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From: Tamra Katcher, Esq. Rem Katcher Law Group <tkatcher@remlawgroup.com>
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To: Comments Mailbox
Subject: [External]Future of Court Operations - Request for Comments

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Dear Judge Grant:

I am a single mother of a 12 year old and a criminal defense attorney/litigator.

Pre-COVID, balancing my family responsibilities and my work responsibilities was very difficult. However, as an experienced attorney, I understood that there were tradeoffs and sacrifices that had to be made based on my career. I readily accepted those sacrifices, although it was at times difficult not to be present in my child's life due to work.

Many hours of my work day included sitting in court and waiting for my case to be called. Oftentimes, I would wait for several hours to appear in court for a brief (less than 5 minute) appearance. Between time waiting in court and commuting between courts, many hours were spent away from my desk, away from clients, away from my computer, and away from my family. Municipal court matters which are often heard in the late afternoon or evening hours would further affect work and home.

I believe COVID gave the court system an opportunity to evaluate its efficiencies and incorporate readily available technology to improve the flow of work from all sides of the bench. Hours of full courtrooms and waiting are no longer required and the work is still getting done. Quick adjournments, status conferences, and similar hearing are able to be dispatched by the court in short order so that the longer cases can be addressed either in person or at a separate time. Clogged courtrooms wherein more than 50% of the volume is for adjournments or appearances lasting no more than 2-3 minutes have been eradicated. Attorneys can sit in front of their computers and continue doing work while waiting for their cases to be called, and sometimes can be appearing in other courtrooms almost simultaneously thereby allowing more than one case at a time, increasing efficiencies.

Here is an example for Your Honor to appreciate the effectiveness of virtual court. I live in Morris County. To arrive in court in Bergen County (where my office is located) for a morning appearance, I would have to leave my home no later than 8am to arrive in court hopefully by 9am. I would hope that my case would be called sometime before 10am. Then I may have another appearance in Passaic County with a ready hold for some time after 11am and hope that the matter would be heard before the lunch break at 12:30pm. In the span of the morning session, due to commuting and waiting in court, I would be able to appear for 2 matters. Oftentimes my court appearances would be less than 5 minutes each due to being a quick status conference or adjournment request. With virtual court, I can remain at my computer and appear for both matters likely before 10:30am and then can appear in at least 2 municipal court appearances before lunch. In other words, I would be able to address double the number of cases through virtual court as opposed to appearing in person during the same period of time. Alternatively, I can get right back to work after court since I would already be sitting at my desk/computer. My clients and my office benefit from my increased availability and the courts benefit from my increased availability. The time efficiencies are immeasurable. Cases do not need to be rescheduled due to a scheduling conflict because counsel is traveling from one court to the next. Recently, I was able to appear in 7 separate court appearance in one day due to the virtual court platform. I was able to be in 2 different county courts, and a handful of municipal courts. All matters were addressed and attended to in an expeditious manner as if we were in court.

Virtual court has allowed me to provide better service to my clients and to the courts due to my increased availability and focus. I no longer have to be concerned with whether there will be traffic or parking issue which will delay my arrival when the court is expecting me. I feel that virtual court has allowed me to make better use of my time throughout the workday.

As for being a single mother, virtual court has also allowed me the work-life balance that most attorneys were unable to achieve. COVID's impact on schooling was a challenge for everyone. Virtual court allowed me to be home with my son to assist him with his virtual schooling and homework while still being able to take care of my work responsibilities. I did not miss one court appearance due to my son's school calendar, illness, or other related issues. I was able and remain able to be a full-time mother and full-time attorney simultaneously.

Virtual court has been a learning curve for everyone. I understand that it is not easy for court staff to coordinate their efforts, but I believe that with practice we learn and we improve.

The virtual court platform enables the court system and all counsel to efficiently expedite our responsibilities. Practically speaking, only a handful of cases *should* be in person, as outlined by Your Honor's July 16, 2021 Notice to the Bar and the Public. The large majority of matters can best be handled virtually while enabling the judicial system to function at the speed and proficiency that has been demonstrated in the past.

I encourage Your Honor to continue virtual court appearances to the fullest extent possible. I believe that the entire system of justice will benefit from making virtual courts a common occurrence in New Jersey.

I thank you for asking for comments from the bar and the public and look forward to seeing how this issue progresses.

Respectfully submitted,

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