

**LA Times**

**Op-Ed: Why the state court system is experiencing a pandemic meltdown**

The Stanley Mosk Courthouse in downtown Los Angeles on March 21, two days after Gov. Gavin Newsom issued a statewide “stay at home” order to help slow the spread of the coronavirus.

We’ve endured overwhelming death, job dislocation and societal shutdown during the coronavirus pandemic, so now let us lament another casualty — functioning state courts.

The courts, a cornerstone of our democracy since the republic’s founding, are experiencing a pandemic meltdown in California. Our concrete and brick bulwarks of justice have become a fundamentally broken mess.

The blame cannot be laid solely on COVID-19. Leadership has been lacking at many levels that would help us adapt to our new viral reality.

In Los Angeles County, all civil jury trials have been [postponed until 2021](#). Given a growing backlog of thousands of criminal trials, which take precedence under state law, a mountain of civil cases is piling up that promises to take years to excavate.

It’s no better elsewhere around the state. Superior Courts in the Bay Area are shortening hours and putting off civil jury trials until at least late this year. In San Diego, criminal trials won’t happen until at least the fall, and judges are telling lawyers that civil trials won’t occur until next year.

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Full Article Here: <https://www.latimes.com/opinion/story/2020-09-07/courts-and-covid-hed>

Daily Journal

# Some judges don't wear masks, igniting debate

**In a letter to Monterey County Presiding Judge Julie R. Culver and California Chief Justice Tani G. Cantil-Sakauye, Salinas defense attorney Phillip J. Crawford said the judges are violating state, county, and city guidelines by refusing to wear face coverings in areas accessible to the public.**

As courts try to restart across California, attorneys are clashing with judges over how to conduct in-person trials.

Criminal defense attorneys in Monterey County are complaining four judges there are violating state and local government mask policies by refusing to wear them on the bench.

In a letter to Monterey County Presiding Judge [Julie R. Culver](#) and California Chief Justice [Tani G. Cantil-Sakauye](#), Salinas defense attorney Phillip J. Crawford said the judges are violating state, county, and city guidelines by refusing to wear face coverings in areas accessible to the public.

While courtrooms in the Salinas criminal courthouse do have Plexiglas coverings around the judge, Crawford said judges are still required to wear a mask under a county ordinance. Further, he said the danger of COVID-19 in the county has only increased in recent months.

"I don't know of any guidance that gives judges the authority to commit misdemeanors in the courtroom," Crawford said Friday.

But state and local laws may not apply to judges. Culver, in an Aug. 27 response, wrote trial court judges have broad power to run court proceedings.

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Daily Journal

# LA's 1st trial since March ends with jurors having to fill out verdict forms 4 times

Time after time, the jurors filled out the forms, waited for them to be reviewed, and were then called back to fill them out again because of mistakes.



*Judge Sam Ohta*

LOS ANGELES -- Jurors in Los Angeles County's first trial since March decided their verdict in 90 minutes by midday Thursday but had to go home and return Friday because they incorrectly filled out the verdict forms three times.

Superior Court Judge [Sam Ohta](#), who had overseen the two-day felony hit and run trial with detailed orders on where jurors, attorneys and witnesses could sit and how exhibits should be handled, delivered 32 pages of jury instructions on Thursday. But time after time, the jurors filled out the forms, waited for them to be reviewed, and were then called back to fill them out

again because of mistake. Ohta read the instructions twice, finally temporarily dismissing the jurors Thursday evening.

They returned Friday morning and delivered a verdict of guilty of hit-and-run, causing serious bodily injury.

"Those forms are very easy to mess up," Deputy District Attorney Scott W. Eisen said afterward. "Jurors do it all the time. They're not written in plain English. If you want to find a defendant guilty of the greater and not

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