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Sent: Monday, August 16, 2021 10:57 AM
To: Comments Mailbox
Subject: [External]Continuation of Remote proceedings

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Good morning,

I am writing to express my support of the continuation of virtual hearings for most court matters.

I am a municipal prosecutor in 11 towns in Camden County, as well as a private practitioner with a concentration in family law. Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, I tried a number of cases- including municipal court criminal and traffic matters, custody trials, and Final Restraining Order hearings- on the Zoom platform. Not only was it efficient and effective, it allowed me to avoid having to reschedule or ready hold matters where I would not have been able to appear in person in two courts a half hour apart, for example, after finishing one list and needing to start another. With Zoom, this took only a few seconds as opposed to driving half an hour in the car and making multiple parties, including the judge, wait for me to arrive. Zoom has allowed me to resolve more municipal and family cases more quickly, as people are able to appear remotely from anywhere and have tried to resolve matters for which they ordinarily may not appear due to work, location, etc. I believe I resolved more trial matters during the last year in municipal court due to the efficiency of Zoom, with the exception of those that opted for an in-person hearing and had to wait for courts to reopen.

Recently, I had an in-person FRO trial that resolved in civil restraints, but because it was mandated by the court to be in person, I had to have another municipal prosecutor cover one court and created a delay for another court due to the fact that I would be in the car driving when the case was ready to be heard as opposed to sitting at my desk on Zoom and available. There seems no need to appear in person on FROs when the matter is confirmed to be resolved either by a dismissal or civil restraints, or if a postponement is requested. These are quick matters but require litigants to miss work and other obligations in order to appear in person. For trials, if the litigants request in-person hearings, they should be optional.

In short, I highly support the continuation of most matters via Zoom. There are certainly matters that the parties may decide need to be litigated in person, but this could be handled on a case-by-case basis as opposed to being mandated.

Thank you for your time and consideration on this issue.

Very truly yours,
Steven J. Petersen, Esq.