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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

**DATE: Tuesday, May 19, 2020**

### **JUDICIAL BRANCH TO CONTINUE TO PROVIDE ESSENTIAL SERVICES**

The Judicial Branch of the Navajo Nation, recognizing the ongoing threat posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, will continue to provide essential services to the public through telecommunication to July 31, 2020. Doors to the public will not be open, but essential services will be provided through electronic and teleconference means out of concern for the safety of the public and our staff.

“Even as our communities struggle against the current pandemic, the Judicial Branch has not lost sight of the obligations to the community. We must never lose sight of our mission to provide access to justice for our Navajo People and general public,” Chief Justice JoAnn B. Jayne stated. “We have an obligation to our People and our Nation to provide services even now.”

Additionally, the Administrative Order will require the courts and programs of the Judicial Branch are to assess the ability to expand services beyond essential services only and to assess branch facilities for modifications that will increase the safety of the facility for staff and the public.

“Peacemaking explains that we are facing a *Naayéé*, a monster, which kills through invisibility. It hides in cold places and in the dark and harms us lingering on and building its strength,” Chief Justice Jayne stated in the administrative order. Because of this the Judicial Branch must adapt and prepare the courts and programs to meet the needs of the People while caring for and protecting staff.

The administrative order continues to prioritize the Judicial Branch duties to the People and duties and obligations to Judicial Branch staff. The order also continues to require employees inside Judicial Branch facilities to wear face masks or cloth coverings at all times.

Chief Justice Jayne issued the administrative order for the branch Tuesday, May 19, 2020, in which she also ordered that courts and programs continue to operate with minimal staff and authorized certain Judicial Branch staff to continue to work remotely also to July 31, 2020.

The Judicial Branch implemented a Continuity of Operations Plan in late March to continue to provide essential services – those services that are required by statute of the Navajo Nation –

during the public health emergency. Since then, the branch has augmented the Continuity of Operations Plan with more detailed policies and procedures for the safety of staff and the public.

There are 13 district and family courts throughout the Navajo Nation and the Supreme Court under the Judicial Branch. These courts are currently accepting all filings, but are prioritizing cases that have specific time requirements by statute at this time. Litigants are encouraged to file by email and/or fax.

The Peacemaking Program and the Office of Probation and Parole Services are also within the Judicial Branch and provide services to the people and the Navajo Nation.

For more information on services provided by the courts and programs, please visit [www.navajocourts.org](http://www.navajocourts.org).

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