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From: Dan Pelic <dan@lawgroupm.com>
Sent: Tuesday, August 3, 2021 11:29 AM
To: Comments Mailbox
Subject: [External]Comment on continuing remote proceedings

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Remote proceedings have benefitted my firm's clients tremendously. I practice family law. Initial retainers are often \$3,500 to \$7,500, maximum. Paying a retainer often stretches a client as far as they can go. If I have to file a motion for temporary support for children and/or my client, driving to the courthouse and parking will increase the cost of that application substantially in terms of travel costs and wait time in the courthouse where I cannot work on other matters. That is coming from someone's pocket with mouths to feed. With remote proceedings, not a minute is wasted for that client. If the court is not ready for our proceeding, I can work on other clients' matters while waiting in a virtual waiting room for the court to be ready to proceed.

This is not to mention that clients must take off work to appear at something as routine as a case management conference or more substantial like a motion hearing, where the client may not even be required to say a single word. Using one of say, five or ten, personal days (if the client is lucky enough to have them) to sit in court is a substantial burden to someone. Motion proceedings are also routinely adjourned, carried, or result in further proceedings, that lead to even further burden to the client. If I file a motion to modify support, there often will be two proceedings – the motion hearing and a date to return for further argument after limited post-judgment discovery is granted. With remote proceedings, a client can simply set aside some time in the day for the proceeding without traveling. I routinely have clients behind closed doors in their offices or even in their cars for motion hearings and conferences.

Simply put, remote proceedings have benefitted the public tremendously by lowering legal costs and increasing access to the courts and they have been proven to work. I respectfully submit that the courts are often not mindful of the hidden costs to our clients, especially in family law cases. Parties to family law cases are much more actively involved in court proceedings than say, a party to a contract matter in the Law Division where they can rely on their attorney to go to court without them.

Attorneys also benefit from remote proceedings. Running from courthouse to courthouse and back to the office every day for case management conferences and motion hearings is exhausting and increases the potential for burnout. Burnt out attorneys axiomatically cannot serve their clients as well as an attorney who is not burnt out. The practice of law is extremely stressful and all consuming. While I understand that the benefits to the public come first, the bar is also always concerned with the mental health of attorneys. Mental health and substance abuse issues run rampant in our profession for a reason. This is why things like the Lawyers Assistance Program and other mental health resources exist for attorneys. The benefits of decreasing burnout and improving the quality of life among our State's attorneys should also be taken into consideration. Less hours on the road and sitting in courthouses means less burnout and more time for family because hours on the road and in courthouses will not have to be made up for with working later hours. I find that I now end my day at a much more reasonable hour given that I can immediately begin to work on other matters as soon as a remote proceeding is over.

Sincerely,

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