

National Court Partners' Resources for Promoting Permanency During COVID-19 and Beyond

Families, child welfare agencies and courts alike have raised concerns about children and youth who were scheduled to have permanency hearings and placement decisions during the COVID-19 timeframes and beyond. During the “stay in place” orders, some courts are identifying innovative and creative solutions to continue down the path of permanency for children involved in dependency court. This is an important consideration to ensure permanency remains a priority and families continue to receive access to justice, while also addressing Court workload. Virtual hearings are a strategy to keep to permanency hearings now and prevent backlogged dockets in the immediate future. This resource highlights some of the content that national court partners have rapidly developed to support Judges and court staff in undertaking the new reality of virtual hearings. Additionally, it highlights federal announcements to support technology needs and barriers that may exist.

National Webinars, Guides & Other Resources

What are states and tribes doing for hearings? Are the Courts open? Are they conducting in person or virtual hearings?

- The **National Center for State Courts** (NCSC) has developed an interactive [Tableau site](#) that lists and provides links to each state’s COVID-19 websites. These lists include information on issues such as courts restricting entrance inside courthouses, courts suspending in-person proceedings, states that have mandated use and no orders, and courts urging the use of remote or virtual hearings.
- The **National American Indian Court Judges Association** (NAICJA) has developed a section of their [website](#) dedicated to sharing resources for Tribal Courts during the COVID-19 pandemic. NAICJA is also hosting a targeted webinar series focusing on various topics related to *Administering Justice in Tribal Courts During the COVID-19 Pandemic*. Topics in this webinar series include: Virtual Talking Circles, Effective Use of Technology and E-Filing, & Self-Care, Court Community Operations, and Child Welfare Safety Planning.

How should Courts conduct Virtual Hearings?

- The **National Center for State Courts** (NCSC) released an informative guide, [Strategic Issues to Consider when Starting Virtual Hearings](#). As Courts are challenged to rapidly move to remote access, this guide offers important guidance designed to help courts succeed with efforts to provide virtual hearings.
- The **National Center for State Courts** (NCSC) developed a [webinars series](#), these archived webinars feature state court administrators who have implemented remote hearings as well as judges who are conducting them.
 - **Lights, Cameras, Motion! Part 1** (April 7, 2020) – Featuring how court leaders provided the information needed to move quickly to establish and implement remote hearings.
 - **Lights, Cameras, Motion! Part 2** (April 15, 2020) – Explored the operational details of how state courts continue to maintain access to justice through remote hearings. Topics

include software security, procedures for introducing evidence, and considerations for language access and self-represented litigants.

- The **Capacity Building Center for Courts** has produced guidance for [Conducting Effective Remote Hearings in Child Welfare Cases](#). It is focused on the role of hearing participants, including children and parents.
- The **National Center for State Courts** (NCSC) is hosting [Tiny Chats](#) (short videos). These high interest videos focus on access to justice and court operations in the midst of COVID-19. [The second Tiny Chat](#) focuses on tips for Courts to keep in mind when creating a communication strategy around COVID-19.
- The **National Center for State Courts** (NCSC) has created an informative checklist and mock script for Judges to help navigate remote hearings.
 - [Checklist for Judges in Virtual Proceedings](#). This document includes a remote proceeding bench card, a remote proceeding checklist and a FAQ from Michigan. Information and background on legal standards on public right to access and a live stream bench card from Texas.
 - [Mock Video Conference Hearing-Pierce County \(WA\) Superior Court](#) This resource offers a scripted video featuring Judge Tim Ashcroft that includes example scenarios that can occur during a virtual hearing.
- The **ABA Center on Children and the Law** hosted a webinar ([COVID-19 and Child Welfare Cases](#)) highlighting federal guidance on emerging legal issues aimed at helping attorneys and judges make case-by-case decisions on all important aspect of child welfare legal proceedings that will be impacted by COVID-19.
- The **National Association of Counsel for Children** (NACC) hosted a [webinar](#) offering guidance and practical tips to safeguard and advance the rights of youth in the child welfare system during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond. Concrete tools to determine ongoing and unique client needs and how to maintain, modify and increase zealous advocacy amid the pandemic.

What about specialty court hearings for older youth?

- The **National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges** (NCJFCJ), in collaboration with the National Association of Drug Court Professionals (NADCP), hosted a [three-part online learning series](#) for juvenile drug treatment court (JDTC) teams to share and discuss alternative strategies that address new and unprecedented challenges faced by JDTCs due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The three-part learning series is scheduled throughout the month of April and will be provided via webinar. This webinar series will be archived on the NCJFCJ website shortly.
 - How to Enhance Supervision Strategies While Practicing Social Distancing (April 15, 2020)
 - How to Keep Youth and Families Engaged in Treatment While Practicing Social Distancing (April 22, 2020)
 - How to Continue Helping Youth Build Skills While Practicing Social Distancing (April 29, 2020)

What funding is available to help with technology for remote hearings?

- On April 16, 2020, the **federal Children's Bureau** released a letter addressed to Chief Justices and State Court Administrators urging judicial leaders to work closely with Court Improvement Programs' (CIP) to acquire and support telework and video conferencing equipment and software. [CIP program funds](#) can be used to purchase technology and support virtual hearings.
- On March 27, 2020, the **federal Children's Bureau** released a [letter addressed to child welfare legal and judicial leaders](#) regarding statutory requirements and encouraging jurisdictions to work in partnership in order to ensure that parents, children, and youth are represented and able to participate in all proceedings, whether conducted in-person or virtually. The Children's Bureau included, as an attachment to the letter, a list of low cost or no cost communication platform and applications used around the country for participation in hearings, reviews and attorney communications.
- The **National Center for State Courts** (NCSC) are hosting [Tiny Chats](#), which are short videos of high interest around access to justice and court operations in the midst of COVID-19. The third Tiny Chat focuses on [Federal Pass Through Funding](#).

What technology platforms exist to assist courts with virtual or remote hearings?

The suggestions below are not an exhaustive list of technology options, but are some of the more utilized platforms available.

- **Zoom**
Details and signup can be found [here](#).
- **Cisco Webex**
Details and signup can be found [here](#).
- **GoToMeeting**
Details and signup can be found [here](#).
- **LifeSize**
Details and signup can be found [here](#).

Does your Court need more information and instruction?

- The **National Center for State Courts** (NCSC) is offering free 30-90 minute **consultation appointments** ("[The Doctor is In](#)"). The purpose of these consultations is to target one specific challenge with professionals offering insights related to experiences and technical assistance solutions.