

Committee is formed to take on court system delays

Chief Justice Dame Helen Winkelmann has reported that a multi-agency committee has been established to deal with the huge backlog of proceedings sitting with the courts due to delays and as a result of COVID-19 and the government-imposed lockdown. There are roughly 60,000 proceedings in the court pipeline and jury trials are not scheduled to restart until August 2020.

The Chief Judge of the District Court has put together a committee that is made up of an array of people across multiple professions, not just court judges; there are members of police and the Department of Corrections who will be involved in the decision making also.

While a large contributor to the delays is the COVID-19 pandemic, there are other reasons that the backlog has built up including an already complex court system and bottlenecks, especially in the District Court. There were 21 new district court judges appointed to District Court before lockdown as part of a bid to reduce the number of proceedings that had already built up.

A large concern is the number of people currently on remand in prison, as they often are not even convicted and are simply awaiting trial. Immediate release is often available after sentencing and Chief Justice Winkelmann considers these delays entirely unacceptable and a great concern to society. The new committee will be doing what it can to restore the rule of law to the New Zealand court systems.

Resources:

New multi-agency committee set to combat COVID-19 court delays

<https://www.thelawyer.com/nz/news/general/new-multi-agency-committee-set-to-combat-covid-19-court-delays/225787> > 20 June 2020