



司法機構政務長

Judiciary Administrator

30 March 2020

Dr Hon Priscilla Leung, SBS, JP  
Chairman  
Panel on Administration of Justice and Legal Services  
Legislative Council Complex  
1 Legislative Council Road  
Central, Hong Kong

*Dear Chairman,*

**Panel on Administration of Justice and Legal Services  
("AJLS Panel")  
General Adjourned Period**

Further to my letter of 25 March 2020, on the instruction of the Chief Justice, I am writing to provide an update on the General Adjourned Period ("GAP") for the information of the AJLS panel.

**Continuation of GAP**

2. The Judiciary announced on 28 March 2020 that in view of the latest public health considerations, GAP would continue from 30 March (Monday) to 13 April (Monday), and be subject to review having regard to the prevailing public health situation. It is important to underline the fact that the public's health and safety, including that of court users and Judiciary staff, remain paramount considerations in the handling of court operations by the Judiciary.

3. While during GAP, courts will continue to handle certain urgent and essential business, the Judiciary will put in place public health measures to ensure appropriate social distancing for court users attending to court business.

## **Social Distancing**

4. The Judiciary has to strike a careful balance between the due administration of justice (particularly given the uncertainty of the duration of GAP) and the latest public health situation. Individual court cases or businesses on their own may not add very much to public health risks. However, if many cases or businesses are conducted at the same time at same court premises, their combined impact on public health risks as a whole may increase. As such, the Judiciary has been adopting a "space-out" approach to ensure that people flow in court premises is smooth and that court premises, including office areas, are not overcrowded. This is reflected in the limited scope of business, including registry business (as revised from time to time), the manner in which cases are listed for hearing, the number of courts that are opened for hearing, the number of and manner in which magistrates' courts ("MCs") are opened for business, and the preventive and crowd control measures implemented.

5. In particular, the Judiciary will continue to use various means to space out court proceedings, with suitable adjustments as appropriate to suit the latest situation. Where appropriate, the number of cases to be handled in the same courtroom at any one session will be reduced. This will in turn reduce the number of people who will need to be in a courtroom at any point in time. Additional holding space or waiting area(s) in other courtroom(s) or at court lobbies will be provided whenever possible so that fewer people will need to gather in a courtroom. Broadcasting of proceedings will be done on a need basis. For certain levels of court such as the MCs, more court buildings will operate on any given day so that the cases may be spread out for handling in more courtrooms.

6. There will also be capacity limits for each courtroom, court lobby, and registry areas to contain the people flow within reasonable limits and having regard to the need for social distancing. To help enforce such controls, queuing system will be implemented as appropriate. The Judiciary also urges court users, including legal practitioners, to minimise the number of people coming to the court.

## **Court Proceedings**

7. All court/tribunal hearings will generally be adjourned during this period unless they are urgent and essential business as directed by the presiding Judge or Judicial Officer. Parties will be notified only if their hearings will be held as scheduled during this period.

8. Other urgent and essential hearings will continue to be handled in accordance with the established mechanisms, including the Duty Judge system. The updated list of urgent and essential hearings and matters is uploaded onto the Judiciary website.

## **Registries and Offices**

9. Court/tribunal registries and offices will generally be closed during this period, but enhanced measures will be introduced so that more businesses will be handled. The list of businesses that will be handled by the registries during this period is uploaded onto the Judiciary website.

## **Preventive and crowd management measures**

10. The Judiciary will continue to put in place appropriate preventive and crowd management measures for the health protection of all people who are required to enter and remain in the court premises for urgent and essential business. Court users are required to have their body temperature taken and wear a surgical mask before they are allowed to enter and remain in the court premises.

11. To support the above arrangements, necessary queuing and other crowd management measures, as well as security controls to limit the number of court users entering and remaining in the Judiciary premises, will be put in place as appropriate. To maintain social distancing, the seating capacity of courtrooms and lobbies are reduced by about 50 per cent. In addition, capacity limits are set for confined areas such as registries and offices to avoid crowding of users.

12. Parties, legal representatives and other court users are reminded that they should not come to the Judiciary premises to attend court proceedings or conduct businesses at court registry/office if they are subject to quarantine requirement or medical surveillance of the

Government. Court users who are subject to any quarantine requirement or medical surveillance of the Government are also asked to, as soon as practicable, apply to the court for permission of absence or inform the court with reasons for absence as appropriate.

13. The Judiciary will continue to post updated information, including Daily Cause Lists, messages related to the Judiciary's arrangements arising from public health considerations and advice to court users visiting the courts during this period, on the Judiciary website ([www.judiciary.hk](http://www.judiciary.hk)). Dedicated hotlines have also been set up for each level of court.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Emma Lau', written in a cursive style.

(Miss Emma Lau)  
Judiciary Administrator

c.c. Ms Teresa Cheng, GBS, SC, JP  
Secretary for Justice

Mr Philip J Dykes, SC  
Chairman, Hong Kong Bar Association

Ms Melissa K Pang  
President, The Law Society of Hong Kong