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Media Release

Covid 19 – stay away from the courts if you’re not directly involved in the proceedings

New Zealand Bar Association President, Kate Davenport QC, is deeply concerned at reports of large numbers of people attending some of our courts on the first day of the alert level 4 lockdown. “Unless you are required to be in a court, stay away. You are endangering everybody about you and your families as well,” says Ms Davenport. “If you are a defendant, do not bring a large support group. You are only exposing them and everyone else to significant danger. Your lawyer is there to support you.”

Ms Davenport applauds the directions from the Chief Justice excluding members of the public from courthouses. Only those required to appear before the courts, such as the defendants, their lawyers, prosecutors and officers of the court, should be in the courthouses. Supporters will be denied entry to courthouses unless they get advance permission from the presiding Judge. Permission can be requested by telephoning the Ministry of Justice Contact Centre 0800 COURTS (0800 268 787).

“If you are required go to court, you should maintain at least two metres physical distance between you and everyone else and follow the hygiene recommendations. If you do need to be in court and are feeling unwell, let your lawyer or the court know in advance so you can be excused,” says Ms Davenport.

“These are difficult times and obviously it will require us all to be flexible as we find our way through the complications that Covid 19 has imposed on our lives. But it’s important to do exactly what the Government has asked us to do and stay at home. The longer we fail to comply with these directives, the longer this illness will go on and the more lives it will claim.”

The Bar Association recommends that people who are unsure about whether they have to go to court, should check with their lawyer or contact the court involved. Contact details can be found at <https://courtsfnz.govt.nz/utilities/contact/courts/>

Ends.

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