

Further to the attached press release issued March 13, 2020 from all three level of the Court in Manitoba which includes the following statement:

Effective Monday, March 16, 2020 access to the courthouses, including circuit court locations in Manitoba will be restricted to only those persons who are necessary to the proceedings before the courts. This will include counsel, litigants, accused, witnesses and victim service workers.

It has come to my attention that this directive is being followed exactly as written and thereby limiting the presence of family members and other direct supports within the courtroom at hearings and sentencings. I can advise that per my discussion with all three Chiefs, the intent was to discourage non-essential parties from attending court proceedings to reduce the risk of the virus spreading. However, it was acknowledged by all three Chiefs that other individuals like family members, elders or a support person may be required to support the victim, witness or accused through the court process. We agreed that a list would be provided to Sheriff Services wherever possible identifying those that might be coming to court to limit any possibility of refusal in their attendance at same. In the event a person is not on the list, but is a close support, the Sheriffs will exercise their discretion and allow them entry. If parties are allowed to attend court to support the participant and they have been identified as necessary in the view of Victim Services, Prosecutions or counsel, including Legal Aid, Sheriff Services will not refuse their entry into court and thus, their attendance within the courtroom would also be permitted.

Suzanne Gervais
Assistant Deputy Minister
Courts Division