

1 **8-110. Criminal contempt.**

2 A. **Scope.** This rule establishes procedures to implement the inherent and statutory
3 powers of the court to impose punitive sanctions for criminal contempt of court. This rule shall not
4 apply to the imposition of other sanctions specifically authorized by these rules, statute, or the
5 common law, or to the imposition of remedial sanctions. This rule shall not apply to any person
6 who is less than eighteen years old.

7 B. **Definitions.**

8 (1) “Contempt” or “contemptuous conduct” includes but is not limited to

9 (a) disorderly conduct, insolent behavior, or a breach of peace, noise,
10 or other disturbance, if such behavior actually obstructs or hinders the administration of justice or
11 tends to diminish the court’s authority;

12 (b) misconduct of court officers in official transactions; or

13 (c) disobedience of any lawful order, rule, or process of the court.

14 (2) “Direct contempt” means contemptuous conduct committed in the
15 immediate presence of the court that is personally observed by the judge.

16 (3) “Indirect contempt” means contemptuous conduct that occurs outside the
17 presence of the court, or conduct that is not personally observed by the judge and requires further
18 fact finding.

19 (4) “Punitive sanction” means a sentence imposed to punish a person for
20 committing an act of criminal contempt and may include a reprimand or unconditional fine or
21 unconditional sentence of imprisonment.

22 C. **Direct criminal contempt.** A direct criminal contempt may be punished
23 summarily at the time of the contempt without further evidentiary proceedings. Except in cases of

1 flagrant contemptuous conduct, before summarily punishing a person for direct criminal contempt
2 the judge shall give the person a warning, either orally or in writing, to no longer engage in the
3 contemptuous behavior and shall give the person an opportunity to explain the conduct. When the
4 judge summarily punishes a contempt defendant for direct criminal contempt, the judge shall
5 forthwith sign and file with the clerk a written order, which shall constitute a judgment and
6 sentence, certifying

7 (1) the specific facts constituting the direct criminal contempt;

8 (2) that the judge personally observed the contemptuous conduct committed in
9 the presence of the judge without the need for further fact finding;

10 (3) the punishment that was summarily imposed; and

11 (4) that the court has not imposed any term of imprisonment that exceeds ninety
12 (90) days.

13 **D. Disposition of indirect criminal contempt on notice and hearing.** Indirect
14 criminal contempt shall be punished only after notice and hearing in accordance with this
15 paragraph.

16 (1) **Criminal complaint.** An indirect criminal contempt proceeding shall be
17 initiated with a criminal complaint under Rule 8-201 NMRA, which shall be served with a
18 summons as set forth in Rule 8-204 NMRA.

19 (2) **Prosecution.** An indirect criminal contempt may be prosecuted by the
20 municipal attorney.

21 (3) **Rules of Procedure.** A charge of indirect criminal contempt shall be
22 prosecuted in accordance with this rule and the Rules of Procedure for the Municipal Courts, to
23 the extent that such rules are not inconsistent with this rule.

1 (4) **Judgment and sentence.** If the contempt defendant is found guilty of
2 criminal contempt, the court shall enter a judgment and sentence. The court shall not impose any
3 term of imprisonment that exceeds ninety (90) days.

4 E. **Docketing.** Any criminal contempt proceeding commenced under this rule shall be
5 docketed as a separate criminal matter with a new case number.

6 F. **Appeal.** Any person found guilty of criminal contempt may appeal under Rule 8-
7 703 NMRA and Rule 5-826 NMRA of the Rules of Criminal Procedure for the District Courts.
8 [As amended, effective January 1, 1996; as amended by Supreme Court Order No. 16-8300-016,
9 effective for all cases pending or filed on or after December 31, 2016; suspended by Supreme
10 Court Order No. 21-8300-032, effective November 22, 2021, until further order of the Court.]
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12 **Committee commentary.** — This rule applies to criminal contempt of court proceedings that arise
13 from conduct occurring in municipal court. This rule does not apply to civil contempt proceedings,
14 nor does it address the extent to which the municipal court has the authority to impose sanctions
15 for civil contempt of court.

16 New Mexico law classifies contempts of court as either civil or criminal. *See Concha v.*
17 *Sanchez*, 2011-NMSC-031, ¶ 24, 150 N.M. 268, 258 P.3d 1060. The classification of a contempt
18 as civil or criminal does not depend on whether the contempt proceeding arises out of an
19 underlying criminal action or civil action. Instead, the focus should be on the reason why the court
20 is invoking its contempt powers. *See id.* Civil contempt sanctions are remedial and may be imposed
21 as coercive measures to compel a person to comply with an order of the court or to enforce the
22 rights of a private party to a lawsuit. *See id.* ¶ 25; *State ex rel. Bliss v. Greenwood*, 1957-NMSC-
23 071, ¶ 6, 63 N.M. 156, 315 P.2d 223. A person held in civil contempt “carries the keys to his

1 prison” and can end continuing contempt sanctions by complying with the court’s
2 orders. *Concha*, 2011-NMSC-031, ¶ 25 (internal quotation marks and citation omitted). Criminal
3 contempt sanctions are imposed to punish the contempt defendant for a completed act of contempt
4 and to preserve the dignity and authority of the court. *See Concha*, 2011-NMSC-031, ¶
5 26; *Greenwood*, 1957-NMSC-071, ¶ 6.

6 Whether a contempt proceeding is classified as criminal or civil will impact the procedures
7 the court must follow. Because civil contempt sanctions are remedial and not intended to punish,
8 the court may impose civil contempt sanctions “by honoring the most basic due process
9 protections—in most cases, fair notice and an opportunity to be heard.” *Concha*, 2011-NMSC-
10 031, ¶ 25. Criminal contempt, on the other hand, is a “crime in the ordinary sense; it is a violation
11 of the law.” *Id.* ¶ 26. “A criminal contempt defendant is therefore entitled to due process
12 protections of the criminal law, the specific nature of which will depend on whether the criminal
13 contempt is categorized as direct or indirect.” *Id.* A contempt proceeding can result in both civil
14 and criminal contempt sanctions, *see State v. Pothier*, 1986-NMSC-039, ¶¶ 4-6, 104 N.M.
15 363, 721 P.2d 1294 (recognizing that both civil and criminal sanctions can be imposed for
16 contemptuous conduct), and this rule sets forth the procedures the court must follow if the court
17 intends to pursue criminal contempt sanctions even if the court is also considering civil contempt
18 sanctions.

19 The applicable procedures for a criminal contempt proceeding depend on whether the
20 criminal contempt is direct or indirect. “Direct contempts are contemptuous acts committed in the
21 presence of the court, while indirect contempts are such acts committed outside the presence of
22 the court.” *Concha v. Sanchez*, 2011-NMSC-031, ¶ 24, 150 N.M. 268, 258 P.3d 1060. If the
23 contemptuous conduct has occurred in court and the judge has personal knowledge, based on

1 perceiving the conduct, of the facts establishing all elements of the contempt, the court may follow
2 the summary procedures for direct criminal contempt set forth in Paragraph C of this rule.
3 However, before holding a person in direct criminal contempt, the judge in most cases still must
4 give such person a warning to stop engaging in contemptuous behavior and an opportunity to
5 explain the behavior. *See id.* ¶ 27 (“If feasible, even in summary proceedings for an act of direct
6 contempt occurring in open court, an adequate opportunity to defend or explain one’s conduct is a
7 minimum requirement before imposition of punishment.” (internal quotation marks and citation
8 omitted)).

9 “When the judge has not personally witnessed the defendant’s contemptuous behavior in
10 the course of a court proceeding,” the court must follow the Rules of Procedure for the Municipal
11 Courts and the procedures set forth in Paragraph D of this rule for indirect criminal contempt. *See*
12 *id.* ¶ 28. The indirect criminal contempt may be prosecuted by a municipal attorney.

13 A judge may be required to recuse in appropriate cases under Rule 8-106(B) NMRA. *See*
14 *State v. Stout*, 1983-NMSC-094, ¶ 12, 100 N.M. 472, 672 P.2d 645 (providing that a judge is
15 precluded from presiding over a contempt proceeding if the “judge has become so embroiled in
16 the controversy that he cannot fairly and objectively hear the case, or when he or one of his staff
17 will necessarily be a witness in the proceeding”).

18 If incarcerated, the contempt defendant is entitled to bail as provided by Rule 8-
19 401 NMRA. The defendant has a right to assistance of counsel. And, if the defendant is indigent
20 and the court contemplates the imposition of any sentence of imprisonment, the defendant is
21 entitled to representation by an attorney at the state’s expense. *See* NMSA 1978, § 31-15-10(C)
22 (“The district public defender shall represent every person without counsel who is financially

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1 unable to obtain counsel and who is charged in any court within the district with any crime that
2 carries a possible sentence of imprisonment.”).

3 If the defendant is found guilty of direct or indirect criminal contempt, the judge must enter
4 a judgment and sentence. An adjudication of guilt on a charge of criminal contempt constitutes a
5 criminal conviction, which may result in collateral consequences and may have other implications
6 for the defendant. The court may defer or suspend a criminal contempt sentence as permitted by
7 law. The court should assess and collect court costs as set forth in NMSA 1978, Section 35-14-11.
8 Whether the defendant is found guilty of direct or indirect criminal contempt, the defendant has a
9 right to appeal under the rules governing appeals from municipal court. *See* N.M. Const. art. VI, §
10 27; NMSA 1978, § 35-15-1(B); Rules 5-826, 8-703 NMRA. Under NMSA 1978, § 39-3-15(A)
11 (1966), “In any case of criminal contempt, the taking of an appeal operates to stay execution of
12 the judgment without bond.”

13 [Adopted by Supreme Court Order No. 16-8300-016, effective for all cases pending or filed on or
14 after December 31, 2016; suspended by Supreme Court Order No. 21-8300-032, effective
15 November 22, 2021, until further order of the Court.]

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