

COVID 19... HOW DOES IT AFFECT LEGAL SERVICES?

BY AMBER RODRIGUEZ

The current health crisis has forced us all to suddenly adapt drastic changes in our daily lives. The legal field is no different. From the courts to day-to-day office operations, the legal community is struggling to change the way it works to continue “business as usual” the best it can at this time.

Courts across the State are now closed or open only for extremely limited purposes. Even the ability to file legal documents has been largely suspended. This has the immediate impact of severely limiting access to the courts.

Currently, in Ventura County, there will be no regular probate hearings for at least 90 days. In addition, there is no access to court clerks or filing documents, not even electronically. While the court is open for emergency hearings only (called “ex partes”), the type of matters that qualify for that exception are very few.

The courts are working to deal with this situation. Until the courts fully reopen, the ability to move existing cases forward or file new cases will be extremely limited. Once the courts do reopen, there will be a backlog of matters and hearings to work through. During this time, it is even more important to find ways to avoid needing the court’s assistance; whether through careful evaluation of your case and the options available to you or by reaching an agreement or settlement with contrary parties that will allow things to move forward for everyone involved.

If you have a matter currently before the court or that needs to be presented to the court, patience will be necessary. Certain legal timelines will also be affected. Now more than ever, retaining an attorney to assist you through this process will be the best way to diminish the uncertainty.

Law offices themselves are dealing with the COVID 19 and “stay safe at home” requirements, each in their own way. Some are open as usual, others have made a partial move to remote services, and others are now entirely remotely based. Just as with other businesses, there is a learning curve and adjustment to be made – by the attorneys, their staff, and the clients they serve.

Our office is operating remotely, with in-person appointments when necessary. We are reviewing and returning calls and emails, moving client matters forward and generally working the same as we did in-person. We are here to help. We want to reassure you that your matter will continue to get the attention it needs – both in-person and remotely.

We wish you and your family peace and good health. Please contact us if we can be of assistance as we all navigate our way through this challenging time.

Amber Rodriguez is the Chair of the Executive Committee for the Estate Planning and Probate section of the VCBA. Her practice focuses on Probate and Trust Litigation and Administration, Estate Planning and Conservatorships. She can be reached at arodriguez@estateattorneycalifornia.com, or you can visit her website at estateattorneycalifornia.com.