Children's Court location in Albuquerque, where defendants are being transported from MDC. Laptop stations have been set up in a courtroom at Children's Court, allowing defendants to communicate

privately with their attorneys and appear at hearings. Judges presiding over the hearings are located at the court's downtown location. COVID-safe practices remain in place at Children's Court, including requiring all parties in the courtroom to wear masks and maintain physical distancing.

- The Metropolitan Court is planning more remote hearings at a jail location that uses a court-based IT network, which has been unaffected by the disruptions in the county's system. Generally, that location was used for first appearances for felony defendants and arraignments in misdemeanor cases. Metro Court is working to move preliminary hearings and other proceedings for defendants, such as those involving evidentiary issues, to another room at the jail and possibly a neighboring building at the Metropolitan Court's downtown Albuquerque courthouse. Both of those locations utilize the court-based IT network.

"Through our continuous work with local justice partners, we have found ways in which we can keep hearings moving for in-custody defendants through the court's network while being mindful of COVID-safe practices at the jail and the courthouses," said Metropolitan Court Chief Judge Maria I. Dominguez.

Chief Judge Ward said, "I sincerely appreciate our Criminal Court bench —as well as Metropolitan Court Chief Judge Maria Dominguez, all of our justice partners and the New Mexico Supreme Court Emergency Response Team for working quickly to enact plans to allow criminal proceedings to continue in the face of this unforeseen event. I also am grateful to our Children's Court judges who made accommodations for the quick conversion of their facility to allow for transport of inmates to appear via video conference."

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