



The Louisiana Supreme Court NEWS

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MAKING BEST USE OF TECHNOLOGY IN CHALLENGING TIMES

New Orleans - The Louisiana Supreme Court and courts statewide are utilizing technology during this challenging time to protect the constitutional rights and public safety of the citizens of the state while maintaining access to Louisiana courts. This has been a joint effort of the Supreme Court's Information Technology (IT) department and the Louisiana District Judges Association, requiring strong, committed and compassionate leadership, and a dedicated staff of qualified professionals who are astute in their respective fields.

To comply with safety concerns and observe social distancing, many Louisiana state courts are serving citizens by conducting daily operations remotely as much as possible. In response to the ongoing coronavirus pandemic with resulting mandates from the President and Governor to limit crowd sizes and stay home orders, the Louisiana Supreme Court directed the courts to immediately limit in-person proceedings. The Supreme Court's Order of March 26 stated: "All essential court functions should be conducted with the use of video and telephone conferencing whenever possible. Any court lacking the technological capabilities to implement this mandate shall notify the Judicial Administrator of the Louisiana Supreme Court so that accommodations can be made." Since that order was issued, the IT Department of the Supreme Court has been in constant contact with lower courts and has been working non-stop to assist in this area. The Louisiana Judicial College (LJC) and the Louisiana District Judges Association (LDJA) provided guidance to all judges through their websites and hosted several online conferences which included specific attention to remote proceedings and emergency handling of matters in Civil, Criminal, Juvenile, and Family Courts during the COVID-19 pandemic. Training webinars for state judges have been taught by **24th Judicial District Court (JDC) Judge Scott Schlegel** who is Chair of the LDJA Technology Committee; **Louisiana Supreme Court staff attorney Jennifer Eagan**, and **Louisiana Supreme Court Information Technology Director James Murray**.

These training webinars had almost 300 attendees, including district, city and appellate court judges. Judge Schlegel has offered continued guidance with technology and online platforms that are both effective and secure approaches to handling court procedures during this time. In many jurisdictions however, with the implementation of new technological platforms and creative approaches, judges are scheduling and proceeding with much more than simply emergency matters.

Many judges throughout the state immediately implemented video conferencing in their courts. Appellate courts are using these tools as well; the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeal utilizes video conferencing for panel discussion on individual cases and for weekly conferences, and is planning to hear Oral Arguments in May through the use of video conferencing for attorneys who wish to utilize it. Courts are continuing to function with limited staff in the office and others are working remotely utilizing video conferencing technology. In a number of jurisdictions, district courts which had held video arraignments with local and state jails to reduce cost and manpower required to transport incarcerated individuals to the courthouse prior to the pandemic continue to utilize that technology during this coronavirus event.

Courts have extended deadlines in cases pending before them based on guidelines from the Supreme Court. Other courts, including Appellate courts are allowing for filings to be received by fax during the pendency of this event, in addition to filings being submitted by mail or e-filing, where applicable. Courts have waived convenience fees associated with e-filing to allow for greater use of this method of submitting filings, with the goal of reducing potential coronavirus spread caused by person-to-person contact.

Additionally, the Supreme Court's Office of Language Access has worked to provide translations of court Orders in Spanish, Vietnamese, Chinese, and Arabic, to better inform and assist limited English proficient parties who utilize the court system.

At the Louisiana Supreme Court, video conferencing is a tool that has been used for many years. Chief Justice Bernette Joshua Johnson said, "The Court's IT department has worked diligently over the past few years to prepare our staff and justices with the ability to work remotely should this very type of situation arise. Their forward-thinking and preparation has allowed the Court, its justices and staff to continue working for the duration of this ongoing pandemic."

The Louisiana Supreme Court Clerk of Court's office has accepted the e-filing of documents for several years. **Public access to the Chief Justice Pascal F. Calogero, Jr. Courthouse will**

be restricted until further notice. Filings will be received via mail, although e-filing is preferred and the Court is waiving the e-filing convenience fee during this public health crisis.

The Justices have continued to consider and vote on writ applications and Opinions, albeit remotely through the use of video conferencing. During any given week IT support allows the seven Louisiana Supreme Court Justices the option to remain in the districts they serve while meeting through video conferencing to vote on writ applications and discuss administrative matters. However, since March, the Justices have met via video conferencing on an average of three times per week to consider writ applications, opinions, and administrative matters. These conferences are attended via conference call by key court staff members, who disseminate necessary orders, updates and pertinent information to citizens, court administrators and staff, the legal community and media throughout Louisiana and legal professionals in other states. The Supreme Court is also considering holding its next Oral Arguments via video conferencing.

In summation, Chief Justice Johnson commented, “Our citizens can be assured their safety is a priority as the judicial system remains open during this challenging time, thanks to technology and the efforts of our dedicated judges and court staff.”

For more e-filing information, please contact:

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