



Superior Court of California
Mendocino County
100 N. State St., Ukiah, CA 95482
www.mendocino.courts.ca.gov/

PRESS RELEASE

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**TEMPORARY CHANGES AT THE
FORT BRAGG COURTHOUSE RAISE
CONCERNS AMONG COASTAL COMMUNITIES**

The sudden retirement of Judge Clayton Brennan on October 31st has created legitimate concerns in the coastal communities about the future of the Ten Mile courthouse in Fort Bragg.

The Mendocino County Superior Court will remain open and operational in both Ukiah and Fort Bragg. Court Executive Officer Kim Turner emphasizes, “There is no plan to close the Ten Mile courthouse - none.”

Presiding Judge Keith Faulder acknowledges that losing the judicial officer at the coast has created logistical problems for covering all matters assigned to the Ten Mile courthouse. He states, “This is a dynamic situation, and some elements of a complete answer are still evolving. We remain committed to ensuring that both coastal and inland communities continue to receive judicial services. However, the reality is that we cannot fully staff courtrooms without sufficient judicial officers. All of us—your judges and court staff—have taken on additional calendars and responsibilities to meet the need.”

The Mendocino County bench is authorized by statute to have eight judges. Ms. Turner states that the new courthouse, currently under construction in Ukiah, is designed for seven courtrooms only. “The new courthouse is designed to house seven judicial officers. The Mendocino bench has eight judges. This should assure the coastal community that the branch courthouse in Fort Bragg will not close with the completion of the new courthouse in Ukiah.”

In the last sixteen months, the court had two judicial vacancies which were finally filled by Governor Newsom. Judge Fred Ricco McCurry joined the bench in early October. County Counsel Charlotte Scott will be sworn in as the court’s newest

judge on December 8th. In addition, Judge Ann Moorman is on special assignment to the First Appellate District until at least December 31st.

Judge Brennan's decision to retire on October 31st created a new judicial vacancy which can only be filled in one of two ways – by Governor's appointment in the remaining years of Judge Brennan's term or through an open election in 2030.

With the workload and judicial resource challenges facing the court, temporary measures have been put in place to keep the Ten Mile courthouse open to fulfill its public service obligations.

The court clerk's office in Fort Bragg remains open Monday through Friday to accept filings in all matters, criminal and civil, and to offer self-help services, accept criminal and traffic fine payments and assist the public with court record searches.

Certain case types—such as criminal, domestic violence, and unlawful detainers—have statutory or constitutional priority and often require in-person appearances. Other matters, such as civil and small claims cases, may be handled remotely.

Judge Patrick Pekin will preside over criminal, domestic violence and civil restraining order cases in the Ten Mile Court Mondays through Wednesdays. On Thursdays and Fridays, Judge Pekin will preside over civil, small claims, and unlawful detainer matters, Adult Drug Court and Behavioral Health Court in the Ukiah courthouse. The Ten Mile court's unlimited civil and probate cases and some family law matters are currently reassigned to the Ukiah court.

Kim Turner notes that the court intends to take advantage of remote proceedings for litigants that cannot appear in court in person. "The use of remote hearings, where feasible, makes it easier for the public to attend their proceedings and fully participate in their cases. Remote proceedings have radically changed the way courts operate. They have become commonplace now that Zoom and other video software have improved these courtroom experiences."

Judge Faulder and incoming Presiding Judge Carly Dolan have been working closely to make sure all courtrooms are adequately covered with available resources. Ms. Turner states, "We will use this time to review filing data and other workload measures to ensure a fair and equitable distribution of work in the clerk's offices and among our judges." While there may be additional caseload adjustments as the new judicial officers take on their assignments, the change in court leadership will not radically affect the decisions already being made.

Judge Faulder adds, “We appreciate the public’s patience and understanding as we all work to maintain essential judicial services during this period of transition.”

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