



NEWS RELEASE

SUPERIOR COURT OF CALIFORNIA • COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

San Diego Superior Court Resumes Civil Court Trials

November 5, 2020 – The COVID-19 pandemic caused nearly all non-emergency functions of the San Diego Superior Court to come to a halt in March 2020, however, services have steadily resumed over the past several months. The latest resumed service is in-person bench trials for civil cases, where a judge makes the final decision in the case rather than a jury.

Though the Court continues to offer fully remote civil bench trials, parties may agree to have their case tried with all parties present in a courtroom with social distancing and other protective precautions in place. Three in-person civil bench trials were held in the last two weeks of October and additional trials are being scheduled through the end of the year.

Due to constitutional requirements, criminal jury trials generally take priority over civil trials. However, as the Court safely increases the number of people summoned to report for jury duty, some of those potential jurors may be available for jury trials in civil cases.

Certain civil cases are entitled by statute to “preference” over other civil cases and will be the first to be scheduled for jury trials. Preference motions, or requests for the Court to consider setting an earlier trial date based on the age and/or health of plaintiffs or other factors, have been heard and the first in-person preference civil jury trial is expected to begin in January 2021. Jury trials in non-preference civil cases are expected to follow soon after.

As the pool of jurors that can be made available for civil trials is limited, parties in a civil case will have the option to agree to a smaller number of jurors to decide the issues in their case.

Members of the public who are summoned for jury duty may be placed on either a criminal trial or a civil trial. For more information on the precautions taken to safely bring jurors into the courthouses, please refer to [this video](#) and [this guide](#) to jury service in the San Diego Superior Court during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Civil cases can be unlimited (asking for damages totaling more than \$25,000) or limited (asking for damages up to \$25,000). Small claims cases are a subset of limited civil cases that seek \$10,000 or less. Small claims trials are decided by a judge or commissioner. [Virtual hearings](#) for small claims trials began in September. Hundreds of

small claims trials take place each week in an effort to get caught up with the number of cases that have been waiting for a trial date since the closure.

For more information on the civil case type at the San Diego Superior Court, please visit sdcourt.ca.gov/Civil. Learn more about the Court's operations during the COVID-19 pandemic at sdcourt.ca.gov/coronavirus.

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