



Chief District Court Judge's Chambers
Te Whare o Ngā Kaihautū Waka o Te Kōti-ā-rohe o Aotearoa

Updated – August 2026

INTRODUCTION

This resource is a guide for court staff to support a judge's responsibility to ensure the orderly and efficient conduct of the court's business.

Although much of the content applies to everyday media attendance in court this guide is aimed at matters where there is greater than usual media interest and/or attendance; and therefore, additional logistics to consider and plan for.

The contents are drawn from correspondence received by the Chief District Court Judge's Chambers and the existing media guidelines and protocols. It aims to help build a shared understanding and positive working relationship between the District Court judiciary, court staff and the media.

WHY MEDIA ATTENTION MATTERS

Media are acknowledged as critical to open justice. They act as the eyes and ears of the public and convey what happens in your court to New Zealanders, and even further afield.

The majority of New Zealanders won't ever go to court, so their understanding of court comes from what they see in the news.

Media have collective power to reach a huge audience. They can:

- Educate
- Inform
- Advocate
- Provide context and balance to an issue
- Humanise
- Build public trust and confidence, connection and understanding.

Media have a legal right to attend court hearings and the judicial view is that they should be accommodated and treated with respect.

Making media feel welcome and helping them do their job can build goodwill and understanding, and ultimately help balanced and accurate reporting.

WHEN TO EXPECT MORE MEDIA ATTENTION THAN USUAL

There will be times when the nature of the case or those involved will mean it is clear that there will be additional media attention to consider when planning.



TE AO MĀRAMA

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Sometimes it will not be so obvious. It might seem a fairly innocuous matter, but a single factor might be enough to attract additional media interest including:

- Anything vaccine or COVID-related
- Anything gender-based
- A political/celebrity/sportsperson/well-known brand/business being involved (not necessarily appearing)
- A first or rare charge.

WHAT ADDITIONAL ARRANGEMENTS TO THINK ABOUT PRIOR TO THE EVENT

- Consider talking to other experts such as security and health and safety staff about Security inside the courtroom, in the foyer and at entrances and exits to the court.
- Telling other staff and court users about a possible disruption.
- Alerting the Executive Judge and Ministry of Justice media team.
- Asking for help or advice on managing the extra media attention.
- In-court media applications are necessary if media want permission from the judge to film, record sound or take photos in court.
- Applications are not required if accredited media simply want to attend and observe and shouldn't be used as a guide to gauge how many media might want to attend an event and therefore require seating.
- Be prepared to process several media applications in a short amount of time. You may want to bundle them and seek direction from the judge prior to the start.
- Is there a suitably sized and identified media bench available in the courtroom? Ideally there will be a minimum of four seats with access to power (usually a powerboard) for laptops and audio plug-ins (one plug-in for radio and the other for television).
- Media need to hear the audio so they can edit clips to use for stories and also to check details.
- Soundchecks are important for in court microphones and media plug ins, and it's a good idea to remind participants to speak clearly into their microphones.
- The standard media guidelines allow for one pool tv camera and one pool photographer. That allows journalists to share footage which might help reduce numbers in court. It is the responsibility of journalists to organise the pool and they are used to doing this.
- If you don't think you can accommodate the number of media expected you can advise the judge in advance and discuss alternative arrangements like using the jury box, legal benches or a section of the public gallery. You can also seek advice from the MoJ media team or Te Whare.
- Identify a suitable position for the TV camera where they have access to a power outlet and a chair, and a position and chair for the photographer.
- Media should be notified of any last-minute changes to details or arrangements to avoid further questions and confusion.
- As the media has the right to make submissions on matters such as suppression, they become interested in parties in cases, meaning they need to know if appearance dates change.
- Some media may request VMR access instead of appearing in-person. This request needs to be put before a judge in advance of the hearing and enough time to allow the journalist to arrange an alternative if their request is declined.

WHAT TO PLAN FOR ON THE DAY

- TV and radio media need extra time to set up and test their equipment (ideally 30-40 minutes) so consider having someone meet them and let them into the courtroom before the doors open officially.
- It's important to consider where the press bench is located. If it is not close to the audio plug ins then you will need to work out how radio and TV media are going to access them – maybe through an extension lead taped down or extra seating.
- If you are unsure that someone on the press bench is on the accredited media list you can check the latest list on JET.
- If a someone is not on the accredited media list, they need to supply an identification card or letter from an organisation subject to a code of ethics and the complaints procedure of the Media Council, and a form of personal identification such as a drivers' licence or passport to sit on the press bench and be treated as media and have their privileges
- Anyone claiming to be media but unable to meet these requirements requires a judge's permission to cover proceedings.
- You may need to be extra vigilant for people making unauthorised recordings in the courtroom and/or building.
- Media are likely to want copies of documents relating to the matter so where they have a right to access you should consider how you are going to supply them quickly and efficiently (handouts or email list).
- Remember optics and perception are everything. Observations outside the actual matter can become stories – how victims are treated, how defendants enter/exit the court, how smooth did the matter run etc.
- As far as practicable high profile events and the way parties are treated should resemble an ordinary day.

WHAT SUPPORT IS AVAILABLE

It may be possible to get dedicated support for the matter from the Ministry media team or Te Whare. The sorts of things they can help with include:

- Acting as the media liaison point
- Dealing with media emails and responding to questions
- Distributing Minutes, directions, arrangements etc
- Advising on media issues and logistics
- Attending in person
- Checking media arrangements are suitable
- Responding to information requests and coordinating information releases
- Managing issues like illicit recordings/take down orders and coverage corrections.

KEY CONTACTS

- Ministry of Justice Media & Social Media Manager Joe Locke - media@justice.govt.nz
- Te Whare Principal Advisor Media – steve.corbett@justice.govt.nz

KEY SOURCES

- In-court media coverage — Courts of New Zealand (courtsofnz.govt.nz)
- Ministry of Justice Media guide
- Media quick reference guides (districtcourts.govt.nz)