



FIRST PURPOSE-BUILT COVID-19 COMPLIANT COURTHOUSE OPENS

Tuesday, March 30, 2021 (Halifax, NS) – Trials at the first criminal jury courthouse in Atlantic Canada built to be COVID-19 compliant will begin on Wednesday, March 31, in Dartmouth.

The facility on Mellor Avenue has two courtrooms with partitioned jury boxes and space for lawyers, defendants, witnesses and court staff to physically distance. The courthouse also accommodates onsite jury selection and juror deliberations, and is equipped with state-of-the-art audio-visual systems, including digital recording and evidence presentation systems.

“We have been able to adapt and transform many of our court operations in response to COVID-19,” said Randy Delorey, Attorney General and Minister of Justice. “Addressing delays of court matters and providing for the ongoing safety of those who use our courts continues to be a top priority. With the addition of these two satellite courtrooms, we are now able to safely resume criminal jury trials in the Halifax area.”

The four criminal jury courtrooms at the Law Courts in Halifax were not large enough to accommodate criminal jury trials in compliance with COVID restrictions.

All spaces in the new courthouse allow for required physical distancing and are accessible for those using mobility aids. Staff will be onsite at this satellite location when jury selections and trials are underway.

Quotes:

“We are fortunate in Nova Scotia to have a positive working relationship between the judiciary and the province, which has helped us work through the many challenges presented by the pandemic. Suspending jury trials last March was not an easy decision. Knowing that we now have an appropriate space that can safely accommodate these matters should be welcome news for all Nova Scotians.”

- *Chief Justice Deborah K. Smith, Supreme Court of Nova Scotia*

“The pressures on the criminal justice system are constant and growing, especially in the Halifax region. The pandemic magnified many of these issues, but it also spurred creative solutions and much needed improvements to technology. These new state-of-the-art courtrooms are an example of what we can achieve through collaboration and we thank the department for their responsiveness and support.”

- *Associate Chief Justice Patrick J. Duncan, Supreme Court of Nova*

Quick Facts:

- the total cost of renovations for the COVID-19 compliant satellite courts is forecast to be more than \$4.2 million
- jury trials were able to resume outside of metro Halifax as of Sept. 8, using offsite locations or by reconfiguring existing court infrastructure
- as of today, March 30, there are 44 jury trials pending in the Halifax region, including trials that were scheduled and had to be adjourned during the early months of the pandemic
- health protocols adopted in response to COVID-19 prompted the assessment of all courtrooms and courthouses across the province for their capacity to accommodate in-person matters
- when public health protocols haven't allowed in-person proceedings, matters have been heard by courts virtually, using telephone, video and other online platforms
- a joint task force, led by the province and the judiciary, is exploring more ways to use technology to improve access to justice and increase efficiencies

Additional Resources:

Visual tour of the new courthouse: <https://vimeo.com/530745275/68b7ea5d68>