



COVID-19 Response Perspectives from SJC Sites

Clark County
Minnehaha County
Pennington County

Clark County, Nevada

In response to the outbreak of the COVID-19 virus, the Clark County (Las Vegas, NV) criminal justice system has proactively implemented numerous measures to protect the health and safety of the community. The measures adopted by justice agencies include:

- Utilizing cite and release for non-violent misdemeanors (excluding DUI and domestic violence);
- Suspending traffic and misdemeanor warrant arrests;
- Conducting in-custody courts hearings via video conferencing and suspending out-of-custody hearings and trials;
- Releasing individuals charged with low-level, non-violent charges from jail on own recognizance bonds;
- Establishing phonelines for the community to contact the courts for assistance in rescheduling their court appearance; and
- Screening, monitoring, and quarantining inmates who show signs of illness.

Many of the above actions were formalized by an Administrative Order issued by the Chief Justice of the Peace Suzan Baucum of the Las Vegas Justice Court. A copy of the order is available at www.jmijustice.org/corvid-19.

In addition, the Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department, in cooperation with justice system stakeholders, created a jail depopulation order to prevent the jail from overcrowding and curtail risks to staff and inmates during the crisis. The depopulation order notably restricts the use of jail beds to individuals charged with more serious offenses and sets additional safeguards that include controlling the number of sentenced inmates through early releases.

The situation in Clark County has been extremely challenging, as in many jurisdictions across the country, but strong collaboration between justice system leaders has made things easier. Rich Suey, the Clark County SJC Coordinator, stated “The Clark County Criminal Justice System response to the COVID-19 Pandemic has been nothing short of exceptional. I believe the effective coordination of our response has been due to the great working relationships our decision makers have developed through our Criminal Justice Coordination Council (CJCC). Everything we’ve been able to put into place has been through our ability to pick up a phone and trust the people on the other end will do everything possible to assist.”

South Dakota

South Dakota has also had a proactive response to COVID-19. Although the number of confirmed cases is currently low, the state and counties have taken an aggressive approach to the pandemic. On March 13, 2020, the Supreme Court of South Dakota declared a [judicial emergency](#) and ordered presiding judges of judicial circuits to adopt, modify, and suspend rules in order to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. All seven circuit courts took action and drafted [orders](#).

In Pennington County, the jail is working to release people who are detained pretrial who are considered low risk to help prepare the jail for the possibility of quarantining inmates if the virus enters the jail. Pennington County’s Jail Review Team, which used to meet in person every other week, is now reviewing the jail population for cases to recommend release at least two days a week by email.

Additionally, Pennington County have been working to discontinue drug and alcohol testing as a condition of pretrial release and probation, wherever possible, to reduce the spread of the virus. Those who will remain on drug and alcohol testing are being moved to remote options. Other actions taken by the courts include not penalizing those who are unable to make it to their hearings (failure to appear), delaying sanctions for probation violations, and continuing all non-essentially hearings and trials.

Minnehaha County has been working to transition drug and alcohol testing to remote methods to reduce the spread of the virus. The Court is liberally granting resets of cases to ensure that only healthy people come to the Courthouse. Staff are working on ways to impose sanctions for probation violations that do not involve jail. Additionally, they are working to increase the number of available judges and courtrooms to reduce the number of people in the courtroom at a given time. Judges are providing immediate bond reviews for arrestees who are symptomatic. The Fine and Bond Schedule has been amended to increase the number of offenses that are subject to cite and release and personal recognizance bonds.