Kansas Supreme Court appoints Ad Hoc Virtual Court Proceedings Committee

TOPEKA—The Kansas Supreme Court has established an Ad Hoc Virtual Court Proceedings Committee to study and recommend best practices for using videoconferencing in Kansas courts.

Beginning March 12, the Supreme Court issued a series of orders in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. To safeguard court users, staff, and judicial officers, the court orders limited in-person contact and directed that all hearings should be conducted remotely, if possible.

Administrative Order 2020-CM-059 establishes the ad hoc committee. It states that videoconferencing has allowed the courts to provide access to justice while protecting the health and safety of court users, staff, and judicial officers.

"Courts across the state have adopted videoconferencing in different ways," Chief Justice Marla Luckert said. "It's time now to evaluate what they've done and where we want to go using this technology. This committee will find out what has worked best and share that information with all of our courts."

The Ad Hoc Virtual Court Proceedings Committee will meet for the first time Friday, June 12. Members will examine issues, explore and evaluate possible solutions, and make recommendations for best practices for videoconferencing.

The committee will study:

- current abilities to conduct court proceedings virtually;
- the tools needed to expand virtual court proceedings;
- maximizing efficiencies by conducting court proceedings virtually;
- communication with court users about virtual court proceedings;
- statutory or rule-based impediments to implementation of committee recommendations; and
- other topics benefitting the courts in planning and implementing virtual court proceedings.

Chief Judge Nick St. Peter will chair the committee. He serves in the 19th Judicial District, which is Cowley County.

"Our courts in Kansas are vastly different in terms of technology and resources," St. Peter said. "There is no one, easy solution for all of them. We want to provide the best options for courts as they begin to use or expand videoconferencing."

Others appointed to the committee are:

- Chief Judge Kevin Berens of the 15th Judicial District, composed of Cheyenne, Logan, Rawlins, Sherman, Thomas, and Wallace counties;
- District Judge Tyler Roush of the 18th Judicial District, which is Sedgwick County.
- District Judge John Weingart of the 22nd Judicial District, composed of Brown, Doniphan, Marshall, and Nemaha counties;
- District Magistrate Judge Shannon Rush of the 4th Judicial District, composed of Anderson, Coffey, Franklin, and Osage counties;
- Municipal Judge Karen Torline, City of Shawnee;
- Ellen House, district court administrator of the 18th Judicial District;
- Amanda Truan, district court administrator of the 23rd Judicial District, composed of Ellis, Gove, Rooks, and Trego counties;

- Stephanie Gerken, chief clerk of the district court in the 6th Judicial District, composed of Bourbon, Linn, and Miami counties;
- Douglas Hamilton, clerk of the district court in the 7th Judicial District, which is Douglas County;
- Jennifer Leach, clerk of the district court in the 10th Judicial District, which is Johnson County;
- Katherine Oliver, clerk of the district court in the 21st Judicial District, composed of Clay and Riley counties;
- Kim Schwarz, chief clerk of the 15th Judicial District;
- Jennifer Olson, court reporter in the 3rd Judicial District, which is Shawnee County; and
- Marilyn Targos, administrative assistant in the 30th Judicial District, composed of Barber, Harper, Kingman, Pratt, and Sumner counties.

Amber Smith, deputy judicial administrator of the Office of Judicial Administration; Sarah Hoskinson, deputy special counsel to the chief justice; and other judicial branch personnel will provide support.

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