

# Agenda

## Supreme Court Advisory Committee

### Utah Rules of Civil Procedure

Dec. 6, 2023

4:00 to 6:00 p.m.

Via [Webex](#)

Welcome and approval of minutes	Tab 1	Lauren DiFrancesco
Reminder from Utah Supreme Court	Tab 2	Lauren DiFrancesco
Remote Hearings	Tab 3	Tim Pack
Rule 76 - continued discussion	Tab 4	Susan Vogel
Rules 12 and 83 - back from public comment	Tab 5	Lauren DiFrancesco
Rule 74 - contact information when attorney withdraws	Tab 6	Lauren DiFrancesco
Rule 5(a)(2) and 5(b)(3) - create subcommittee		Lauren DiFrancesco
Rule 5 - continued discussion on service	Tab 7	Loni Page
Rule 42 - filings when cases are consolidated	Tab 8	Lauren DiFrancesco
Rules 7(k), (l), (m), and 37 applying in family law cases		Lauren DiFrancesco / Samantha Parmley
2024 Schedule	Tab 9	Lauren DiFrancesco / Rod Andreason
<i>Rules moved to the Supreme Court</i> - Check for style guide amendments		
<b>Pipeline items:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Omnibus Subcommittee</li><li>- Rule 47 Attorney Voir Dire</li><li>- Third Party Financing</li><li>- Standard POs Subcommittee</li><li>- Rule 62 Subcommittee</li><li>- Rule 53A Special Masters</li><li>- Removal of gendered pronouns by Plain Language Subcommittee</li><li>- Records Classification</li><li>- Probate Subcommittee</li><li>- Rule 7A and 37 - Motion for Sanctions</li><li>- Rule 3(a)(2)</li><li>- Rule 4 and §78B-8-302(7)</li></ul>		Lauren DiFrancesco

# Tab 1

**UTAH SUPREME COURT ADVISORY COMMITTEE  
ON RULES OF CIVIL PROCEDURE**

**Summary Minutes – October 25, 2023  
In-Person and via Webex**

**THIS MEETING WAS CONDUCTED ELECTRONICALLY VIA WEBEX**

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<b>Committee members</b>	<b>Present</b>	<b>Excused</b>	<b>Guests/Staff Present</b>
Rod N. Andreason, Vice-Chair	<b>X</b>		Stacy Haacke, Staff
Lauren DiFrancesco, Chair	<b>X</b>		Keri Sargent
Trevor Lee		<b>X</b>	Crystal Powell
Ash McMurray	<b>X</b>		Glenda Pittman
Michael Stahler	<b>X</b>		
Timothy Pack	<b>X</b>		
Loni Page	<b>X</b>		
Bryan Pattison	<b>X</b>		
Judge Clay Stucki	<b>X</b>		
Judge Andrew H. Stone	<b>X</b>		
Justin T. Toth		<b>X</b>	
Susan Vogel	<b>X</b>		
Tonya Wright	<b>X</b>		
Judge Rita Cornish	<b>X</b>		
Commissioner Catherine Conklin	<b>X</b>		
Giovanna Speiss		<b>X</b>	
Jonas Anderson		<b>X</b>	
Heather Lester		<b>X</b>	
Jensie Anderson	<b>X</b>		
Judge Blaine Rawson	<b>X</b>		
Judge Ronald Russell	<b>X</b>		
Rachel Sykes			
Judge Laura Scott, <i>Emeritus</i>			
James Hunnicutt, <i>Emeritus</i>			

## **(1) INTRODUCTIONS**

The meeting started at 4:04 p.m. after forming a quorum. Ms. Lauren DiFrancesco welcomed the Committee and guests.

## **(2) APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

Ms. DiFrancesco asked for approval of the September 2023 Minutes subject to amendments noted by the Minutes subcommittee. Mr. Rod Andreason moved to adopt the Minutes as amended. Mr. Michael Stahler seconded. The Minutes were unanimously approved.

## **(3) AFFIDAVITS, DECLARATIONS, AND VERIFIED DOCUMENTS**

Mr. Ash McMurray presented on the work his subcommittee has done in standardizing the use of the terms “affidavits,” “declarations,” and “verified documents” throughout the Rules in conformity with the Utah Unsworn Declarations Act which removes the distinction between the various types of sworn document. He noted that the subcommittee’s first objective was to create the least amount of language change throughout the Rules but that became very cumbersome as it required too many references to the statute. He noted that the subcommittee then decided to establish one consistent term to cover affidavits declarations and verified documents along with a definition to consolidate the meaning. The term decided was “declaration” consistent with the language in the Act. He also proposed the creation of new Rule 87 which would contain a definition.

Ms. DiFrancesco questioned if the use of affidavit or unsworn declaration throughout the Rules is necessary given the proposed Rule 87 as it seems duplicative. Mr. McMurray clarified that Rule 87 includes the various definitions between sworn and unsworn declarations, and affidavits but only “declaration” is used throughout the Rules. Ms. Loni Page questioned whether the terms “Affiant” and “Declarant” were also consolidated in the Rules. Ms. McMurray noted that those terms were removed and consolidated. The Committee discussed language changes to draft Rule 87 under the definitions of “verified,” and “signed.” The Committee discussed creating a definition that doesn’t introduce a new term. The Committee discussed the impact of the amendment for self-represented persons to ensure that changes do not make self-representation more difficult.

The Committee also discussed the primary purpose of the Act in doing away with the need to notarize documents and providing for additional means to verify beyond an oath. Judge Andrew Stone expressed his concern that the Committee needs to ensure that changes are not overbroad where the notary also verifies the identity of the person signing documents which is critical in many types of cases such as parental rights and adoptions dealing with

voluntary relinquishment. The Committee generally discussed the language in specific laws in comparison to the language in the Rule to ensure that the Rule incorporates exceptions laid out in various rules statutes. Ms. DiFrancesco suggested that the Committee table the Rule to allow for research into more specific statutory examples. No Motion was made or taken.

**(4) RULE 60. FRAUD ON THE COURT.**

Judge Rita Cornish summarized the research memorandum circulated to the Committee on Rule 60(b)(3) (motion to set aside based on fraud on the court). She noted that the issue that the subcommittee is having is that the court's footnote in the background case law is based on a false premise where she noted that the Utah supreme court has repeatedly addressed that there should be no distinction between fraud on the court (extrinsic fraud) and fraud on a party (intrinsic fraud). The subcommittee suggested that the Committee seek further instructions from the Utah supreme court on how to proceed given the history of the case law and the instructions to the subcommittee. Ms. DiFrancesco suggested having an informal meeting with the Justices that participated in the opinion rather than having the issue on the formal conference calendar. No motion was made or taken.

**(5) RULE 56. MOTION FOR SUMMARY JUDGMENT DEADLINE FEEDBACK FROM UTAH SUPREME COURT**

Ms. DiFrancesco summarized the proposed amendment on the Motion for Summary Judgment deadline. The Utah supreme court agrees with the proposal, and the proposal has been sent out for public comment but there is a concern that with no procedural deadline, cases might go on indefinitely. The court would like to see more comprehensive language or time guides to ensure that cases are moving forward. Specifically, to consider modifying the language of subparagraph (b) to include that judges may set deadlines for motions for summary judgment, certificates of readiness for trial, or any language that would establish a timeline to move the case forward. Ms. DiFrancesco will send the proposal back to the subcommittee before it is discussed generally.

**(6) RULE 104. DIVORCE DECREE UPON AFFIDAVIT**

Ms. Susan Vogel updated the Committee that the work continues on this issue, but a draft is not ready yet and should be ready for the next meeting.

**(7) RULE 76. UPDATING CONTACT INFORMATION AND MYCASE**

Ms. Vogel addressed the status of the MyCase system and offered to present more specifically on it. She reported that the court is close to having functionality available in MyCase so that when a MyCase user updates their email address, their email address in CORIS updates automatically. When that happens, there will be a note entered in the case history. Rule 76 will need to be amended to avoid confusion. The amendment requires that attorneys and self-represented people must keep their contact information (address, email and phone number) current with the court and the notice must be presented to the other parties unless a court order provides otherwise such as in protective orders.

Judge Cornish noted that some of the civil rules apply in criminal cases and there is a concern for self-represented persons updating their information in MyCase which will not update the criminal courts. She encouraged taking a closer look at the Rule to ensure that the criminal system is not affected. Judge Stone questioned whether parties would be confined to using MyCase. Ms. Vogel explained that no Rule will require a party to use the MyCase system because even though it expands the options for persons with access to technology; such a Rule would limit the options of persons who do not have that access. No Motion was made or taken.

#### **(7) DECEMBER MEETING**

Ms. DiFrancesco notified the Committee that the December meeting will be held on December 6, 2023, at 4:00 p.m. There will be no meeting in November.

#### **(12) ADJOURNMENT.**

The meeting was adjourned at 6:00 p.m. The next meeting will be December 6, 2023, at 4:00 p.m.

# Tab 2



Nicholas Stiles  
Appellate Courts Administrator

Nicole J. Gray  
Clerk of Court

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P.O. Box 140210  
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Matthew B. Durrant	Chief Justice
John A. Pearce	Associate Chief Justice
Paige Petersen	Justice
Diana Hagen	Justice
Jill M. Pohlman	Justice

October 30, 2023

To: Utah Supreme Court Committee Staff and Chairs  
From: Nick Stiles  
Re: Reminder about Voting Members

Thank you for your continued service to the Utah Supreme Court. The Court appreciates all the effort that goes into running each of your committees.

An issue has come up recently concerning voting and non-voting members. [Rule 11-101](#) governs the creation and composition of the Supreme Court's Committees. This rule allows for up to two non-voting emeritus members on each committee. The common practice across most Supreme Court committees is to also have ex-officio members that serve as liaisons between an organization/court level, and the committee. Ex-officio members that are permanently on the committee because of their position, should be non-voting members.

Committee staff all have updated member lists and will be able to provide a list to committee leadership if needed. Please remind your committees that only members in voting positions (not emeritus, ex-officio, or recording secretaries) are permitted to vote.

Please don't hesitate to reach out if you have any questions. Thank you again for your service to the Supreme Court, it is very much appreciated.

Respectfully,

Nick Stiles  
Appellate Courts Administrator

# Tab 3



# Supreme Court of Utah

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Telephone 801-578-3834

Nicholas Stiles  
Appellate Court Administrator

## MEMORANDUM

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To: Advisory Committees on the Rules of Criminal, Civil, Juvenile, and Appellate Procedure  
CC: Boards of Judges for Juvenile, District, Appellate, and Justice Courts.  
From: Utah Supreme Court  
Re: Remote vs. In-person Hearings

In October 2022, the Green Phase Workgroup presented its *Report and Recommendation to the Judicial Council and Supreme Court Regarding the Ongoing Use of Virtual Meeting Technology to Conduct Court Proceedings*. The Judicial Council considered the matter extensively and in November 2022, published its *Findings and Recommendations Regarding Ongoing Use of Virtual Meeting Technology to Conduct Court Proceedings*. The report provided in relevant part, “The Judicial Council recommends the Supreme Court consider establishing a rule that allows hearing participants to request permission to appear opposite the decision of the judicial officer.”<sup>1</sup>

The Supreme Court recently considered this charge and requests its Advisory Committees provide recommendations on the following questions as they relate to each committee respectively:

1. Should there be a rule of procedure that allows participants to request their hearing be held opposite the decision of the judicial officer?
2. Should there be a rule of procedure that provides a presumption regarding certain hearing types? (Example: non-evidentiary, status hearings, etc.)
3. Should there be a rule of procedure that provides an appeal process for challenging the decision of a judicial officer as it relates to remote vs. in-person hearings, and if so, who should consider the appeal? (Example: presiding judge)

The Supreme Court welcomes the input from the various Boards of Judges concerning these questions, and invites the Boards to attend relevant advisory committee meetings or provide input directly to the Supreme Court.

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<sup>1</sup> Both reports are included in this document.

# **GREEN PHASE WORKING GROUP**

## **REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE JUDICIAL COUNCIL AND SUPREME COURT REGARDING ONGOING USE OF VIRTUAL MEETING TECHNOLOGY TO CONDUCT COURT PROCEEDINGS**

October 14, 2022



# Table of Contents

[Executive Summary](#)

[Introduction](#)

[Benefits and Drawbacks of Virtual Hearings](#)

[Access to Justice](#)

[Technology Considerations](#)

[Court User Survey](#)

[Judicial Discretion vs. Patron Preference](#)

[Considerations for Judicial Officers](#)

[Juvenile Courts](#)

[Justice and District Courts](#)

[Appellate Courts](#)

[Recommended Best Practices for Virtual Hearings](#)

[Court-wide Recommendations:](#)

[Recommendations for Specific Groups – Judicial Officers & Court Staff:](#)

[Recommendations for Specific Groups – Court Patrons:](#)

[Recommendations for Specific Groups – Attorneys:](#)

[Recommendations for Specific Groups – Prison & Jails:](#)

[Amending Court Rules](#)

[Court Rule Amendment Recommendations - Appearing in Court](#)

[Recommendations to Supreme Court](#)

[Recommendations to the Judicial Council](#)

[Constitutional Considerations](#)

[Initial Rule Amendments to Consider](#)

[Stakeholder Input](#)

[Future Questions](#)

[Recommendations](#)

[APPENDIX A](#)

[APPENDIX B](#)

[APPENDIX C](#)

# **REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE JUDICIAL COUNCIL AND SUPREME COURT REGARDING ONGOING USE OF VIRTUAL MEETING TECHNOLOGY TO CONDUCT COURT PROCEEDINGS**

## **Executive Summary**

The Judicial Council directed the Green Phase Working Group ( GPWG) to study the ongoing use of virtual meeting technology to conduct court proceedings. The GPWG now submits the following report and recommendations for the Council's consideration.

- The use of virtual hearings to conduct court proceedings is accompanied by benefits and drawbacks, which must be identified, monitored, and balanced to best ensure that the courts continue striving to provide the public an open, fair, efficient, and independent system for the advancement of justice.
- A 2022 survey of Utah court users shows an overwhelming preference for the continued use of virtual hearings across court user types and age groups in district, juvenile, and justice courts.
- After careful study, the GPWG favors an approach that prioritizes judicial discretion in determining whether a hearing will be in person or virtual and allows court patrons to request to participate in a different manner.
- Recommended best practices for continued use of virtual hearings revolve around adequate notification of which hearings are intended to be conducted virtually, education and technical assistance to overcome technological and user-centric barriers, clear communication regarding decorum expectations, and continuing coordination with patrons, practitioners, the public, and other stakeholders.

## Introduction

During the COVID-19 pandemic, virtual meeting technology allowed the Utah judiciary to continue striving to provide the public an open, fair, efficient, and independent system for the advancement of justice, even while public health considerations significantly restricted in-person gatherings. Judicial officers and court staff have developed proficiency in the logistics of scheduling and conducting virtual hearings, which has revealed benefits and drawbacks related to using virtual meeting technology for court proceedings.

The Judicial Council directed the Green Phase Working Group (GPWG)<sup>1</sup> to study the matter and develop recommendations regarding the ongoing use of virtual meeting technology to conduct court proceedings. While virtual hearings will undoubtedly continue to be an important tool for the judiciary, the tool's effectiveness varies based on the situation and the parties involved. The goal has been to ascertain how virtual meeting technology can be employed into the future to advance the judiciary's mission without sacrificing the effectiveness inherent in in-person proceedings.

This report:

1. identifies prevalent benefits and drawbacks of virtual hearings;
2. explores the effect of virtual hearings on access to justice;
3. addresses technology considerations;
4. presents aggregate court user feedback on the use of this technology; and
5. recommends best practice considerations moving forward.

Recommendations from the GPWG are noted with a blue background throughout the report and are listed again at the end of the report.

## Definitions

"Virtual hearing" means a court proceeding where the judicial officer, court staff, parties, and attorneys simultaneously appear and participate through the use of virtual meeting technology from different physical locations.

"Hybrid hearing" means a court proceeding where some participants are present together in the physical courtroom while other participants simultaneously appear and participate in the proceedings through the use of virtual meeting technology from a different physical location.

"Virtual meeting technology" means a software platform that enables more than one individual to simultaneously participate in the same meeting from different physical locations.

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<sup>1</sup> **Appendix A** contains a list of GPWG members and staff.

## Benefits and Drawbacks of Virtual Hearings

Virtual hearings have been critical to the operation of the judiciary during the pandemic. The use of technology allowed the courts to overcome the all-or-nothing choice between fully restricting access to the courts or exposing patrons, court staff, and judicial officers to a little-understood, highly contagious and deadly disease. Like any new technology, the benefits of virtual hearings came with drawbacks. The judiciary has learned a great deal about the utility and efficacy of virtual hearings since they became the default in 2020. Table 1 below outlines examples of the benefits and drawbacks of virtual hearings, as experienced by judicial officers, court employees, and court users throughout the state.

BENEFITS	
Access to Courts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some people will be able to attend a hearing who otherwise would not be able to do so.</li> <li>• Virtual hearings accommodate people who do not have a driver license but have access to virtual meeting technology.</li> <li>• The judiciary can draw from a larger pool of interpreters if interpreters do not have to attend court in person.</li> <li>• Extended family members and friends are able to attend proceedings such as adoptions.</li> <li>• News media outlets are able to cover hearings more regularly and across greater geographic diversity.</li> </ul>
Convenience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Court patrons can appear in court without needing to take time from work or home responsibilities.</li> <li>• Virtual jury selection is less disruptive to potential jurors.</li> </ul>
Financial Savings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Court patrons are less likely to lose wages for missing work if they are able to appear remotely.</li> <li>• Court patrons may avoid the need to pay for childcare or travel expenses to and from the courthouse.</li> <li>• Litigants may avoid having to pay their attorneys to travel to court or wait at the courthouse for their case(s) to be called.</li> </ul>
Legal Representation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Practitioners may be able to represent more clients if they travel less for hearings.</li> <li>• Litigants can draw from a larger pool of attorneys if attorneys do not have to travel to different geographic regions of the state / county / city.</li> <li>• Underserved communities have greater access to pro bono representation.</li> <li>• Attorneys in some civil cases may be able to have better communication with their clients in a virtual setting where the client better understands that the communication will be focused and efficient.</li> </ul>
Efficiency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Court patrons may spend less time unable to fulfill other responsibilities while waiting for their hearing.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Practitioners are able to accomplish more work when spending less time traveling to hearings / sitting in a courtroom waiting for their case(s).</li> <li>• Virtual hearings may be a more efficient use of resources than transporting people from jails, prisons, or other secure facilities.</li> </ul>
Safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Virtual hearings offer an increased feeling of safety for victims of crime, petitioners for protective orders and civil stalking injunctions, parties in high conflict domestic cases, volunteers and others.</li> <li>• There are fewer law enforcement and public safety concerns than are involved with physically transporting inmates to a courthouse.</li> </ul>
Comfort	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some court patrons find appearing remotely for proceedings more comfortable / less intimidating, allowing them to be more authentic</li> </ul>
Judicial Preference	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some judicial officers prefer virtual jury selection over in-person jury selection.</li> </ul>
Information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In some kinds of cases, courts receive additional information to use in decision-making when people who would not be able to participate in person are able to appear virtually.</li> </ul>
<b>DRAWBACKS</b>	
Loss of Court Efficiency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• For certain hearings, conducting the hearing virtually may take longer than doing the same work in person.</li> <li>• Fewer opportunities for counsel to visit while in the courthouse may result in fewer cases being settled on terms acceptable to the parties.</li> <li>• It can be difficult to negotiate with another party through a virtual platform.</li> </ul>
Lack of Decorum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Because virtual hearings are often viewed as less formal, some participants show a lack of decorum reflected in their dress, location when appearing, other activities going on in the background, interruptions, and lack of civility.</li> </ul>
Lack of Focus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Court participants sometimes try to multitask during virtual hearings and do not give their full attention to the court proceeding.</li> </ul>
Constraints on Other Actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It is difficult or impossible to enforce certain court orders virtually.</li> <li>• It is difficult to serve parties who would be served at the courthouse if the hearing were in person.</li> <li>• It may be difficult to get defendants to report to jail when custody is ordered through a virtual hearing.</li> </ul>
Resource Limitations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some jails are unable to accommodate the volume or timing of virtual hearings.</li> <li>• Lack of necessary equipment or insufficient access to the internet may limit or prevent some people from appearing through Webex.</li> </ul>

Communication Friction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communication between attorneys and clients may suffer during virtual hearings and requires more planning to accommodate.</li> <li>• There are challenges using the Language Line (interpretation resource) in virtual hearings.</li> <li>• Obtaining victim and restitution information from prosecutors is more challenging in a virtual setting.</li> <li>• News media outlets obtain the highest quality recordings (particularly of higher profile case hearings) when recorded in person.</li> <li>• Judicial officers, attorneys, and jurors may miss important non-verbal cues that could be seen in person.</li> </ul>
Technical Issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Technical problems sometimes interfere with hearings and may hinder access to court.</li> <li>• Virtual hearings use large amounts of bandwidth.</li> <li>• Interpretation sometimes suffers during virtual hearings.</li> <li>• The quality of the record may be diminished.</li> <li>• There is a learning curve for new participants.</li> </ul>
Demands on Staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Non-IT staff are often required to provide impromptu technical support.</li> <li>• With the current system, scheduling virtual hearings requires additional work for staff.</li> </ul>
Legal Concerns	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Virtual hearings may present constitutional deficiencies for some criminal hearings.</li> <li>• It can be difficult to judge the credibility of witnesses or ensure that witnesses are not impermissibly relying on extrinsic sources or aided by other individuals when providing testimony (despite amending the rule to include additional language in the oath).</li> <li>• It can be difficult to know whether another person is in the room with a virtual participant, trying to influence that participant.</li> </ul>

*Table 1 – Benefits and Drawbacks of Virtual Hearings*

## Access to Justice

Access to justice has been, is, and will continue to be a primary consideration when assessing court operations, including the use of virtual meeting technology. One of the benefits of virtual hearings has been an increase in access to justice for many people.

- Some parties find that it is much easier to participate in court proceedings virtually than to appear in person. Through the use of virtual hearings, barriers such as arranging transportation, finding daycare, or taking time off from work or other life responsibilities are reduced or eliminated. For some people, these barriers are the difference between being able to access court services and having to delay, or even forgo, court involvement, some of which affects physical safety. For others, these barriers could be the difference between a default judgment and the ability to meaningfully participate in their case. In some instances, it will be the difference between participation in an occupancy hearing and becoming homeless.
- Virtual hearings can reduce barriers by allowing court patrons to feel safe by appearing in a comfortable place and in a different location than the person they fear. Though a court patron in this situation may be capable of attending an in-person hearing, such a patron may reasonably view virtual hearings as increasing their access to the courts.
- Virtual hearings provide greater access for some court patrons and practitioners with disabilities. At least one attorney explained that he is often not able to attend in-person hearings because of his disabilities. The use of virtual hearings has allowed him to significantly expand his law practice because he is able to attend many more proceedings. This provides greater access to the attorney and his clients.
- For many people, virtual hearings provide greater access to justice simply because they are more convenient. While mere convenience may not override other considerations, it is still an important factor.

There are also aspects of virtual hearings that can impede access to justice. These obstacles must be understood and considered to ensure that the judiciary provides the best opportunities for the public to access court services.

- Some court patrons lack sufficient internet access, have limited means to purchase or maintain the necessary hardware, or are not comfortable with technology generally. This can impair or completely prevent the individual from appearing or effectively advocating their position in the case.
- Even for the users most comfortable with virtual hearings, technical problems outside of the individual's control can present barriers to accessing justice. Virtual platforms obviously depend on reliable networks and sufficient bandwidth. Some court patrons may use a less-than-optimal network that disrupts the hearing, making it difficult for the court to hear them and difficult for the patrons to follow what is taking place in the hearing. The demand for internal network bandwidth by court staff and judges

sometimes exceeds supply, causing disruptions to virtual hearings and other network uses.

- Virtual hearings are also more prone to create issues with the quality of the audio recording of the court proceedings. Disruptions from other court patrons in the same hearing, bandwidth constraints and fluctuations, and sometimes limitations of the virtual platform itself have compromised the quality of the audio recordings that constitute “the record.” Recording quality concerns span the spectrum from minor annoyance in some cases to rendering the record completely useless during the transcription process. The diminishment of reliable recording quality is a clear and significant problem, particularly if issues in a case evade meaningful and complete appellate review due to a compromised recording.

The platform providers and our internal IT team have done much to improve the quality of the virtual hearing recordings and specific additional improvements are anticipated to be completed in the near future. With support from the Judicial Council, the IT and facilities teams are installing kiosks in courthouses throughout the state that provide reliable access to virtual hearings. The IT team has also been working hard to secure expanded bandwidth and provide support and training along with the necessary hardware and software.

## **Technology Considerations**

Instituting virtual hearings in the Utah courts at the onset of the pandemic required the judiciary to purchase and roll out new technology, train judicial officers and employees, collaborate with system partners, and increase IT team support. A forward-looking and effective virtual hearings strategy will require additional and upgraded hardware and software, continual network monitoring and improvements, and significant time to fully implement.

### ***Hardware and Software***

The Utah courts have invested significant time and resources into establishing a baseline hardware and software foundation for conducting virtual hearings. These previous investments, coupled with planned upgrades, position the courts to continue using virtual and hybrid hearings into the future.

Early in the pandemic, the Utah courts determined that Webex was the virtual meeting technology platform best suited to the needs of the judiciary. The number of Webex accounts available to judicial officers and court employees has gradually increased since the beginning of the pandemic as licensing needs and available resources have allowed. The judiciary currently has approximately 1,900 Webex licenses for state and local courts. Most of the state courts' computers have been upgraded to meet the minimum standards for Webex, but some outdated computers remain in use and will need to be replaced.

Beyond the necessary software licensing and the computers to operate that software, other hardware and technology upgrades in the courtrooms statewide have been necessary to conduct efficient and effective virtual and hybrid hearings. Numerous courtroom upgrades such as rolling media carts, additional monitors to display proceedings to the parties, and video cameras have been purchased and installed to support both virtual and hybrid hearings. In the near future, additional upgrades will be installed in courtrooms to better facilitate remote appearances, the presentation of evidence, and other related functionalities. Important additional upgrades to hardware and software are planned including: enabling simultaneous interpretation; allowing Webex audio to be recorded directly to the courts' official audio recording platform "For The Record" (FTR); and cloud migration of FTR data.

### ***Network Requirements***

The increased use of virtual court hearings and meetings has at times placed a nearly overwhelming load on the courts' network capabilities and bandwidth. This voluminous data transmission burden has resulted in slow network response times for critical systems to function well. It is anticipated that these challenges will not be fully resolved until an ARPA-funded<sup>2</sup> network upgrade is completed in December 2024. This upgrade is intended to optimize system performance through the creation of discrete network connections to route network traffic for the courts' internal applications (CORIS, CARE, etc.) separately from external applications (Webex, Google services, etc.).

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<sup>2</sup> "ARPA" is the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (H.R. 1319), enacted on March 11, 2021.

## ***Other Technology-related Considerations and Challenges***

While the advancements and expanded use of technology are critical to the successful ongoing use of virtual and hybrid hearings, there are some challenges that the courts should anticipate and prepare for:

- judicial officer and court staff training will remain a significant need;
- reliance for support from the IT team will increase and add additional pressures on a small support staff tasked with handling high support volume;
- supply chain issues for hardware and devices will likely present ongoing challenges into the foreseeable future; and
- upgrades such as Webex kiosks, permanent cameras in all courtrooms, an accessible and intuitive public portal, FTR migration to the cloud, simultaneous interpretation, and other changes will be implemented gradually through December 2024, which will require the courts to adopt some short-term solutions while coping with the necessary time to complete these critical technology upgrades.

### **GPWG Recommendation**

Continue to invest in IT staff necessary to support virtual and hybrid hearings and to provide training to employees, judges and commissioners.

## Court User Survey

During the summer of 2022, the Utah State Bar's Access to Justice Commission, in partnership with the Utah Judicial Council, conducted a limited survey of court users (primarily in the Third District) about their experiences with virtual hearings from the fall of 2021 through the spring of 2022. The results, which provide useful information for the judiciary, are found in "*Utah Survey of Court Users: The Impact of Remote Hearings on Access to Justice, June 2022.*"<sup>3</sup>

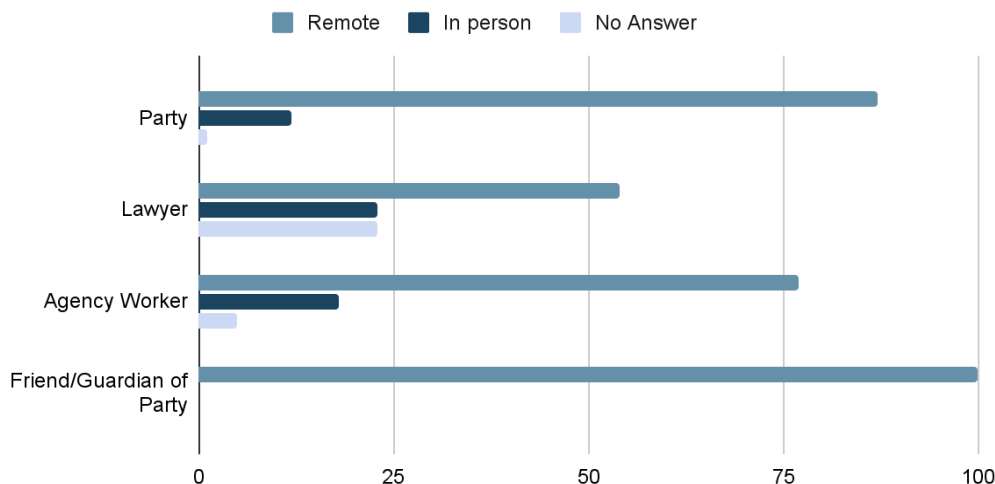
At the time the report was published, a total of 212 individuals had provided survey responses, including 116 parties, 68 lawyers, 22 government agency workers, and 5 friends/guardians of a party. These individuals participated in a variety of hearings in district court (criminal and civil), juvenile court (delinquency and child welfare), and justice court (criminal, traffic, and small claims).

The most conclusive survey result was that 75% of respondents across all types of survey participants expressed a preference for virtual hearings.<sup>4</sup> Parties were the most likely group to prefer virtual hearings (87%), followed by agency workers (77%) and lawyers (54%).<sup>5</sup> See Figure 1.

While the preference of court users is only one consideration among many, it is strong evidence that there is value in conducting certain court proceedings through virtual hearings.

**Figure 1. Hearing Preference by Type of Participant**

Source: Utah Survey of Court Users: The Impact of Remote Hearings on Access to Justice, June 2022.



<sup>3</sup> See **Appendix B** for the Utah State Bar Access to Justice Commission full survey report.

<sup>4</sup> Respondents were asked "For your court hearing or activity today, which do you prefer?" and were given two choices: "I prefer participating in person at the courthouse" and "I prefer participating remotely (by video, phone, or virtually)."

<sup>5</sup> 100% of "friends / guardians of party" preferred virtual hearings, though the sample size of this group was five individuals.

## Judicial Discretion vs. Patron Preference

There are many approaches the Judicial Council could adopt regarding the ongoing use of virtual hearings. In discussing various approaches, the GPWG weighed three main considerations: patron preference, consistency, and judicial discretion.

**Consistency.** There is value in having a consistent approach throughout the state. Court patrons know what to expect and can plan accordingly. Attorneys know whether a hearing is likely to be quick because it is virtual or whether the hearing will involve significant travel time to and from the courthouse. This is especially helpful for attorneys who practice in front of multiple judicial officers in different districts. It matters even more for non-profit legal service providers; they provide legal services across the state and have minimal administrative support to keep track of and cope with varying requirements. These agencies and other stakeholders have expressed a preference for statewide consistency.

**Patron Preference.** Public perception and participation are significantly impacted by the type of hearing. When attorneys, parties, and other court patrons can choose whether to access court remotely or in person, they are better able to manage their work and family obligations, schedules, finances, transportation, and personal safety. Court administration in Ohio has found that court users rank the courts higher in access and fairness when they are allowed to choose the venue because it allows them to participate in the process instead of just having the court process happen to them.

**Judicial Discretion.** Every hearing involves unique circumstances and people, and the judicial officer is in the best position to determine whether a virtual hearing or in-person hearing best serves the interests of justice given those unique factors. Additionally, our state comprises diverse geographic regions with unique strengths, needs, and characteristics. It is difficult to craft a single approach to determining whether hearings will be held virtually or in person that adequately serves the needs of all districts. Maximizing judicial discretion also allows judges to consider the impact virtual or in-person hearings have on their individual staff members.

The GPWG discussed and ultimately rejected an approach used by some states that establishes presumptions or mandates for every type of hearing. Though this approach establishes consistency, it almost completely ignores judicial discretion and the reality that every case is different. The GPWG also worried that complete judicial discretion discounts the feedback received from external stakeholders and leads to practices that are inconsistent for similar types of hearings.

In an effort to give appropriate weight to all three of these considerations, the GPWG recommends the following approach.

1. **Judicial discretion**

Judicial officers consider the factors discussed below in “Considerations for Judicial Officers” and other information relevant to the case, hearing, and parties and then determine whether a hearing will be in-person or virtual.

## 2. **Court Patron Requests**

- a. Where an in-person hearing is scheduled and a participant requests that they be allowed to participate virtually, the judicial officer must allow them to participate virtually if the participant shows good cause, which permission shall not be unreasonably withheld.
- b. Where a virtual hearing is scheduled and a participant requests that they be allowed to participate in person, the judicial officer must allow them to participate in person if the participant shows good cause, which permission shall not be unreasonably withheld.

## 3. **Good Cause**

A good cause standard should be established, as discussed below in “Amending Court Rules.”

## 4. **Court Technology**

- a. Courtroom technology must provide remote participants the same opportunity as in-person attendees to hear, view, and participate in the court proceeding.
- b. Each district should develop a digital evidence plan to standardize how digital evidence is managed within the district.

## 5. **Remote Attendee Obligations**

- a. A person who attends a court proceeding virtually must use a device and an internet connection that will contemporaneously transmit video and audio with sufficient quality to ensure a clear, verbatim record of the proceeding. If that technology is unavailable, the person must attend the court proceeding in person. The judicial officer may choose to require only audio transmission.
- b. Remote attendees must observe the same courtroom decorum as those attending in person, including appropriate courtroom attire, behavior, and language.
- c. Remote attendees must appear from a location that does not disrupt the court proceeding and allows the attendee to participate without distractions.
- d. Attendees must never appear in a court proceeding while operating a vehicle.
- e. Attorneys appearing remotely must be on time and not delay a court proceeding by overscheduling remote appearances.

### **GPWG Recommendation**

Judicial officers should have discretion to determine whether a hearing will be in person or virtual. If a court patron requests to participate in a way other than the way identified by the judicial officer and demonstrates a valid reason, the judicial officer should be required to grant the request. Court rules should be adopted to implement this approach.

# Considerations for Judicial Officers

## **Juvenile Courts**

Addressing the individual needs of children and families is one of the foundational components of the Utah Juvenile Court. This approach extends to and influences decisions on appropriateness and effectiveness of conducting a hearing in-person or virtually. Maintaining judicial discretion in making these decisions is vital to preserving the defining characteristics of the juvenile court and ensuring an individualized approach to each case.

While the decisions on in-person and virtual hearings should be made based on unique circumstances of each case and each hearing, some juvenile court proceedings are more suitable to conduct virtually while other proceedings are more suitable for an in-person setting.

### **Virtual**

The following juvenile court hearing types may be more appropriate to conduct virtually.

- Delinquency:
  - Detention Hearings
  - Expungements
  - Entire delinquency cases (*contingent on the factors listed below*)
  - Entire delinquency cases where minors are in an out-of-county placement
- Child Welfare:
  - Custody of Refugee Minor cases (CCS Petitioner)
  - Immigrant Status cases
  - Child Welfare Reviews (*contingent on the factors listed below*)
  - Child Welfare Post Termination Reviews

### **In Person**

The following juvenile court hearing types may be more suitable to conduct in-person.

- Delinquency:
  - Trials
  - Evidentiary Hearings
  - Hearings on Motions to Suppress that include testimony
  - Competency hearings
  - Order to Show Cause/Contempt hearings
  - Criminal Information or Bind over cases that involve evidence
  - Any case where a party requests an in-person appearance
- Child Welfare:
  - Trials
  - Evidentiary hearings
  - Shelter hearings
  - Adjudication/Pretrial hearings
  - Disposition

- Permanency hearings
- Voluntary Relinquishment
- Order to Show Cause/Contempt hearings
- Any case where a party requests an in-person appearance
- Other Cases/Hearings
  - Treatment Courts
  - Petitions for Marriage
  - Judicial Bypass petitions
  - Emancipation petitions
  - Protective Orders
  - Adoption (*with an option for virtual attendance for family members out of the area*)

In making decisions on scheduling an in-person or virtual hearing, juvenile court judges should consider:

- Individual needs of youth and parents:
  - access to technology, including availability of Webex kiosks or other similar accommodations to facilitate participation in a virtual hearing;
  - transportation and travel challenges, including distance of residence from the courthouse (out of county, etc);
  - accommodation for youth enrolled in school; and
  - accommodation for working parents.
- Case Circumstances:
  - feasibility of a virtual hearing or transport for an incarcerated parent;
  - whether a case is high-profile;
  - whether a youth or parent would benefit from face-to-face interaction with the judge;
  - youth or parent lack of engagement;
  - youth is in a remote out of home placement and transport is not feasible; and
  - youth or parent display a lack of understanding of court processes or orders.
- Hearing Circumstances:
  - whether the hearing is a procedural or substantive type hearing;
  - whether evidence is being presented; and
  - whether witness testimony is required.

Juvenile court judges should additionally consider comfort level, preferences, and health accommodations of parties and teams. It may be beneficial at the time the next hearing is being scheduled to provide an opportunity for parties and participants to express their preferences regarding an in-person or virtual setting.

**GPWG Recommendation**

Juvenile court judges should consider the factors listed in this section when deciding whether a hearing will be in person or virtual.

***Justice and District Courts***

Post-pandemic, justice court judges and district court judges will continue to have the option to use in-person and virtual hearings to effectively accomplish the mission of the courts. While the state courts IT department has made significant improvements to the technology and hardware that make virtual hearings possible, the judiciary should continue to make additional investments in technology to better accommodate virtual hearings, facilitate hybrid hearings, and improve the evidence-presentation process for all hearing types in every courtroom throughout the state. Regardless of the type of hearing, an accurate audio record must be maintained.

Judicial discretion is paramount when deciding whether to hold an in-person or virtual hearing. Given the unique characteristics of each court, court location, and case, district court judges must have individual discretion to determine which hearing type will best promote the open, fair, and efficient administration of justice in each proceeding. In-person and virtual hearings offer different benefits and efficiencies, so judges will need to decide whether proceeding in person or virtually will best address the unique circumstances of each hearing.

It is also important to understand the technical limitations that impact virtual hearings. For example, some county jails have limited capacity for virtual hearings and cannot accommodate the number or length of virtual hearings a court may desire to hold.

The GPWG recommends justice court judges and district court judges consider principles of procedural fairness, factors outlined in court rule, and the following factors where relevant (listed in no particular order):

- Does an existing statute, rule, or principle of law require an in-person hearing? Can the mandatory nature of that requirement be waived by the parties (or by a single party)?
- Do all parties have sufficient access to technology for virtual hearings?
- What is the substantive or procedural importance of the hearing?
- Which type of hearing best promotes access to justice for the parties?
- Are the parties more comfortable with a virtual hearing (e.g., high-conflict domestic cases, protective order hearings, and civil stalking injunction hearings)?
- Does the type of hearing allow the parties to have access to counsel of their choice?
- Would the parties or their counsel be required to travel long distances for an in-person hearing?
- Is there a significant cost to a party for an in-person hearing (e.g., money, time, lost work, child care, cost of transportation from jail for civil proceeding, etc.)?
- Do the parties have a stated preference for a certain type of hearing? If so, how and when do parties state their hearing-type preference?

- Are the judge and court staff able to manage a virtual or hybrid courtroom effectively?
- Does the hearing make efficient use of judicial resources, facilities, and court personnel?
- Will a party be prejudiced from requiring an in-person, virtual, or hybrid hearing?
- Will the type of hearing unreasonably delay the progress of the case, increase expense, or complicate resolution of any issue?
- Will the type of hearing unreasonably limit the court's ability to assess credibility, voluntariness, or comprehension?
- Is there a fairness concern because one party has easier access to the courthouse, or greater facility with technology, and is seeking a strategic advantage?
- Does the type of hearing allow for greater access to effective interpretation services?
- Is there enough time to give notice for people to make appropriate arrangements—especially where there is a change from one hearing type to another?
- Does the type of hearing—particularly virtual and hybrid hearings—allow parties to share documents?
- In virtual and hybrid hearings, will the participants have prior or simultaneous access to documents, photos, etc., that are submitted to the courtroom?

#### **GPWG Recommendation**

Justice court judges and district court judges should consider the factors listed in this section when deciding whether a hearing will be in person or virtual.

## ***Appellate Courts***

The appellate courts have only one hearing type to consider in evaluating moving into a post-pandemic judicial environment—oral arguments. Oral arguments never have witnesses and very rarely utilize any form of evidentiary exhibits.

Likewise, procedural fairness in appellate hearings is accomplished by parties being able to clearly present their arguments and communicate with the members of the bench, and respond in rebuttal where appropriate, to opposing counsel's arguments. This of course has historically been accomplished by in-person oral arguments. Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic this was accomplished entirely via virtual hearings.

One aspect of procedural fairness that was not considered prior to the pandemic was that our appellate courts hear cases from all eight judicial districts while being housed in the Third District. This presents the question: how does this geographical arrangement impact litigants? For example, represented parties of an appeal originating in the Fifth District would possibly pay more for their appeal as their counsel is required to travel several hundred miles to Salt Lake City. Allowing for virtual appearances for these parties and attorneys, if able to be done equitably, would eliminate a procedural hurdle for the geographically distant party and increase procedural fairness.

Utah's appellate courtrooms are currently undergoing a significant technology overhaul that will allow both parties, as well as the appellate judges, to appear in person or virtually. The

technology allows one party to appear virtually while the other appears in-person, and allows one or more judges to appear remotely while the others appear in-person.

### ***Considerations for Deciding on In-person vs. Virtual Oral Argument***

- What are the locations of parties and the costs of travel? Does requiring one party to travel a significantly greater distance to the courthouse create fairness issues?
- What are the unintended impacts of having appellate courts that operate from only one courthouse in the state? Does this geographic reality impact decisions to file appeals?
- Would in-person or virtual oral argument increase the diversity of the appellate bar? Would it increase the diversity of the appellate bench?
- Which method(s) do the parties prefer for making their oral arguments?
- Which method does the appellate bench prefer for holding oral argument? Because oral argument is designed to be an opportunity for judicial officers to ask questions presented in briefing, does this preference hold more weight than the preference of the parties?
- Does the type of case matter in making the decision on remote vs. in-person?

#### **GPWG Recommendation**

Appellate court judges should consider the factors listed in this section when deciding whether a hearing will be in person or virtual.

## Recommended Best Practices for Virtual Hearings

The experiences of judicial officers and court staff with virtual hearings over the past two years helped the GPWG identify best practices for the ongoing use of virtual hearings. The following pages of this report provide both court-wide recommendations and recommendations for specific groups including judges and court staff, court patrons, attorneys, and the prison and jails.

### ***Court-wide Recommendations:***

1. Each court location should update judicial officers, court staff, patrons, attorneys, and community partners (e.g., the prison and jails) on relevant Webex updates and process changes. This may include a page on the court website for updates and regular revisions to posted Webex guides.
2. Each court calendar should clearly indicate if a hearing is scheduled to be held in person or through a virtual or hybrid hearing. If the calendar setting is for a virtual or hybrid hearing, the Webex link for the hearing should be included on the calendar for the parties, public, and media to access, as appropriate (i.e., some hearings — such as adoptions — are not open to the general public or media and would therefore not have a publicly-accessible Webex link).
3. A party who shows up at the courthouse for a virtual hearing — whether due to calendaring confusion or inability to access a virtual hearing on their own — should be provided access to participate in the virtual hearing. To facilitate this access, kiosks should be available at every courthouse for patrons to participate in virtual hearings as needed.
4. To address current challenges with the courts' network bandwidth, it is recommended that court employees working at a court location avoid using the wireless network and instead connect to the wired network whenever and wherever possible.
5. Court employees working at the same court location who attend a virtual meeting should gather as a group in a single location to attend the meeting from a single device and network connection as this reduces bandwidth pressure on the courts' network.
6. The public wireless networks in each court location share a statewide connection, resulting in limited capacity to support parties, attorneys, and members of the public who may expect to use the courts' public wireless network to attend remote hearings. These court participants should connect to virtual hearings using networks other than the courts' public wireless networks at the courthouse.

## Recommendations for Specific Groups – Judicial Officers & Court Staff:

JUDICIAL OFFICERS & COURT STAFF		
1	<b>Notices:</b> <i>Contents</i>	<p>All notices for virtual hearings should include at a minimum the following information (taking into consideration Rule 43 of the Utah Rules of Civil Procedure):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the date and time of the hearing;</li> <li>• the type of hearing – virtual, hybrid, or in-person;</li> <li>• the purpose of the hearing;</li> <li>• how to join the hearing, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– the Webex link (or how to access that link);</li> <li>– if permitted, how to call-in for the hearing;</li> <li>– whether participant video must be enabled;</li> <li>– how to access virtual hearing kiosks at a court location;</li> </ul> </li> <li>• what to expect at a virtual hearing;</li> <li>• how to file, serve, and present evidence;</li> <li>• what patrons should tell their witnesses;</li> <li>• contact information for technical assistance (<i>see Recommendation #5</i>);</li> <li>• the process for submitting and presenting evidence (<i>see Recommendation #8</i>); and</li> <li>• how to request interpretation or accommodation (<i>see Recommendation #12</i>).</li> </ul>
2	<b>Notices:</b> <i>Plain Language</i>	Notices should be easy to understand (i.e., in plain language, avoiding abbreviations or having standard abbreviations; etc.).
3	<b>Notices:</b> <i>Hearing Changes</i>	If a hearing is changed from in person to virtual or vice versa after notice was sent, a new timely notice should be provided to all participants.
4	<b>Notices:</b> <i>Self-Represented Parties</i>	If a self-represented party has provided an email address, notices should be sent by email. When possible, MyCase should be the preferred method for such communication.
5	Technical Assistance for Virtual Hearing Participants	<p>Each court location should have a technical assistance phone number that is included on every hearing notice. Ideally this number should be specific to each court location, but at a minimum should connect the participant to a qualified individual who can:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) assist the participant to resolve technical issues; AND</li> <li>b) communicate immediately with the judicial officer's judicial assistant that the participant is attempting to connect to the virtual hearing but is experiencing technical issues.</li> </ol>
6	Calendar Capacity	Virtual hearings may take longer and should be scheduled appropriately.

JUDICIAL OFFICERS & COURT STAFF		
7	Webex Greeting	Participants should be greeted by a screen in Webex to confirm for participants and the public that they are in the right virtual location. For example, the screen could display the name of the judge, the time hearings are scheduled to begin, and what to do while waiting.
8	<b>Instructions:</b> <i>Evidence</i>	Judicial officers and judicial assistants should provide participants with clear instructions on how to submit and present evidence to the court during a virtual hearing.
9	<b>Instructions:</b> <i>Expectations</i>	If possible, any specific expectations of the parties should be clearly communicated to the parties in advance (e.g., if a camera is required for the party's participation in the hearing, if parties are expected to have spoken/negotiated before the hearing or if breakout rooms will be available for that purpose, etc.). These expectations could be provided in a flier, district-level standing order, or the Judicial Council may want to create a rule.
10	<b>Instructions:</b> <i>Hearing Processes</i>	The judicial officer or judicial assistant should provide hearing-specific instruction on virtual hearing processes (e.g., how a party/attorney should inform the court when their case is ready to be called). "How to" materials could be created for attorneys new to virtual hearings (how to find the calendar/hearing information, tips on how to communicate with clients if they are not in the same location during the hearing, how to prepare clients, how interpretation works during hearings, communicating with opposing side in advance of the hearing, use of breakout rooms, how to present evidence, etc.)
11	<b>Instructions:</b> <i>Use of Webex</i>	The courts should provide clear instructions explaining how to use Webex. "How to" materials could be created for all Webex users. Materials for attorneys new to virtual hearings might include how to find the calendar/hearing information, tips on how to communicate with clients if they are not in the same location during the hearing, how to prepare clients, how interpretation works during hearings, communicating with opposing side in advance of the hearing, use of breakout rooms, how to present evidence, etc.
12	Interpretation & Accommodation	When an interpreter is needed, judicial assistants should make arrangements for simultaneous interpretation if possible (or direct the party or attorney on how to arrange for simultaneous interpretation). The process for requesting other accommodations should be clearly communicated to participants.
13	Ongoing Training	Judicial officers and judicial assistants should receive ongoing training on Webex and other necessary virtual hearing technology.

JUDICIAL OFFICERS & COURT STAFF		
14	Experience Sharing	The courts should provide regular opportunities for judicial officers, court staff, patrons, and stakeholders to share their feedback on the use of the virtual hearings.

### ***Recommendations for Specific Groups – Court Patrons:***

COURT PATRONS		
1	Decorum Expectations	<p>Participants <b>SHOULD</b>:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) remember that a virtual courtroom is subject to the same standards of behavior and decorum as in-person court;</li> <li>b) dress appropriately for a court appearance;</li> <li>c) be focused on the proceedings by pre-arranging care for other obligations that may need attention during the hearing (i.e., children, pets, etc.); and</li> <li>d) if late for a hearing, remain in the Webex proceeding until the judicial officer has finished calling through the other scheduled hearings before alerting the judicial officer.</li> </ul> <p>Participants <b>SHOULD NOT</b>:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>e) speak over another party or an interpreter;</li> <li>f) interrupt when joining a virtual hearing that has already started (remain muted until their case is called); and</li> <li>g) eat, drink, smoke, or drive during the hearing.</li> </ul>
2	Technology Expectations	<p>Participants <b>SHOULD</b>:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) <b>Location</b> – plan on joining the virtual hearing from a suitable location that is quiet, private, and allows the participant to focus;</li> <li>b) <b>Camera</b> – have video enabled and be visible to the court when participating in a proceeding, choosing a camera angle that avoids background distractions;</li> <li>c) <b>Lighting</b> – avoid camera angles that position a window or other bright light behind the participant (this often results in poor video quality and obscures the participant’s face);</li> <li>d) <b>Audio</b> – be aware of and try to minimize background noises;</li> <li>e) <b>Calling in on a non-smartphone</b> – avoid joining a virtual hearing via a non-smartphone, as it will limit Webex functionality (e.g., the participant won’t be able to be moved into a separate virtual room to talk with an attorney); and</li> <li>f) <b>Bandwidth</b> – use a network with sufficient bandwidth for a stable connection to the virtual hearing OR use a computer kiosk at the courthouse to join a virtual proceeding.</li> </ul>

## Recommendations for Specific Groups – Attorneys:

ATTORNEYS		
1	Expectations	<p>Expectations for attorneys should be outlined and disseminated. For example, attorneys <b>SHOULD</b>:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) <b>Title &amp; Name</b> – ensure their Webex name displays their title followed by their full name (i.e., Defense Attorney Atticus Finch);</li> <li>b) <b>Camera</b> – have video enabled and be visible to the court when participating in a proceeding, choosing a camera angle that avoids background distractions;</li> <li>c) <b>Audio</b> – be aware of and try to minimize background noises, and use a quality microphone to help ensure an accurate record;</li> <li>d) <b>Attire</b> – dress appropriately for a court appearance;</li> <li>e) <b>Simultaneous hearings</b> – log into multiple simultaneous hearings only if the attorney can effectively manage participation in each hearing, ensuring appropriate, timely, and responsive communication with each court; and</li> <li>f) <b>NEVER</b> drive during an appearance.</li> </ul>

## Recommendations for Specific Groups – Prison & Jails:

PRISON & JAILS		
1	Stakeholder Meetings	<p>Stakeholder meetings should be held to discuss and establish best practices between the courts and the prison / jails, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) communication processes to notify the correctional facility if a hearing will be in person or virtual so appropriate transportation or virtual appearance can be arranged;</li> <li>b) the need for each correctional facility to provide at least two Webex-equipped rooms per court calendar to facilitate attorney / client communication in a breakout room, while the court moves forward with other cases in the remaining room.</li> <li>c) the need for each correctional facility to have a dedicated phone that an interpreter can use to provide simultaneous interpretation during the hearing to an inmate with limited english proficiency.</li> </ul>

# **Amending Court Rules**

## ***Court Rule Amendment Recommendations - Appearing in Court***

A foundational principle of our pre-pandemic understanding was that appearing in court meant being physically present in the courtroom. In limited circumstances judicial officers and practitioners would utilize phone conferences, and, with exception to some in-custody first appearances taking place remotely from jails, video conferencing was seldom used across the state. As a result, most rules and practices did not contemplate the use of virtual meeting technology or—at a minimum—indicated a strong preference for in-person appearances. With the rapid advancement in courtroom technology experienced over the last several years, this strong preference for in-person appearances seems to be an increasingly outdated approach to the administration of justice.

Pursuant to the Utah Constitution, the Supreme Court is obligated “to adopt rules of procedure and evidence” and the Judicial Council is obligated “to adopt rules for the administration of the courts of the state.” Court rules are essential to the mission of the Utah judiciary to provide the people an open, fair, efficient, and independent system for the advancement of justice under the law. Throughout the pandemic the interpretation of the meaning of this mission has evolved. The Supreme Court and Judicial Council amended or suspended application of certain rules to accommodate necessary pandemic-related changes to previously established practice. In large part, court rules are still built on a pre-pandemic understanding of the needs of judicial officers, court staff, and patrons. This section will provide recommendations our rulemaking bodies should consider when creating and amending rules in a post-pandemic judiciary.

## ***Recommendations to Supreme Court***

The Green Phase Workgroup acknowledges that many of the necessary changes found in this section implicate the direct authority of the Utah Supreme Court. As presented in *Judicial Discretion v. Patron Preference*, the GPWG recommends the Supreme Court establish a “good cause” standard that hearing participants must demonstrate in requesting to appear opposite the decision of the judicial officer. The GPWG recommends the Supreme Court charge its various advisory committees with defining the “good cause” standard through rule. The Supreme Court’s advisory committees are uniquely suited for this task because of their diverse practitioner composition, and practice of incorporating stakeholder comments into their decision-making process. Finally, the GPWG recommends that the Supreme Court establish an appeal process when a hearing participant believes a judicial officer is not appropriately applying the “good cause” standard as defined in the relevant procedural rules. Because the “good cause” standard may vary between procedural rule chapters, it will likely be necessary for each procedural rule chapter to define an appeal process.

**GPWG Recommendation**

The Supreme Court establish a “good cause” standard that hearing participants must demonstrate in requesting to appear opposite the decision of the judicial officer. The Supreme Court should define “good cause” and establish an appeal process when a hearing participant believes a judicial officer is not appropriately applying the “good cause” standard as defined in the relevant procedural rules.

***Recommendations to the Judicial Council***

During the pandemic, districts accommodated email filing for self-represented litigants who were not able to file electronically because in-person filing was not an option. That practice proved helpful to many self-represented litigants. The GPWG discussed whether the courts should continue to allow email filing by self-represented litigants. Due to the significant workload email filing adds to clerical staff, the GPWG recommends that all initial filings by self-represented litigants be made in person or via US mail. The GPWG also recommends that the Judicial Council amend its rules to specifically authorize self-represented litigants to make subsequent filings (after the initial filing) in a case through email. Notwithstanding the above, the GPWG recommends that a patron seeking a civil protective order or civil stalking injunction be allowed to file their initial request via email due to the significant access and safety concerns implicated in these proceedings.

**GPWG Recommendation**

All initial filings by self-represented litigants should be made in person or via US mail. The Judicial Council should amend its rules to specifically authorize self-represented litigants to make subsequent filings (after the initial filing) in a case through email. Notwithstanding the above, a patron seeking a civil protective order or civil stalking injunction be allowed to file their initial request via email due to the significant access and safety concerns implicated in these proceedings.

***Constitutional Considerations***

Rulemaking bodies should explore the constitutional concerns surrounding the use of in-person and virtual hearings, most importantly whether in-person and virtual hearings are constitutionally equivalent. For example, Rule 26(a)(1) of the Utah Rules of Juvenile Procedure provides that minors have a right “to appear in person and to defend in person or by counsel.” Rule 17.5 of the Utah Rules of Criminal Procedure identifies certain types of hearings that can be held via contemporaneous transmission, while prohibiting others, and allowing for waiver of the prohibition with mutual agreement of the parties. Our historical analysis of when parties were entitled to in-person hearings may not be current with recent technological advances and the availability of virtual resources. The GPWG recommends that the judiciary’s rulemaking bodies balance the increasing need for opportunities to improve access to justice, while simultaneously ensuring court rules and practices do not violate principles of due process.

### ***Initial Rule Amendments to Consider***

In addition to rule-making bodies providing guidance on the new “good cause” standard, there are other procedural and administrative rules that may benefit from amendment or clarification. The GPWG has formulated a list of the rules with the most perceptible need for attention, which is included under **Appendix C** of this report.

## Stakeholder Input

The GPWG distributed a draft of this report to community stakeholders and government agencies, requesting their feedback.

### ***Community Stakeholders***

The most common feedback from community stakeholders was that options for virtual participation in court proceedings should continue and that court patrons should be able to request the opportunity to participate virtually even if the judicial officer has determined that the proceeding will be in person. Stakeholders explained that even though virtual hearings have some limitations and are not the best option in all circumstances, they have significantly expanded access to justice.

Multiple stakeholders expressed appreciation for virtual hearings while also noting a need for additional technical support for virtual hearing participants. Many participants will not have experience with Webex and may experience difficulties accessing a virtual hearing and navigating through Webex. Resources with detailed explanations about how to participate in a virtual hearing and employees or volunteers dedicated to assisting virtual hearing participants would help people overcome difficulties prior to and during their virtual hearing.

Two stakeholders noted that the health concerns regarding the pandemic are still very real and very serious for some people and asked for appropriate consideration of the circumstances of those people.

Stakeholders provided many additional recommendations, which are listed below.

- Coordinate with community organizations likely to provide access to technology and support efforts to strengthen these services.
- Provide dedicated staff to assist users experiencing technical problems with a virtual hearing.
- Establish consistent policies to determine whether hearings will be virtual or in person.
- Each court should have a single, consistent link used to access virtual hearings.
- For virtual calendars involving multiple cases, establish a consistent way to notify the court that a participant is prepared for their case to be called and a way to notify a participant that their case will be called next.
- Provide greater access to breakout rooms for conversations with clients and for negotiations among parties.
- Make reasonable accommodations for patrons with disabilities.
- Allow hearing participants to participate virtually upon a finding of good cause even if the court has determined the hearing will be in person.
- Provide better instructions accessing a virtual hearing and explaining the expectations for participants. This may be a short video or an information sheet.
- Provide links for all public virtual hearings in a central location on the courts' website.

- Establish consistent procedures for entering evidence in virtual hearings.
- Ask virtual hearing participants if another person is in the room in order to determine whether someone is trying to influence the participant.
- Develop procedures for patrons to participate in virtual hearings without sacrificing privacy.
- Expand the availability of court kiosks for pro se people to use for printing, scanning, and filing documents.
- In both virtual hearings and in-person hearings, allow appropriate time for participants to process questions and communicate with the judicial officer.
- Shift the approach of courts to make judicial officers seem approachable and encourage staff to help people navigate the complexities of court.
- Consider offering extended hours to accommodate people who work during the day.

### ***Government Agencies***

The Utah Department of Corrections (UDC) expressed hope that the courts would not change policies that would result in them needing to conduct more transports. UDC noted that increasing the number of transports would impact their capacity to handle other work. The Division of Juvenile Justice and Youth Services similarly expressed a hope that detention hearings could be held virtually. They noted that for youth in a community placement in their county, their case managers would plan to request in-person hearings when they felt it was necessary.

## Future Questions

The judiciary will continue to learn about the utility of virtual hearings in coming months. Periodic review of these recommendations and policies based on these recommendations is important. The judiciary should gather and analyze data, including data from court patrons and stakeholders as well as data about virtual and in-person hearings, to see how virtual hearings are serving the public and advancing the mission of the judiciary.

### **GPWG Recommendation**

The judiciary should gather and analyze data, including data from court patrons and stakeholders as well as data about virtual and in-person hearings, to see how virtual hearings are serving the public and advancing the mission of the judiciary.

There will certainly be additional questions that arise regarding the use of virtual hearings. The GPWG is willing to consider and make recommendations on any additional issues that would be helpful to the Judicial Council and Supreme Court.

## Recommendations

- Continue to invest in IT staff necessary to support virtual and hybrid hearings and to provide training to employees and judicial officers.
  - Judicial discretion vs. patron preference
1. **Judicial discretion**

Judicial officers consider the factors discussed below in “Considerations for Judicial Officers” and other information relevant to the case, hearing, and parties and then determine whether a hearing will be in-person or virtual.
  2. **Court Patron Requests**
    - a. Where an in-person hearing is scheduled and a participant requests that they be allowed to participate virtually, the judicial officer must allow them to participate virtually if the participant shows good cause, which permission shall not be unreasonably withheld.
    - b. Where a virtual hearing is scheduled and a participant requests that they be allowed to participate in person, the judicial officer must allow them to participate in person if the participant shows good cause, which permission shall not be unreasonably withheld.
  3. **Good Cause**

A good cause standard should be established, as discussed below in “Amending Court Rules.”
  4. **Court Technology**
    - a. Courtroom technology must provide remote participants the same opportunity as in-person attendees to hear, view, and participate in the court proceeding.
    - b. Each district should develop a digital evidence plan to standardize how digital evidence is managed within the district.
  5. **Remote Attendee Obligations**
    - a. A person who attends a court proceeding virtually must use a device and an internet connection that will contemporaneously transmit video and audio with sufficient quality to ensure a clear, verbatim record of the proceeding. If that technology is unavailable, the person must attend the court proceeding in person. The court may choose to require only audio transmission.
    - b. Remote attendees must observe the same courtroom decorum as those attending in person, including appropriate courtroom attire, behavior, and language.
    - c. Remote attendees must appear from a location that does not disrupt the court proceeding and allows the attendee to participate without distractions. Attendees must never appear in a court proceeding while operating a vehicle.

- Juvenile court judges should consider the following factors when deciding whether a hearing will be in person or virtually.
  - Individual needs of youth and parents:
    - access to technology, including availability of Webex kiosks or other similar accommodations to facilitate participation in a virtual hearing;
    - transportation and travel challenges, including distance of residence from the courthouse (out of county, etc);
    - accommodation for youth enrolled in school; and
    - accommodation for working parents.
  - Case Circumstances:
    - feasibility of a virtual hearing or transport for an incarcerated parent;
    - whether a case is high-profile;
    - whether a youth or parent would benefit from face-to-face interaction with the judge;
    - youth or parent lack of engagement;
    - youth is in a remote out of home placement and transport is not feasible; and
    - youth or parent display a lack of understanding of court processes or orders.
  - Hearing Circumstances:
    - whether the hearing is a procedural or substantive type hearing;
    - whether evidence is being presented; and
    - whether witness testimony is required.
  - Judges should additionally consider comfort level, preferences, and health accommodations of parties and teams.
- Justice court judges and district court judges should consider the following factors when deciding whether a hearing will be in person or virtually.
  - Does an existing statute, rule, or principle of law require an in-person hearing? Can the mandatory nature of that requirement be waived by the parties (or by a single party)?
  - Do all parties have sufficient access to technology for virtual hearings?
  - What is the substantive or procedural importance of the hearing?
  - Which type of hearing best promotes access to justice for the parties?
  - Are the parties more comfortable with a virtual hearing (e.g., high-conflict domestic cases, protective order hearings, and civil stalking injunction hearings)?
  - Does the type of hearing allow the parties to have access to counsel of their choice?
  - Would the parties or their counsel be required to travel long distances for an in-person hearing?
  - Is there a significant cost to a party for an in-person hearing (e.g., money, time, lost work, child care, cost of transportation from jail for civil proceeding, etc.)?

- Do the parties have a stated preference for a certain type of hearing? If so, how and when do parties state their hearing-type preference?
- Are the judge and court staff able to manage a virtual or hybrid courtroom effectively?
- Does the hearing make efficient use of judicial resources, facilities, and court personnel?
- Will a party be prejudiced from requiring an in-person, virtual, or hybrid hearing?
- Will the type of hearing unreasonably delay the progress of the case, increase expense, or complicate resolution of any issue?
- Will the type of hearing unreasonably limit the court's ability to assess credibility, voluntariness, or comprehension?
- Is there a fairness concern because one party has easier access to the courthouse, or greater facility with technology, and is seeking a strategic advantage?
- Does the type of hearing allow for greater access to effective interpretation services?
- Is there enough time to give notice for people to make appropriate arrangements—especially where there is a change from one hearing type to another?
- Does the type of hearing—particularly virtual and hybrid hearings—allow parties to share documents?
- In virtual and hybrid hearings, will the participants have prior or simultaneous access to documents, photos, etc., that are submitted to the courtroom?
- Appellate court judges should consider the following factors when deciding whether a hearing will be in person or virtually.
  - What are the locations of parties and the costs of travel? Does requiring one party to travel a significantly greater distance to the courthouse create fairness issues?
  - What are the unintended impacts of having appellate courts that operate from only one courthouse in the state? Does this geographic reality impact decisions to file appeals?
  - Would in-person or virtual oral argument increase the diversity of the appellate bar? Would it increase the diversity of the appellate bench?
  - Which method(s) do the parties prefer for making their oral arguments?
  - Which method does the appellate bench prefer for holding oral argument? Because oral argument is designed to be an opportunity for judicial officers to ask questions presented in briefing, does this preference hold more weight than the preference of the parties?
  - Does the type of case matter in making the decision on remote vs. in-person?
- Court-wide best practices
  - Each court location should update judicial officers, court staff, patrons, attorneys, and community partners (e.g., the prison and jails) on relevant Webex updates

and process changes. This may include a page on the court website for updates and regular revisions to posted Webex guides.

- Each court calendar should clearly indicate if a hearing is scheduled to be held in person or through a virtual or hybrid hearing. If the calendar setting is for a virtual or hybrid hearing, the Webex link for the hearing should be included on the calendar for the parties, public, and media to access, as appropriate (i.e., some hearings — such as adoptions — are not open to the general public or media and would therefore not have a publicly-accessible Webex link).
  - A party who shows up at the courthouse for a virtual hearing — whether due to calendaring confusion or inability to access a virtual hearing on their own — should be provided access to participate in the virtual hearing. To facilitate this access, kiosks should be available at every courthouse for patrons to participate in virtual hearings as needed.
  - To address current challenges with the courts’ network bandwidth, it is recommended that court employees working at a court location avoid using the wireless network and instead connect to the wired network whenever and wherever possible.
  - Court employees working at the same court location who attend a virtual meeting should gather as a group in a single location to attend the meeting from a single device and network connection as this reduces bandwidth pressure on the courts’ network.
  - The public wireless networks in each court location share a statewide connection, resulting in limited capacity to support parties, attorneys, and members of the public who may expect to use the courts’ public wireless network to attend remote hearings. These court participants should connect to virtual hearings using networks other than the courts’ public wireless networks at the courthouse.
- Best practices for judicial officers and court staff

JUDICIAL OFFICERS & COURT STAFF		
1	<b>Notices:</b> <i>Contents</i>	<p>All notices for virtual hearings should include at a minimum the following information (taking into consideration Rule 43 of the Utah Rules of Civil Procedure):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the date and time of the hearing;</li> <li>• the type of hearing — virtual, hybrid, or in-person;</li> <li>• the purpose of the hearing;</li> <li>• how to join the hearing, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– the Webex link (or how to access that link);</li> <li>– if permitted, how to call-in for the hearing;</li> <li>– whether participant video must be enabled;</li> <li>– how to access virtual hearing kiosks at a court location;</li> </ul> </li> <li>• what to expect at a virtual hearing;</li> </ul>

JUDICIAL OFFICERS & COURT STAFF		
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• how to file, serve, and present evidence;</li> <li>• what patrons should tell their witnesses;</li> <li>• contact information for technical assistance (see <i>Recommendation #5</i>);</li> <li>• the process for submitting and presenting evidence (see <i>Recommendation #8</i>); and</li> <li>• how to request interpretation or accommodation (see <i>Recommendation #12</i>).</li> </ul>
<b>2</b>	<b>Notices:</b> <i>Plain Language</i>	Notices should be easy to understand (i.e., in plain language, avoiding abbreviations or having standard abbreviations; etc.).
<b>3</b>	<b>Notices:</b> <i>Hearing Changes</i>	If a hearing is changed from in person to virtual or vice versa after notice was sent, a new timely notice should be provided to all participants.
<b>4</b>	<b>Notices:</b> <i>Self-Represented Parties</i>	If a self-represented party has provided an email address, notices should be sent by email. When possible, MyCase should be the preferred method for such communication.
<b>5</b>	Technical Assistance for Virtual Hearing Participants	Each court location should have a technical assistance phone number that is included on every hearing notice. Ideally this number should be specific to each court location, but at a minimum should connect the participant to a qualified individual who can: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) assist the participant to resolve technical issues; AND</li> <li>b) communicate immediately with the judicial officer's judicial assistant that the participant is attempting to connect to the virtual hearing but is experiencing technical issues.</li> </ul>
<b>6</b>	Calendar Capacity	Virtual hearings may take longer and should be scheduled appropriately.
<b>7</b>	Webex Greeting	Participants should be greeted by a screen in Webex to confirm for participants and the public that they are in the right virtual location. For example, the screen could display the name of the judge, the time hearings are scheduled to begin, and what to do while waiting.
<b>8</b>	<b>Instructions:</b> <i>Evidence</i>	Judicial officers and judicial assistants should provide participants with clear instructions on how to submit and present evidence to the court during a virtual hearing.

JUDICIAL OFFICERS & COURT STAFF		
9	<b>Instructions:</b> <i>Expectations</i>	If possible, any specific expectations of the parties should be clearly communicated to the parties in advance (e.g., if a camera is required for the party's participation in the hearing, if parties are expected to have spoken/negotiated before the hearing or if breakout rooms will be available for that purpose, etc.). These expectations could be provided in a flier, district-level standing order, or the Judicial Council may want to create a rule.
10	<b>Instructions:</b> <i>Hearing Processes</i>	The judicial officer or judicial assistant should provide hearing-specific instruction on virtual hearing processes (e.g., how a party/attorney should inform the court when their case is ready to be called). "How to" materials could be created for attorneys new to virtual hearings (how to find the calendar/hearing information, tips on how to communicate with clients if they are not in the same location during the hearing, how to prepare clients, how interpretation works during hearings, communicating with opposing side in advance of the hearing, use of breakout rooms, how to present evidence, etc.)
11	<b>Instructions:</b> <i>Use of Webex</i>	The courts should provide clear instructions explaining how to use Webex. "How to" materials could be created for all Webex users. Materials for attorneys new to virtual hearings might include how to find the calendar/hearing information, tips on how to communicate with clients if they are not in the same location during the hearing, how to prepare clients, how interpretation works during hearings, communicating with opposing side in advance of the hearing, use of breakout rooms, how to present evidence, etc.
12	Interpretation & Accommodation	When an interpreter is needed, judicial assistants should make arrangements for simultaneous interpretation if possible (or direct the party or attorney on how to arrange for simultaneous interpretation). The process for requesting other accommodations should be clearly communicated to participants.
13	Ongoing Training	Judicial officers and judicial assistants should receive ongoing training on Webex and other necessary virtual hearing technology.
14	Experience Sharing	The courts should provide regular opportunities for judicial officers, court staff, patrons, and stakeholders to share their feedback on the use of the virtual hearings.

- Best practices for court patrons

COURT PATRONS		
1	Decorum Expectations	Participants <b>SHOULD:</b> h) remember that a virtual courtroom is subject to the same

COURT PATRONS		
		<p>standards of behavior and decorum as in-person court;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i) dress appropriately for a court appearance;</li> <li>j) be focused on the proceedings by pre-arranging care for other obligations that may need attention during the hearing (i.e., children, pets, etc.); and</li> <li>k) if late for a hearing, remain in the Webex proceeding until the judicial officer has finished calling through the other scheduled hearings before alerting the judicial officer.</li> </ul> <p>Participants <b>SHOULD NOT</b>:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>l) speak over another party or an interpreter;</li> <li>m) interrupt when joining a virtual hearing that has already started (remain muted until their case is called); and</li> <li>n) eat, drink, smoke, or drive during the hearing.</li> </ul>
2	Technology Expectations	<p>Participants <b>SHOULD</b>:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>g) <b>Location</b> – plan on joining the virtual hearing from a suitable location that is quiet, private, and allows the participant to focus;</li> <li>h) <b>Camera</b> – have video enabled and be visible to the court when participating in a proceeding, choosing a camera angle that avoids background distractions;</li> <li>i) <b>Lighting</b> – avoid camera angles that position a window or other bright light behind the participant (this often results in poor video quality and obscures the participant's face);</li> <li>j) <b>Audio</b> – be aware of and try to minimize background noises;</li> <li>k) <b>Calling in on a non-smartphone</b> – avoid joining a virtual hearing via a non-smartphone, as it will limit Webex functionality (e.g., the participant won't be able to be moved into a separate virtual room to talk with an attorney); and</li> <li>l) <b>Bandwidth</b> – use a network with sufficient bandwidth for a stable connection to the virtual hearing OR use a computer kiosk at the courthouse to join a virtual proceeding.</li> </ul>

- Best practices for attorneys

ATTORNEYS		
1	Expectations	<p>Expectations for attorneys should be outlined and disseminated. For example, attorneys <b>SHOULD</b>:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>g) <b>Title &amp; Name</b> – ensure their Webex name displays their title followed by their full name (i.e., Defense Attorney Atticus Finch);</li> <li>h) <b>Camera</b> – have video enabled and be visible to the court when participating in a proceeding, choosing a camera angle that avoids background distractions;</li> <li>i) <b>Audio</b> – be aware of and try to minimize background noises, and</li> </ul>

ATTORNEYS		
		<p>use a quality microphone to help ensure an accurate record;</p> <p>j) <b>Attire</b> – dress appropriately for a court appearance;</p> <p>k) <b>Simultaneous hearings</b> – log into multiple simultaneous hearings only if the attorney can effectively manage participation in each hearing, ensuring appropriate, timely, and responsive communication with each court; and</p> <p>l) <b>NEVER</b> drive during an appearance.</p>

- Best practices for jails and prisons

PRISON & JAILS		
1	Stakeholder Meetings	<p>Stakeholder meetings should be held to discuss and establish best practices between the courts and the prison / jails, including:</p> <p>d) communication processes to notify the correctional facility if a hearing will be in person or virtual so appropriate transportation or virtual appearance can be arranged;</p> <p>e) the need for each correctional facility to provide at least two Webex-equipped rooms per court calendar to facilitate attorney / client communication in a breakout room, while the court moves forward with other cases in the remaining room.</p> <p>f) the need for each correctional facility to have a dedicated phone that an interpreter can use to provide simultaneous interpretation during the hearing to an inmate with limited english proficiency.</p>

- The Supreme Court should establish a “good cause” standard that hearing participants must demonstrate in requesting to appear opposite the decision of the judicial officer. The Supreme Court should charge its various advisory committees with defining the “good cause” standard through rule. The Supreme Court should establish an appeal process when a hearing participant believes a judicial officer is not appropriately applying the “good cause” standard as defined in the relevant procedural rules. Because the “good cause” standard may vary between procedural rule chapters, it will likely be necessary for each procedural rule chapter to define an appeal process.
- All initial filings by self-represented litigants should be made in person or via US mail. The Judicial Council should amend its rules to specifically authorize self-represented litigants to make subsequent filings (after the initial filing) in a case through email. Notwithstanding the above, a patron seeking a civil protective order or civil stalking injunction be allowed to file their initial request via email due to the significant access and safety concerns implicated in these proceedings.
- The judiciary should gather and analyze data, including data from court patrons and stakeholders as well as data about virtual and in-person hearings, to see how virtual hearings are serving the public and advancing the mission of the judiciary.



## **APPENDIX A**

### ***Green Phase Working Group Members***

- Hon. Ryan Harris, *Utah Court of Appeals*
- Hon. Renee Jimenez, *Third District Juvenile Court*
- Hon. Michael Leavitt, *Fifth District Juvenile Court*
- Hon. Richard Mrazik, *Third District Court*
- Hon. Don Torgerson, *Seventh District Court*
- Hon. Danalee Welch-O'Donnal, *Grand County Justice Court*
- Brody Arishita, *Chief Information Officer*
- Linda Ekker, *Clerk of Court – Sixth District*
- Becky Faatau, *Judicial Assistant – Third District*
- Brett Folkman, *Trial Court Executive – First District*
- Chris Morgan, *Trial Court Executive – Sixth District*
- Joyce Pace, *Trial Court Executive – Fifth District*
- Russell Pearson, *Trial Court Executive – Eighth District*
- Nathanael Player, *Self-Help Center Director*
- Glen Proctor, *Trial Court Executive – Second District*
- Calli Stephensen, *Judicial Assistant – Fourth District*
- Shannon Treseder, *Clerk of Court – Second District*
- Pleasy Wayas, *Self-Help Center Attorney*

### ***Green Phase Working Group Staff***

- Shane Bahr, *District Court Administrator*
- Michael Drechsel, *Assistant State Court Administrator*
- Ron Gordon, *State Court Administrator*
- Meredith Mannebach, *Assistant District Court Administrator*
- Daniel Meza Rincon, *Assistant Juvenile Court Administrator*
- Jim Peters, *Justice Court Administrator*
- Neira Siaperas, *Deputy Court Administrator*
- Nick Stiles, *Appellate Court Administrator*
- Sonia Sweeney, *Juvenile Court Administrator*

## **APPENDIX B**

### ***Survey Report***

*Utah Survey of Court Users:  
The Impact of Remote Hearings  
on Access to Justice, June 2022*



# UTAH SURVEY OF COURT USERS: THE IMPACT OF REMOTE HEARINGS ON ACCESS TO JUSTICE

June 2022



## PREPARED BY

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**Appendix B** - Utah Survey of Court Users

## **Access to Justice Commission: Court User Survey Workgroup**

Justice Christine Durham, Amy Sorenson, Pamela Beatse, Nancy Sylvester, Keenan Carroll, Judge Susan Eisenman, Judge Clem Landau, David McNeill, Judge Richard Mrazik, Kim Paulding, Nathanael Player, Keri Sargent.

## **Acknowledgment**

Members of the Court User Survey Workgroup of the Access to Justice Commission would like to thank everyone who responded to the survey. They would like to thank the Third District judicial teams and judges who are participating in this Court User Survey project including District Court Judge Richard Mrazik, Justice Court Judge Clemens Landau, and Juvenile Court Judge Susan Eisenman. They would also like to thank the National Center for State Courts, in particular Danielle Hirsch, Alisa Kim, and Zachary Zarnow, and the Utah Courts team, in particular Heidi Anderson, Todd Eaton, and Jace Kinder, who gave support and technical assistance building and distributing the survey.

# KEY RESULTS



## Benefits of Remote Hearings

1. Increased Job Stability
2. Economic Savings
3. Improved Access to Court
4. Personal Safety

**Professionally conducted.  
Clear audio and video. Saves a  
lot of time, money and travel.**



**77%** of participants are from  
the **Third Judicial District**.

**Treated with Courtesy and Respect**  
Court patrons and practitioners think  
the court treats them professionally.



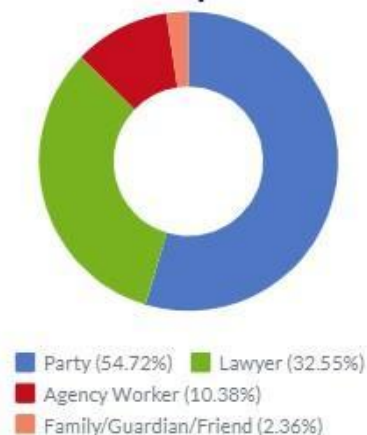
**Done in Reasonable Amount of Time**  
Participants believe their activities are  
completed in timely manner.



**Quality Sound and Video**  
Respondents say Webex sound and  
video are ample to conduct activities.



## Categories of Survey Participants



Contents	
Summary	1
Method	1
Limitations	2
Survey Participants	2
Survey Content	2
Survey Data and What It Tells Us	3
Age of Respondents	4
Accessing Court Hearings or Other Activities	4
Locations Where Respondents Attended Court	4
Types of Court Use	5
Open-Ended Responses	5
Key Findings	7
Snapshot: Dialogue from Lawyers in the Field	9
Snapshot: A View from the Bench	11
Comparison with Other State Reporting	12
Obstacles to Participation in Remote Hearings	13
Barriers to Accessing Legal Representation	14
Recommendations	15

## Summary

When Governor Gary Herbert declared a state of emergency to enable the State of Utah to respond to novel coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) on March 6, 2020, the landscape of justice changed rapidly. Since March 13, 2020, the Utah Supreme Court and the Utah Judicial Council have issued numerous Administrative Orders governing court operations during the pandemic to protect the public from the spread of disease. During this time, and out of necessity, the Utah State Courts relied on the use of Webex to conduct remote hearings and other court business statewide. Along the way, tools and processes were initiated to allow for fully remote hearings. Some are now working on returning to in-person hearings.

In the fall of 2021, the Access to Justice Commission (“ATJ Commission”) began studying remote hearings in Utah by conducting a survey of Utah court patrons and practitioners. The ATJ Commission initially partnered with the National Center for State Courts as part of a national review. The Commission then narrowed its focus to a Utah-specific survey. The data from this survey is the basis for this report. The focus of this study was determining whether and how remote hearings resulted in access to equal justice for people in Utah.

Based on the data collected, Utah court patrons and practitioners strongly prefer remote hearings, at least for some types of court hearings and activities. Court operations over Webex are done with courtesy and in a timely manner. While there are occasional issues, Webex sound and video are highly rated. Most importantly, remote hearings have increased access to equal justice for many people. Survey respondents list benefits that include being better able to provide representation in rural Utah, not having to miss work, and not having to pay for childcare and travel as strong benefits. Based on these due process and convenience factors, Utah courts should work to include remote access moving forward.

## Method

A sample of data from Utah court patrons and practitioners was collected through two different online surveys. The first was prepared by the National Center for State Courts as a Utah-specific questionnaire using Qualtrics (“NCSC Survey”).<sup>6</sup> Data through the NCSC survey currently includes 101 responses, collected from September 24, 2021, through June 5, 2022, with continuing responses anticipated.

The second was developed by the Access to Justice Commission Court User Survey Workgroup using SurveyMonkey (“ATJ Survey”).<sup>7</sup> Data from the ATJ survey currently includes 119 responses, collected from March 14 through June 5, 2022, with responses continuing to

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<sup>6</sup> National Center for State Courts Qualtrics Court User Survey *available at* [https://ncsc2.iad1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_bIYBug4VwsbQhnM](https://ncsc2.iad1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_bIYBug4VwsbQhnM).

<sup>7</sup> Access to Justice Commission SurveyMonkey Court User Survey *available at* <https://utahcourts.surveymonkey.com/r/CTT5WB3>.

accumulate. At present there are 220 individual records. Seven responses were excluded due to incomplete information, for a total sample of 213.

## Limitations

There are limitations to the data collected through this survey of Utah court patrons and practitioners. Survey responses were primarily collected through a pilot program in the Third Judicial District. The combined responses are sufficient to draw several conclusions, but the data is less certain for some types of court use. For example, certain districts are under- or unrepresented, in part as a natural consequence of state population distribution and in part due to the constraints of the pilot study. Surveys were mostly collected by sending a link by email, reducing responses from call-in users. In addition, the survey did not collect any responses from jurors or witnesses, so it includes limited information on the efficacy of remote hearings for jury trials or complex litigation. To keep the survey small, important questions were not asked and they merit further study such as the impact of remote hearings on privacy or on victims of abuse.

## Survey Participants

Surveys were sent or given to parties (plaintiffs and defendants), lawyers, agency workers, family members, and friends after they appeared in a Utah court. Agency workers include people from the Department of Child and Family Services, the Division of Juvenile Justice Services, and other court advocates. The sample population is based on respondents' ability and willingness to participate, not a scientific or fully representative sample. One district court, one justice court, and one juvenile court judicial team sent surveys to their court patrons.<sup>8</sup> Starting in April, the Access to Justice Office of the Utah State Bar sent surveys to participants in the Third District immediate occupancy and debt collection calendars. The ATJ Office also sent surveys to volunteer attorneys in their programs. Links to the online surveys were provided through a variety of channels, including by email, text message, insertion in the Webex chat, and QR code.



## Survey Content

The NCSC survey included 24 multipart questions and took approximately 5 minutes to complete. The ATJ survey was reduced to 19 questions that were included in the NCSC survey. The typical time spent completing this survey was 2 minutes and 2 seconds.



Both surveys included qualitative and quantitative questions about demographics, accessing remote proceedings, type and location of court use, their preferences, and other aspects of their experiences. The objective was to understand how court patrons and practitioners experienced virtual services in Utah courts. Data includes matching responses combined from surveys.

## Survey Data and What It Tells Us

The 213 survey respondents combined from the NCSC and ATJ Surveys represent a population of parties (116), lawyers (69), agency workers (22), and family members and friends (5) who are diverse in their age, method of accessing the remote hearing, location, and type of court use. They represent actual court patrons and practitioners who appeared in a Utah district, justice, or juvenile court from fall 2021 to spring 2022. The NCSC Survey was slanted towards plaintiffs and defendants who comprised 90% of NCSC Survey respondents. The ATJ Survey respondents included more nonparties: 55% lawyers and 19% agency workers. Because court uses include juvenile matters, respondents included minors.

Respondents provided feedback in these key areas:

1. Stating a preference to participate in-person or remotely.
2. Evaluating whether the court team treated everyone with courtesy and respect.
3. Assessing if they got their court business done in a reasonable amount of time.
4. Rating the quality of Webex sound and video.

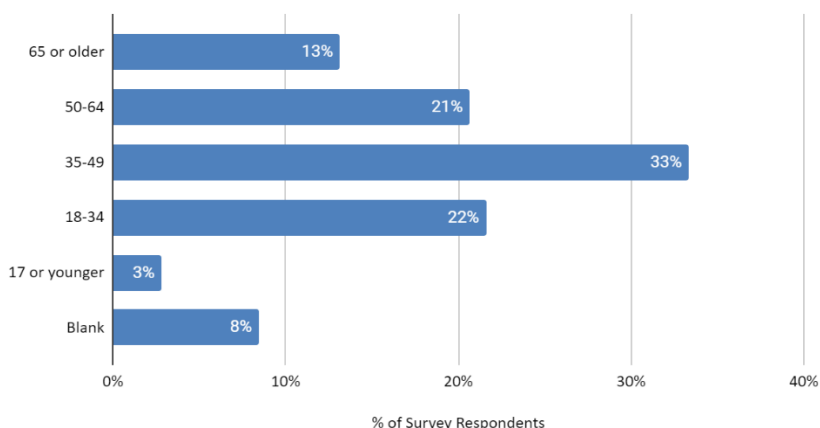
## Age of Respondents

There were 199 respondents who self-identified their age by selecting from a range of ages. Most people were between 18 years and 49 years old (55%):

- 47 respondents aged 18 - 34 years (22%)
- 72 respondents aged 35 - 49 years (33%)

Minor children aged 17 or younger were 3% of the sample. The remainder included 21% respondents aged 50 - 64, 13% aged 65 or older and the remaining 8% did not respond to this field.

Age of Survey Respondents



## Accessing Court

### Hearings or Other Activities

The combined survey provided these options for how respondents accessed court: face-to-face at the courthouse, remotely using a court kiosk, remotely using a personal computer or laptop, remotely using a cell phone, iPad, or tablet, remotely from jail, prison, or detention center, remotely from a hospital, and other. Most respondents appeared remotely either using a personal

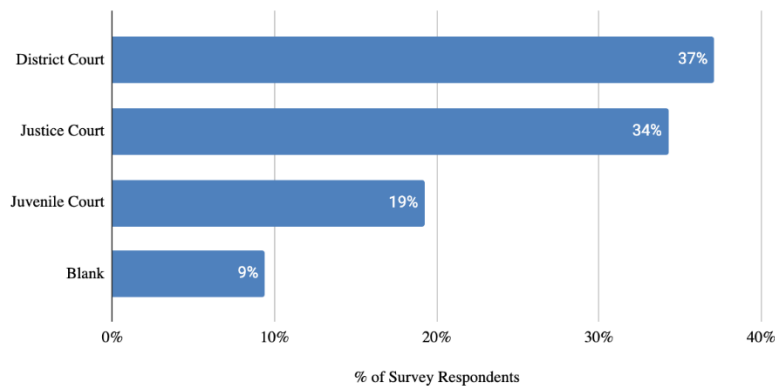
## Appendix B - Utah Survey of Court Users

computer or laptop (109) or using a cell phone, iPad, or tablet (71). There were some respondents who attended in-person (9) or used a court kiosk (2).

## Locations Where Respondents Attended Court

Respondents appeared in district court (37%), justice court for small claims or criminal cases (34%), and juvenile court (19%).

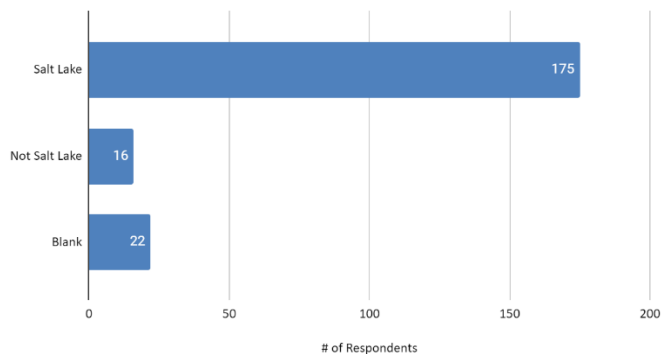
Survey Respondents Participated in District, Justice, and Juvenile Courts



The ATJ Survey asked specifically about judicial district, while the NCSC did not. The ATJ Survey included responses from the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th, and 7th Districts; however, most were from the Third District (77%).

All respondents were able to self-identify by county, but most were from Salt Lake County (176 responses in Salt Lake County, 22 blank for this field, and 16 responses from outside of Salt Lake County).

Location of Survey Respondents (By County)



## Types of Court Use

Patrons and practitioners used the court for a wide variety of civil and criminal legal matters, including conducting administrative business such as making a payment.

This is the breakdown:

### Types of Court Use

### Total

Traffic/Ticket

53

Criminal/probation

35

Civil matter	26
DCFS/Child welfare case	23
Landlord/Tenant/Eviction	12
Juvenile delinquency	11
Divorce/Custody/Support	7
Other: firearm at SLC international security check, infraction possession of marijuana, DUI, adoption, DASLC operations	5
Specialty court (Drug, Mental health, Veterans)	4
Other: Domestic Violence/Sexual Abuse	4
Small claims	3
Protective Order or Civil Stalking Injunction	3
Multi-issue hearing (criminal + civil)	2
Guardianship/Conservatorship	1
Estate/Trust	1
To make a payment	1

## Open-Ended Responses

The survey asked this open-ended response question, “Please provide additional comments or suggestions about your experience today,” to allow respondents the opportunity to further comment on their experiences and give additional insights. Most people gave positive comments about their experiences but there were a few negative reactions. Overall, these open-ended responses tell a story of why there is such a strong preference for remote hearings, suggestions for continuing remotely, some of the problems, and why remote hearings remove access to justice obstacles for many.

Here are some examples of participant open responses received:

***Ease:*** “Much easier to do virtually than find time, transportation, parking.”

## Appendix B - Utah Survey of Court Users

***Less Intimidating:*** “I felt the judge was more relaxed with the virtual court. I was much more comfortable at my work rather than standing in front of him. I felt it much easier to speak to him though I could see him and he could see me it was much calmer.”

***Increased Representation:*** “I would not have been able to accept and represent in this case if it were not conducted remotely as it was in St. George and I am in Salt Lake.”

***Better Access:*** “Love WebEx. Very efficient and allows for the best access to justice.”

***Economic Savings:*** “I appreciate the flexibility and savings in gas!”

***New Standard:*** “I think it’s nice to do the small cases remotely. The big cases could be used for the court such as criminal prosecutions since they require a lot of time .... Not everyone has the gas money nor the time to attend a hearing due to the demands from their job. It should be the new standard going forward after the pandemic so you guys can handle case loads faster.”

***Too Lax:*** “The hearing was a couple of weeks ago, and I thought the time permitted for argument was excessive and the judge should have done more to require opposing counsel to conduct himself with professionalism and civility.”

***No Covid Restrictions:*** “Court hearings should be in person, perhaps other than simple scheduling matters. No Covid restrictions should be imposed on any participants. Mask wearing should be discouraged, particularly for parties, attorneys, and judges.”

***Tech Issues:*** “Horrible. I was never able to join the court proceedings because I never received the email with the link. I received an email a few days before, saying that an additional email would be sent to me, but I never received that email, and thus, could not join the court proceedings. This is not my fault at all.”

***Need Clear Instruction:*** “... It may benefit a defendant to have a knowledge of each step involved in a case provided by the prosecution, including any possible deviations. Step by step knowledge of procedures would have greatly reduced the intimidation. (A ‘timeline’, printed chronological order of appointments and the purpose of each would save court staff countless hours answering the same questions that inevitably are asked and give confidence to all parties.)”

***Inefficiency of In-person:*** “Remote hearings should be the default, except where testimony or evidence need be presented. In-person attendance is wasteful and inefficient.”

***Job Stability:*** “Webex allows my clients to attend more hearings and still keep their jobs. It is vastly more efficient.”

***Time & Money Savings:*** “Professionally conducted. Clear audio and video. Saves a lot of time and travel.”

## Key Findings

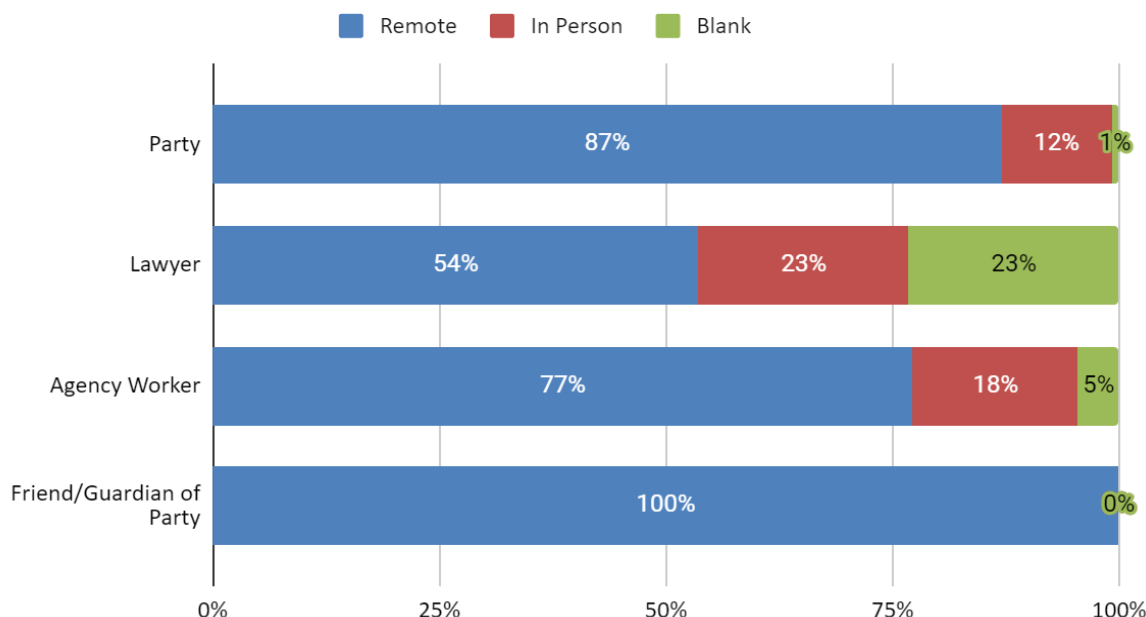
This court user survey reveals important benefits to holding remote hearings. Remote hearings have made court more accessible, whether the participant was young or old, in the metro area or more rural, in small claims or district court. Participants believe remote hearings are usually handled professionally and they feel respected. They recognize Webex provides adequate sound and video. They appreciate the convenience as well as the savings in time and money.



**75% of all Utah participants prefer remote hearings**  
regardless of how they accessed court, their age, or location.

The most conclusive finding from the Court User Survey is that every type of participant strongly prefers remote access. Seventy-five percent of all survey respondents prefer remote hearings and only sixteen percent selected in-person (the other nine percent left this field blank). Comparing this preference by type of participant reveals interesting information. Based on this

### All Types of Participants Prefer Remote Access

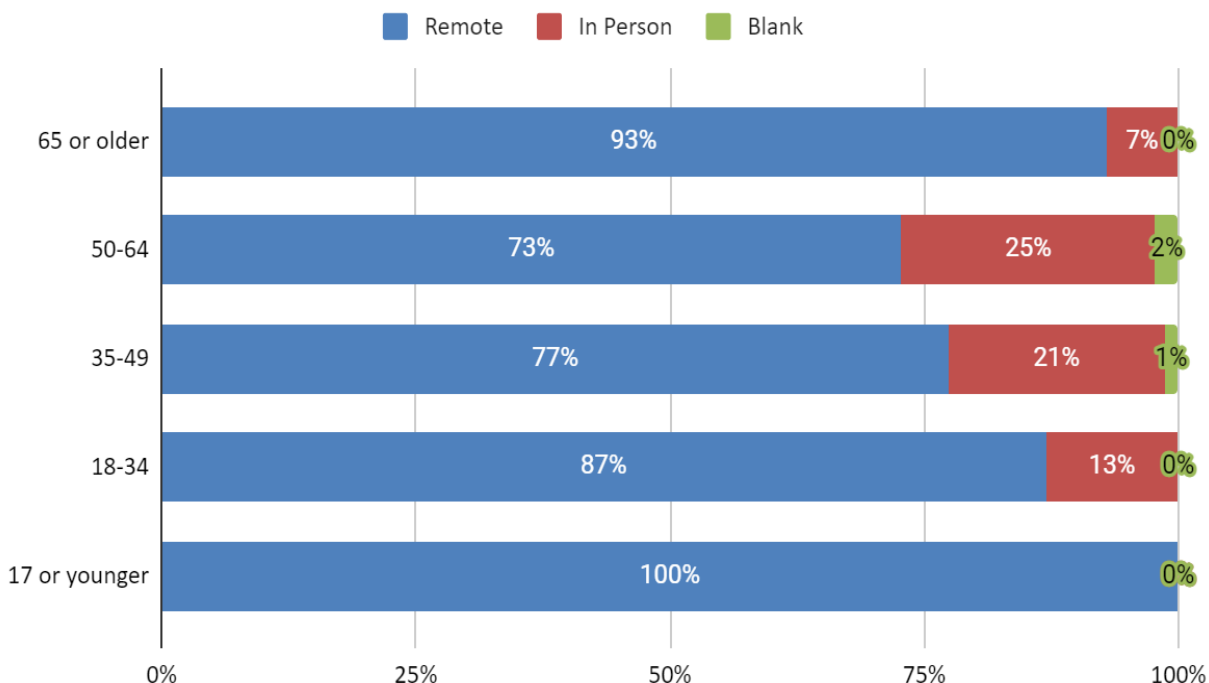


breakdown, it becomes clear that lawyers are participants who most want court to be in-person. Yet even this category shows that the majority of lawyers prefer remote access. Moreover, the people with the most to gain or lose – plaintiffs and petitioners, defendants and respondents, and their family, guardians, or friends – overwhelmingly prefer remote court hearings. This same trend can be found when considering preference of access by age.

## Appendix B - Utah Survey of Court Users

The robust preference for remote access is found in every age range. As one might expect, younger users would rather appear in court remotely. In fact, 100% of participants under the age of 17 selected this option. More surprisingly, 93% of older adults 65 years or over also expressed a clear preference for attending virtually. Perhaps this is due to mobility, transportation, or other factors, but it dispels the stereotype of older people struggling with technology. Participants aged 50-64 were the most likely to select the in-person option, and still 73% of this range preferred remote hearings. Ultimately, no matter what age the participant was, they prefer to access court remotely by either computer, laptop, or phone.

## People of All Ages Prefer Remote Access



Even the type of court did not impact this preference for remote access by court patrons and practitioners. In fact, 78% of district court, 84% of justice court, and 85% of juvenile court participants all expressed preference for remote hearings. This data displays the importance of asking and acting on information instead of doing what might seem easier or more intuitive.



Utah survey participants are **treated with courtesy and respect** by the court.

There is a clear showing that survey participants feel they are treated with courtesy and respect by the judicial team and the judge. In the survey, respondents were asked to rate this by strongly agreeing, agreeing, being neutral, disagreeing, or strongly disagreeing. Out of 213 responses, 84% agreed with this statement with 70% “strongly agreeing.”

## Appendix B - Utah Survey of Court Users



3.

Utah survey participants get **court business done in a reasonable amount of time** whether they participate remotely or in-person.

Survey participants were asked if they were able to get their court business done in a reasonable amount of time by strongly agreeing, agreeing, being neutral, disagreeing, or strongly disagreeing. Out of 213 responses, 76% agreed with this statement with 58% “strongly agreeing.” While this is somewhat lower than their courtesy and respect rating, it is still a very positive response.



4.

The **quality of Webex sound and video are suitable** for conducting the court business of Utah survey participants.

The Webex platform provides adequate sound and video quality, which allows survey respondents to participate in remote hearings. The NCSC and ATJ Surveys asked this question differently, so responses cannot be combined.<sup>9</sup> However, the results show participants generally had a very positive view of Webex sound and video quality. For example, 72% of NCSC Survey respondents said they experienced no issues with being able to hear or be heard. Sound quality was rated even higher by ATJ Survey respondents: only 2 people said the sound quality was “Very Bad” and nobody selected “Bad.” This means that less than two percent negatively rated Webex sound quality. Moreover, 81.3% of NCSC Survey respondents said they experienced no issues with being able to see or be seen. Again, video was rated even higher by ATJ Survey respondents: less than one percent gave a negative rating; only 1 respondent said the quality was “Very Bad” and none selected “Bad.” This data shows most participants were satisfied that they could adequately hear and/or see during their remote hearing.

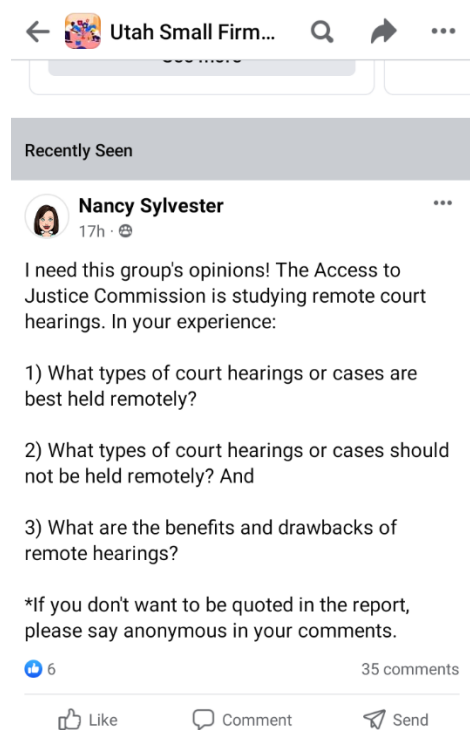
## Snapshot: Dialogue from Lawyers in the Field

The data from the combined surveys provides useful information, yet it does not allow for conversation. The Court User Survey Workgroup recognized this and wanted to provide a channel for lawyers to discuss their personal experiences with remote court hearings. To collect this more qualitative information, they posted a query to the Utah Small Firm Attorney Network (USFAN), which is a Facebook group with over 900 Utah lawyers. USFAN actively discussed the merits and drawbacks of remote hearings. They also gave several suggestions on which types of hearings or cases were best suited for remote court. Other group members could respond and

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<sup>9</sup> The NCSC Survey asked, “Were there any issues with the sound or audio that made it difficult to hear or be heard?” and “Were there any issues with the video that made it difficult to see or be seen?” The possible responses to both were “All of the time,” “Most of the time,” “Some of the time,” or “None of the time.” The ATJ Survey asked, “If you ATTENDED BY WEBEX, rate the quality of the SOUND” and “If you ATTENDED BY WEBEX, rate the quality of the VIDEO.” The possible responses to both ATJ questions were “Very bad,” “Bad,” “Neutral,” “Good,” “Very Good,” and “Not Applicable.”

react to each comment.<sup>10</sup> Some interesting themes, considerations, and suggestions are represented in their dialogue.



The group strongly supported the continuation of remote court for most hearings. As to which are best done remotely, many agreed evidentiary hearings, especially those involving witness testimony or complex, voluminous documents should be done in-person whenever possible. For instance, Scott Wiser received 15 “likes” for this comment, “I think Webex should be the default for everything short of trials and evidentiary hearings, and even then Webex appearances should be liberally granted for good cause ....” Some advocated for remote hearings being the standard even when they include live testimony. Melissa Bean explained, “I’ve been pleased with almost everything by remote access – even live testimony ... I honestly can’t think of many cases that would necessitate in-person hearings.” Yet others noted technology issues can sometimes require reconstructing the record to make sure it is clear. Many suggested a hybrid approach where the lawyer and/or the parties could choose.

Group members acknowledged there can be drawbacks to remote hearings. Common weaknesses discussed were the lack of spontaneous negotiations and problem-solving or the occasional technical glitch. There was also some back-and-forth debate on the ability of the judge to make assessments of the truthfulness and character of witnesses. Marco Brown said he believed that the judge really needs to see a witness live and in-person. There were counterexamples, e.g., “I find that having the four parties on the screen actually allows the judge to really ‘see’ a party’s tells<sup>11</sup> much easier than in court.”

A significant part of the Group’s dialogue centered on issues involving access to equal justice and fairness. Many people highlighted the benefits of remote hearings:

1. Remote hearings allow *greater access to lawyers*, especially in rural areas. Justin Caplin shared, “An attorney can take hearings in Kanab and Cedar and Beaver, Panguitch, and even more remote cities and counties without having to drive 1 to 3 hours each way.”
2. All participants receive a *cost savings in transportation and childcare*.
3. Clients have *lower legal costs*. Christopher M. Guymon explained, “Instead of charging my client for 1+ hours per hearing, I often only need to charge .2 or .3 hours, so often I

<sup>10</sup> Some patterns and key ideas from the USFAN group are presented here, and the full Facebook dialogue, with replies and reactions, is attached as Exhibit A.

<sup>11</sup> Webster’s Dictionary defines a “tell” as an inadvertent behavior or mannerism that betrays a poker player’s true thoughts, intentions, or emotions. In this context, the commentor is likening a party’s revealing gestures, expressions, etc., to a poker player’s tell.

would say remote hearings save my clients a significant amount of money.” Jill Coil added, “It’s also allowed my attorneys to take in more clients. Now with us going back to court case load must go down which means we can’t serve as many.”

4. Remote hearings *help stabilize jobs for clients who do not have to miss work*. This is true because “A party can participate in a remote hearing from home or from the office without having to take a half day or full day off from work to drive downtown, especially when the majority of time at the courthouse is waiting for the other several cases to be called before theirs.”
5. Appearing virtually or on the phone *saves time and is more convenient* for clients and practitioners. “As a single parent and solo practitioner,” Sarah Larsen said, “I have really appreciated having most things remote” as it saves her time from not having to commute to be with her family.

Some lawyers noted that when dealing with indigent people or those who are incarcerated, additional issues need to be considered. If they do not have access to internet or a phone, it is important to have these resources available to them in a convenient and private location. Also, allowing incarcerated people to conduct “any and all civil hearings” remotely is important because “they have to pay separately for transport on civil issues,” said Brandon L. Merrill. While these anecdotal experiences and ideas are not quantitatively verified, they provide context and important qualitative information to help fill in some of the information missing from the Court User Survey.

## Snapshot: A View from the Bench

Judges were not included the Court User Survey. However, Utah Judge Angela Fannesbeck shared a view “of the benefits and pitfalls of Webex or other virtual hearing platforms, and how they coincide with professional ethics and a lawyer’s responsibilities to the court and clients” in the July/August Utah Bar Journal.<sup>12</sup> Judge Fannesbeck acknowledges remote hearings have expanded access to equal justice for many people. She notes that for court patrons it is a less costly option that reduces the cost of legal representation, limits time away from work and removes transportation issues.<sup>13</sup> Remote hearings also benefit lawyers by increasing productivity and preventing delays. Even witnesses benefit, especially if they are out-of-town or need protection.

Yet there are drawbacks to the system. Judge Fannesbeck explains that presenting evidence and properly identifying people can be challenging.<sup>14</sup> Technology problems can make it difficult to hear or participate. She suggested there are also negative intangible consequences to virtual hearings like the informal nature of the proceedings including people wearing pajamas, revealing clothing, or appearing in public places.<sup>15</sup> Judge Fannesbeck gives concrete ways that many of these obstacles in remote hearings can be overcome by following the guidelines and rules

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<sup>12</sup> Judge Angela Fannesbeck, *Navigating the Half-Empty/Half-Full Dichotomy of Virtual Court Hearings*, July/August Vol. 35, No. 4 UTAH BAR JOURNAL, 13-16, p. 13 (2022).

<sup>13</sup> *Id.*

<sup>14</sup> *Id.* at 14.

<sup>15</sup> *Id.*

provided in the Utah Code of Judicial Administration and the Supreme Court Rules of Professional Practice.<sup>16</sup> Ultimately, she expressed that virtual hearings “have both virtue and vice that can be successfully navigated by the court, the attorneys, and the participants” as long as they each actively work together.<sup>17</sup> This balanced and nuanced approach can maximize the advantages and minimize the shortcomings of remote hearings.

## Comparison with Other State Reporting

Utah responses align with similar data collected from other states which did not have the same study limitations. For example, the DC Bar Foundation commissioned a study on the perspectives of family law litigants on remote hearings and published the report in December 2021.<sup>18</sup> The DC report showed that “remote hearings worked well for most people. Most study participants reported being satisfied with their remote proceedings” in a diverse array of family law case types, including child custody, child support, domestic violence, and divorce.<sup>19</sup> Specifically, the DC report found that:

- 73% appreciated not having to find and pay for transportation to/from the courthouse,
- 62% appreciated not having to take time off work or school,
- 60% appreciated not having to find childcare, and
- 72% felt safer and less threatened by the opposing party.<sup>20</sup>

The Texas Office of Court Administration partnered with the National Center for State Courts to study the use of remote hearings and the impact on judicial workload.<sup>21</sup> The Texas report also highlighted the benefits of remote hearings for court users including “not needing to take time off work, locate transportation, or find childcare.” and noting it can be “emotionally easier” for some parties to not be in the same room.<sup>22</sup>

While Utah has a court environment that is distinct from these states, the similarity of these findings further validate this report: providing options and support for remote hearings improves the court experience and increases access to justice for many patrons and practitioners.

## Obstacles to Participation in Remote Hearings

While remote hearings promote access to justice for many, there are obstacles to participating in remote hearings. Commonly cited examples include language barriers, accessibility, and

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<sup>16</sup> *Id.* at 15-16.

<sup>17</sup> *Id.* at 16.

<sup>18</sup> DC Bar Foundation, *Litigant Perspectives on Remote Hearings in Family Law Cases: A Survey Study Conducted with the DC Family Law Learning Network*, (December 2021), accessed June 12, 2022, available at [https://www.dcbarfoundation.org/files/ugd/3ddb49\\_2c2da451535e4f9f8de6ab2baf575a54.pdf](https://www.dcbarfoundation.org/files/ugd/3ddb49_2c2da451535e4f9f8de6ab2baf575a54.pdf).

<sup>19</sup> *Id.* at i.

<sup>20</sup> *Id.* at 8.

<sup>21</sup> National Center for State Courts Court Consulting Division, *The Use of Remote Hearings in Texas State Courts: The Impact on Judicial Workload*, accessed June 12, 2022, available at <https://www.ncsc.org/media/ncsc/files/pdf/newsroom/TX-Remote-Hearing-Assessment-Report.pdf>.

<sup>22</sup> *Id.* at 9.

technological challenges.<sup>23</sup> These obstacles have been and continue to be overcome through strategic planning and targeted resources.

Court patrons may be non-English speakers or have only a limited understanding. They also may lack full literacy or comprehension. Potential solutions include providing translation services, making court documents and instructions available in other languages, and preparing explainer videos that can be distributed online, via email, and by text message.

Court patrons and practitioners may have a recognized disability under the Americans with Disabilities Act<sup>24</sup> or experience other accessibility issues. These are often referred to as the “digital divide” meaning lack of or poor connectivity to internet or Wi-Fi signal, limited access to email, restrictions on phone minutes or data plans and other barriers to remote access.<sup>25</sup> Solutions to accommodate ADA disabilities can include offering closed captioning, keyboard accessibility, screen reader support, and having automatic transcripts available.<sup>26</sup> To bridge the digital divide, having a call-in only option for remote hearings is essential. Other solutions include court use kiosks and working with libraries and other community partners to help provide access.

Remote hearings require some level of technical proficiency in either internet or phone use. For some it can be challenging to access the necessary technology. However, similar to the above discussion on accessibility, having strong partnerships with libraries, social service providers, and other community partners can help provide needed support. Other solutions include providing explainer videos and clear instructions written in plain language. Having staff available to provide support and troubleshooting if video or sound issues occur can help correct problems that may arise.

Acknowledging there are obstacles to remote hearings is not a sufficient reason to require in-person attendance at court. Instead, this recognition can be the touchstone for change and progress. In fact, organizations like the National Center for State Courts continue to develop and release guidelines, best practices, and ways to overcome problems to effectively manage hybrid and fully remote hearings. These efforts become even more important when looking at the barriers many Utah communities face when seeking legal representation.

## Barriers to Accessing Legal Representation

Deciding whether Utah State Courts will go back in-person or continue to offer remote attendance will affect all Utahns. However, it will hit some Utah communities much more than

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<sup>23</sup> See e.g., California Commission on Access to Justice, *Remote Hearings and Access to Justice During Covid-19 and Beyond*, PPP & Cal Remote Hearings Guide - NCSC (National Center for State Courts), accessed June 12, 2022, available at

[https://www.ncsc.org/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0018/40365/RRT-Technology-ATJ-Remote-Hearings-Guide.pdf](https://www.ncsc.org/_data/assets/pdf_file/0018/40365/RRT-Technology-ATJ-Remote-Hearings-Guide.pdf).

<sup>24</sup> 42 U.S. Code § 12101 et seq.

<sup>25</sup> USLegal.com definition: “digital divide,” available at

<https://definitions.uslegal.com/d/digital-divide/#:~:text=Digital%20divide%20refers%20to%20the,technology%20and%20those%20who%20cannot.>

<sup>26</sup> California Commission on Access to Justice, *supra*.

## Appendix B - Utah Survey of Court Users

others. There is a vast divide in how many lawyers are available based solely on where the person needing legal representation lives. This division plainly emerges when comparing the cases filed per attorney to the number of attorneys available in each Utah county.

Utah has 29 counties, and there are 8677 active attorneys in Utah.<sup>27</sup> In its directory, the Utah State Bar lists the county associated with each lawyer's preferred address. Legal representation deficiencies in many counties appear when this information is compared to the number of 2021 Utah district, justice, and juvenile court cases filed.

*Table 1: Lawyers by County Compared to Cases Filed*

Utah County	# of Active Attorneys	Cases Per Attorney (District, Justice, and Juvenile for FY2021)
Beaver	1	5,043
Garfield	2	1,487
San Juan	5	1,439
Juab	6	1,240
Emery	6	758
Kane	6	594
Piute	1	533
Box Elder	27	489
Duchesne	13	483
Carbon	21	387
Millard	14	377
Sevier	17	350
Sanpete	16	316
Tooele	53	304
Daggett	2	298
Rich	4	265
Uintah	34	262
Grand	17	254
Wayne	2	251
Iron	62	221
Weber	321	168
Morgan	11	154
Cache	166	133
Wasatch	74	120
Washington	340	117
Utah	1260	77
Davis	656	77
Summit	204	46

Table 1 shows access to legal representation by county where the red shades indicate the least access to attorneys and the blue shades signify the greatest access.

As the reds lighten and then turn to blue, the communities have an increasing ability to find a lawyer.

(See next page for blue shading)

<sup>27</sup> Active attorneys are those included in the Utah State Bar attorney database who are in good standing and listed as "AttUnder3," "AttActive," or "AttEmerit."

Utah County	# of Active Attorneys	Cases Per Attorney (District, Justice, and Juvenile for FY2021)
Salt Lake	5211	39

A person living in Salt Lake County can hire a local lawyer located near where they live and by the courthouse. A person living in Iron or Uintah County most likely can choose from several lawyers.

However, a person living in Beaver, Piute, Garfield, or San Juan will almost certainly struggle to find an attorney unless they can pay for and hire an out-of-town lawyer. Making the decision to continue offering remote hearings, at least for some people, cases, and circumstances can alleviate this disparity.

## Recommendations

1. Utah courts should continue offering remote hearings. At a minimum, remote hearings are strongly preferred and more efficient for at least some hearings and types of actions.
2. Non-binary options for remote participation should be available, where some parts of the case may be held virtually or by video while other parts are in-person. This will remove barriers to making an appearance in court for both patrons and practitioners.
3. Hybrid options for appearing remotely should be used for ADA accommodations; resolving mobility issues for older adults; reducing the economic impact of in-person court caused by getting time off work; the cost of traveling to court and obtaining childcare; and promoting patron safety.
4. Clear explainers of common court procedures (like how to use Webex) should be created using plain language. These materials should be provided in written form and by video, which is then emailed and texted to court users as well as posted online. Written instructions can be translated into other languages as well.
5. Utah courts should conduct further study to determine which hearings and types of actions are best done remotely and which are better held in-person. They may consider expanding this court user survey to additional judicial teams statewide for this purpose.

## **APPENDIX C**

### ***Rule Amendment Proposals:***

Utah Rules of Criminal Procedure  
Utah Rules of Civil Procedure  
Utah Rules of Juvenile Procedure  
Utah Rules of Evidence  
Utah Rules of Appellate Procedure  
Utah Code of Judicial Administration

Rule Amendments – Utah Rules of Criminal Procedure	
<p><a href="#">Rule 17</a> – The trial.</p> <p><a href="#">Rule 17.5</a> – Hearings with contemporaneous transmission from a different location.</p>	<p>Need to consider <b>Rule 17</b> and <b>Rule 17.5</b> in full.</p> <p>At the time of this report, the Supreme Court’s Advisory Committee on the Rules of Criminal Procedure is reviewing these rules.</p>
<p><a href="#">Rule 17(a)</a> – The trial.</p>	<p>At the time of this report, the Supreme Court’s Advisory Committee on the Rules of Criminal Procedure is reviewing this rule.</p> <p><b>Previously suspended / amended by the Administrative Order, dated 4/11/2022, as follows:</b></p> <p><i>In all cases tried to the bench, a defendant may waive the right to appear in person at trial and consent to appear through video conferencing if the defendant has an effective opportunity to participate, which includes the ability to view trial participants and to meaningfully interact with counsel of record in real time. “Trial participants” is defined to include the judge and testifying witnesses. The defendant’s waiver and consent must be on the record and the court must make findings that the waiver and consent are voluntary.</i></p>
<p><a href="#">Rule 17.5(b)</a> – Hearings with contemporaneous transmission from a different location.</p>	<p>At the time of this report, the Supreme Court’s Advisory Committee on the Rules of Criminal Procedure is reviewing this rule.</p> <p><b>Previously suspended for infractions by the Administrative Order, dated 4/11/2022, as follows:</b></p> <p><i>Rule 17.5(b)...is suspended in infraction cases and to the extent it requires the prosecution’s consent in other cases. The parties’ consent is not required for a bench trial by remote transmission in an infraction case and a defendant may consent to a bench trial in other cases. Bench trials will be conducted as scheduled unless the court determines it is not reasonably practical to do so in a particular case, given the issues and anticipated evidence.</i></p>
<p><a href="#">Rule 6</a> – Warrant of arrest or summons.</p>	<p>Need to consider <b>subsection (e)(1)(E)</b>, and potentially <b>subsection (e)(1)(D)</b>.</p>
<p><a href="#">Rule 14</a> – Subpoenas.</p>	<p>Need to consider <b>subsection (a)(8)</b>.</p>
<p><a href="#">Rule 15.5</a> – Out of court statement and testimony of</p>	<p>Need to consider <b>Rule 15.5</b> in full – how, if at all, does</p>

## Appendix C – Rule Amendments

child victims or child witnesses of sexual or physical abuse - Conditions of admissibility.	Webex impact this?
<p><a href="#">Rule 27</a> – Stays of sentence pending motions for new trial or appeal from courts of record.</p> <p><a href="#">Rule 27A</a> – Stays pending appeal from a court not of record - Appeals for a trial de novo.</p> <p><a href="#">Rule 27B</a> – Stays pending appeal from a court not of record - Hearings de novo, DUI, and reckless driving cases.</p>	These rules address appearances, using the term “appear as required.” Clarification may be helpful.
<a href="#">Rule 41</a> – Unsecured Bonds.	Need to consider <b>subsection (b)(2)</b> use of “appears in court.” Clarification may be helpful.

Rule Amendments – Utah Rules of Civil Procedure	
<a href="#">Rule 26.3</a> – Disclosure in unlawful detainer actions.	<p><b>Previously temporarily amended by the Administrative Order, dated 4/11/2022, as follows:</b></p> <p><i>In unlawful detainer cases under Title 78B, Chapter 6, Part 8, Forcible Entry and Detainer, the plaintiff shall include a completed form declaration, disclosing information relevant to federal, state, and local COVID relief law. Such declaration shall be provided with the required Rule 26.3(b)(1) disclosures.</i></p>
<a href="#">Rule 55</a> – Default.	<p><b>Previously temporarily amended by the Administrative Order, dated 4/11/2022, as follows:</b></p> <p><i>The court may not enter default judgment in unlawful detainer cases under Title 78B, Chapter 6, Part 8, Forcible Entry and Detainer, unless the plaintiff has submitted to the court a completed form declaration showing compliance with federal, state, and local COVID relief law. A sample form declaration will be available on the Utah State Courts website after review by the Judicial Council.</i></p>
<a href="#">Rule 7A</a> – Motion to enforce order and for sanctions. <a href="#">Rule 7B</a> – Motion to enforce order and for sanctions in domestic law matters.	Need to consider <b>Rule 7A(c)(4)</b> and <b>Rule 7B(c)(4)</b> .
<a href="#">Rule 28</a> – Person before whom depositions are held. <a href="#">Rule 30</a> – Depositions upon oral questions. <a href="#">Rule 31</a> – Depositions upon written questions.	Need to consider <b>Rule 28</b> , <b>Rule 30</b> , and <b>Rule 31</b> in full.
<a href="#">Rule 32</a> – Use of depositions in court proceedings.	Need to consider <b>subsection (a)(3)</b> , which creates a potentially unnecessary distance limitation for depositions.
<a href="#">Rule 43</a> – Evidence.	Need to consider <b>Rule 43</b> in full.
<a href="#">Rule 77</a> – District courts and clerks.	Need to consider <b>Rule 77</b> in full.

Rule Amendments – Utah Rules of Juvenile Procedure	
<a href="#">Rule 7</a> – Warrants.	Need to consider <b>subsection (d)(1)</b> .
<a href="#">Rule 9</a> – Detention hearings; scheduling; hearing procedure	<b>Rule 9</b> does not currently reference how one is to appear for the detention hearings. Clarification may be helpful.
<a href="#">Rule 13</a> – Shelter hearing.	<b>Rule 13</b> does not currently reference how one is to appear for the shelter hearing. Clarification may be helpful.
<a href="#">Rule 18</a> – Summons; service of process; notice.	<b>Subsections (a)(3) &amp; (b)(3)</b> each deal with appearances, but (b)(3) specifically says “appears in court.”
<a href="#">Rule 22</a> – Initial appearance and preliminary examination in cases under Utah Code section 80-6-503.	<b>Rule 22</b> states that “the minor shall appear before the court as directed in the summons” (per Rule 18).
<a href="#">Rule 23A</a> – Hearing on factors of Utah Code section 80-6-503; bind over to district court.	Rule 23A(c) states:  The court may consider any written report or other materials that relate to the minor’s mental, physical, educational, trauma, and social history. Upon request by the minor, the minor’s parent, guardian, or other interested party, the court shall require the person preparing the report, or other material, <b>to appear and be subject to direct and cross-examination</b> .
<a href="#">Rule 26</a> – Rights of minors in delinquency proceedings.	Need to consider <b>subsection (a)(1)</b> , which requires a minor to appear “in person.”
<a href="#">Rule 34</a> – Pretrial hearing in non-delinquency cases.	Need to consider <b>subsection (f)</b> requires appearing in-person or by counsel.
<a href="#">Rule 29B</a> – Hearings with remote conferencing from a different location (delinquency).	Need to consider <b>Rule 29B</b> in full..
<a href="#">Rule 37B</a> – Hearings with remote conferencing from a different location (child welfare).	Need to consider <b>Rule 37B</b> in full.
<a href="#">Rule 50</a> – Presence at hearings.	Need to consider <b>Rule 50</b> in full.

### Rule Amendments – Utah Rules of Evidence

[Rule 615](#) – Excluding Witnesses

**Rule 615** governs a party's request to exclude a witness from a proceeding while another witness is testifying.

Some practitioners have reported problems with multiple witnesses appearing from a single location making enforcement of the exclusionary rule difficult or impossible.

### Rule Amendments – Utah Rules of Appellate Procedure

[Rule 29](#) – Oral Arguments

**Rule 29** details how oral arguments are to be held. The rule already contemplates oral arguments being held via video conference (subsection (a)(3)), however, it does not provide a standard for approving or denying a request.

### Rule Amendments – Utah Code of Judicial Administration

[Rule 2-205](#) – Expedited rulemaking procedure.

[Rule 11-105\(5\)\(B\)](#) – Supreme Court Action on Rule Modifications.

**Previously suspended by the Administrative Order, dated 4/11/2022, as follows:**

*Rules 2-205 and 11-105(5)(B) of the Utah Rules of Judicial Administration are suspended to the extent they require a rule amendment that has been adopted on an expedited basis to be immediately published for comment and to be published for 45 days. Rule amendments will be published for public comment as directed by the body that adopts the rule, including reducing the time for public comment.*

[Rule 4-404\(2\)\(B\)](#) – Jury Selection and Service.

[Rule 4-404\(6\)\(C\)\(I\)](#) – Jury Selection and Service.

**Previously suspended / amended by the Administrative Order, dated 4/11/2022, as follows:**

**[(2)(B)]** *The calculation of time for determining juror terms of availability under rule 4-404(2)(B) of the Utah Rules of Judicial Administration is suspended. The suspension will be lifted for a particular court when jury trials resume in that court.*

**[(6)(C)(I)]** *The summons may be by first class mail delivered to the address provided on the juror qualification form, by email to the email address provided on the [...] form, or by telephone.*

[Rule 4-503](#) – Mandatory Electronic Filing

The Judicial Council should amend this rule to accommodate email filing in some circumstances.

[Rule 2-103](#) – Open and closed meetings.

While the Judicial Council already provides notice to the public about its meetings (through the Utah Public Notices website), the Judicial Council should consider including in

	that notice the Webex link to the meeting.
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# UTAH STATE COURTS

## UTAH JUDICIAL COUNCIL

### FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS REGARDING ONGOING USE OF VIRTUAL MEETING TECHNOLOGY TO CONDUCT COURT PROCEEDINGS

November 10, 2022



In February 2022, the Judicial Council established the Green Phase Working Group and directed it to study and make recommendations about the ongoing use of virtual meeting technology in court proceedings. The Judicial Council acknowledges the exhaustive work of the members and staff of the Green Phase Working Group. Their work culminated in a detailed, insightful, and instructive report containing recommendations and best practices regarding the use of virtual court hearings. On October 24, 2022, the Judicial Council adopted the recommendations and best practices with a few adjustments. Below are the findings and recommendations of the Judicial Council which reflect the adjustments made during their October 24, 2022 meeting. The full text of the Green Phase Working Group report is also attached. Where there are differences between this document and the report, this document governs.

### **Investments in IT Staff**

The Judicial Council needs to continue to invest in resources necessary to support virtual and hybrid hearings and to provide training to employees and judicial officers.

### **Judicial Discretion**

Judicial officers should consider the factors noted below in “Considerations for Judicial Officers” and other information relevant to the case, hearing, and parties and then determine whether a hearing will be in-person or virtual.

### **Hearing Participants Preference**

The Judicial Council recommends the Supreme Court consider establishing a rule that allows hearing participants to request permission to appear opposite the decision of the judicial officer.

### **Guidelines**

A judicial officer, courthouse, district, or bench may establish presumptions or guidelines for holding certain types of hearings in person or virtually.

### **Courtroom Technology**

Courtroom technology must provide remote participants the same opportunity as in-person attendees to hear, view, and participate in the court proceeding.

Each district should develop a digital evidence plan to standardize how digital evidence is managed within the district.

### **Remote Attendee Obligations**

A person who attends a court proceeding virtually must use a device and an internet connection that will contemporaneously transmit video and audio with sufficient quality to ensure a clear, verbatim record of the proceeding. If that technology is unavailable, the person must attend the court proceeding in person. The judicial officer may choose to require only audio transmission.

Remote attendees must observe the same courtroom decorum as those attending in person, including appropriate courtroom attire, behavior, and language.

Remote attendees must appear from a location that does not disrupt the court proceeding and allows the attendee to participate without distractions. Attendees must never appear in a court proceeding while operating a vehicle.

## **Considerations for Judicial Officers**

### Juvenile Court Judges and Commissioners

Juvenile court judges and commissioners should consider the following factors when deciding whether a hearing will be held in person or virtually.

- Individual needs of youth and parents
  - access to technology, including availability of Webex kiosks or other similar accommodations to facilitate participation in a virtual hearing;
  - transportation and travel challenges, including distance of residence from the courthouse;
  - accommodation for youth enrolled in school; and
  - accommodation for working parents
- Case Circumstances
  - feasibility of a virtual hearing or transport for an incarcerated parent;
  - whether a case is high-profile;
  - whether a youth or parent would benefit from face-to-face interaction with the judge;
  - youth or parent lack of engagement;
  - whether a youth is in a remote out-of-home placement and transport is not feasible; and
  - whether a youth or parent display a lack of understanding of court processes or orders
- Hearing Circumstances
  - whether the hearing is a procedural or substantive;
  - whether evidence is being presented; and
  - whether witness testimony is required
- Comfort level, preferences, and health accommodations of parties and teams

### Justice Court Judges and District Court Judges and Commissioners

Justice court judges and district court judges and commissioners should consider the following factors when deciding whether a hearing will be held in person or virtually.

- Does an existing statute, rule, or principle of law require an in-person hearing? Can the mandatory nature of that requirement be waived by the parties (or by a single party)?
- Do all parties have sufficient access to technology for virtual hearings?
- What is the substantive or procedural importance of the hearing?
- Which type of hearing best promotes access to justice for the parties?
- Are the parties more comfortable with a virtual hearing (e.g., high-conflict domestic cases, protective order hearings, and civil stalking injunction hearings)?

- Does the type of hearing allow the parties to have access to counsel of their choice?
- Would the parties or their counsel be required to travel long distances for an in-person hearing?
- Is there a significant cost to a party for an in-person hearing (e.g., money, time, lost work, child care, cost of transportation from jail for a civil proceeding, etc.)?
- Do the parties have a stated preference for a certain type of hearing?
- Are the judge and court staff able to manage a virtual or hybrid courtroom effectively?
- Does the hearing make efficient use of judicial resources, facilities, and court personnel?
- Will a party be prejudiced by requiring an in-person, virtual, or hybrid hearing?
- Will the type of hearing unreasonably delay the progress of the case, increase expense, or complicate resolution of any issue?
- Will the type of hearing unreasonably limit the court's ability to assess credibility, voluntariness, or comprehension?
- Is there a fairness concern because one party has easier access to the courthouse, or greater facility with technology, and is seeking a strategic advantage?
- Does the type of hearing allow for greater access to effective interpretation services?
- Is there enough time to give notice for people to make appropriate arrangements—especially where there is a change from one hearing type to another?
- Does the type of hearing—particularly virtual and hybrid hearings—allow parties to share documents?
- In virtual and hybrid hearings, will the participants have prior or simultaneous access to documents, photos, etc., that are submitted to the courtroom?

### Appellate Court Judges

Appellate court judges should consider the following factors when deciding whether a hearing will be held in person or virtually.

- What are the locations of parties and the cost of travel? Does requiring one party to travel a significantly greater distance to the courthouse create fairness issues?
- What are the unintended impacts of having appellate courts that operate from only one courthouse in the state? Does this geographic reality impact decisions to file appeals?
- Would in-person or virtual oral arguments increase the diversity of the appellate bar? Would it increase the diversity of the appellate bench?
- Which method(s) do the parties prefer for making their oral arguments?
- Which method does the appellate bench prefer for holding oral argument? Because oral argument is designed to be an opportunity for judicial officers to ask questions presented in briefing, does this preference hold more weight than the preference of the parties?
- Does the type of case matter in making the decision?

### **Filings by Self-Represented Litigants**

Because in-person filing was not possible during the pandemic, districts accommodated email filing by self-represented litigants who were not able to file electronically. That practice proved helpful to self-represented litigants and also added to the workload of staff. Ideally,

self-represented litigants would be able to file electronically through MyCase. However, that functionality will not be available for approximately 18 months. The Judicial Council asked its Policy, Planning, and Technology Committee to draft an amendment to the Code of Judicial Administration Rule 4-503 that establishes a statewide policy regarding email filing by self-represented litigants. That rule will govern the use of email filing until MyCase is fully functional.

The Judicial Council's Management Committee decided it is important to maintain consistency in the judiciary's approach to email filing between now and the time that an amended Rule 4-503 takes effect. As determined by the Management Committee, the interim statewide policy is self-represented litigants who are not able to file electronically may make any filing through email. This policy is effective immediately.

## **Data Collection**

The judiciary will gather and analyze data, including data from court patrons and stakeholders as well as data about virtual and in-person hearings, to see how virtual hearings are serving the public and advancing the mission of the judiciary.

## **Best Practices**

### *Court-wide best practices*

Each court location should update judicial officers, court staff, patrons, attorneys, and community partners (e.g., the prison and jails) on relevant Webex updates and process changes. This may include a page on the court website for updates and regular revisions to posted Webex guides.

Each court calendar should clearly indicate if a hearing is scheduled to be held in person or through a virtual or hybrid hearing. If the calendar setting is for a virtual or hybrid hearing, the Webex link for the hearing should be included on the calendar for the parties, public, and media to access, as appropriate (i.e., some hearings — such as adoptions — are not open to the general public or media and would therefore not have a publicly-accessible Webex link). A party who shows up at the courthouse for a virtual hearing — whether due to calendaring confusion or inability to access a virtual hearing on their own — should be provided access to participate in the virtual hearing. To facilitate this access, kiosks should be available at every courthouse for patrons to participate in virtual hearings as needed.

To address current challenges with the courts' network bandwidth, it is recommended that court employees working at a court location avoid using the wireless network and instead connect to the wired network whenever and wherever possible.

Court employees working at the same court location who attend a virtual meeting should gather as a group in a single location to attend the meeting from a single device and network connection as this reduces bandwidth pressure on the courts' network.

The public wireless networks in each court location share a statewide connection, resulting in

limited capacity to support parties, attorneys, and members of the public who may expect to use the courts' public wireless network to attend remote hearings. These court participants should connect to virtual hearings using networks other than the courts' public wireless networks at the courthouse.

*Best Practices for Judicial Officers and Court Staff*

JUDICIAL OFFICERS & COURT STAFF		
<b>1</b>	<b>Notices:</b> <i>Contents</i>	<p>All notices for virtual hearings should include at a minimum the following information (taking into consideration Rule 43 of the Utah Rules of Civil Procedure):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the date and time of the hearing;</li> <li>• the type of hearing – virtual, hybrid, or in-person;</li> <li>• the purpose of the hearing;</li> <li>• how to join the hearing, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– the Webex link (or how to access that link);</li> <li>– if permitted, how to call-in for the hearing;</li> <li>– whether participant video must be enabled;</li> <li>– how to access virtual hearing kiosks at a court location;</li> </ul> </li> <li>• what to expect at a virtual hearing;</li> <li>• how to file, serve, and present evidence;</li> <li>• what patrons should tell their witnesses;</li> <li>• contact information for technical assistance (<i>see Recommendation #5</i>);</li> <li>• the process for submitting and presenting evidence (<i>see Recommendation #8</i>); and</li> <li>• how to request interpretation or accommodation (<i>see Recommendation #12</i>).</li> </ul>
<b>2</b>	<b>Notices:</b> <i>Plain Language</i>	Notices should be easy to understand (i.e., in plain language, avoiding abbreviations or having standard abbreviations; etc.).
<b>3</b>	<b>Notices:</b> <i>Hearing Changes</i>	If a hearing is changed from in person to virtual or vice versa after notice was sent, a new timely notice should be provided to all participants.
<b>4</b>	<b>Notices:</b> <i>Self-Represented Parties</i>	If a self-represented party has provided an email address, notices should be sent by email. When possible, MyCase should be the preferred method for such communication.

JUDICIAL OFFICERS & COURT STAFF		
5	Technical Assistance for Virtual Hearing Participants	Each court location should have a technical assistance phone number that is included on every hearing notice. Ideally this number should be specific to each court location, but at a minimum should connect the participant to a qualified individual who can: a) assist the participant to resolve technical issues; and b) communicate immediately with the judicial officer's judicial assistant that the participant is attempting to connect to the virtual hearing but is experiencing technical issues.
6	Calendar Capacity	Virtual hearings may take longer and should be scheduled appropriately.
7	Webex Greeting	Participants should be greeted by a screen in Webex to confirm for participants and the public that they are in the right virtual location. For example, the screen could display the name of the judge, the time hearings are scheduled to begin, and what to do while waiting.
8	<b>Instructions:</b> <i>Evidence</i>	Judicial officers and judicial assistants should provide participants with clear instructions on how to submit and present evidence to the court during a virtual hearing.
9	<b>Instructions:</b> <i>Expectations</i>	If possible, any specific expectations of the parties should be clearly communicated to the parties in advance (e.g., if a camera is required for the party's participation in the hearing, if parties are expected to have spoken/negotiated before the hearing or if breakout rooms will be available for that purpose). These expectations could be provided in a flier, district-level standing order, or rule.
10	<b>Instructions:</b> <i>Hearing Processes</i>	The judicial officer or judicial assistant should provide hearing-specific instruction on virtual hearing processes (e.g., how a party/attorney should inform the court when their case is ready to be called). "How to" materials could be created for attorneys new to virtual hearings (e.g., how to find the calendar/hearing information, tips on how to communicate with clients if they are not in the same location during the hearing, how to prepare clients, how interpretation works during hearings, communicating with the opposing side in advance of the hearing, use of breakout rooms, how to present evidence).
11	<b>Instructions:</b> <i>Use of Webex</i>	The courts should provide clear instructions explaining how to use Webex. "How to" materials could be created for all Webex users. Materials for attorneys new to virtual hearings might include how to find the calendar/hearing information, tips on how to communicate with clients if they are not in the same location during the hearing, how to prepare clients, how interpretation works during hearings, communicating with opposing side in advance of the hearing, use of breakout rooms, and how to present evidence.

JUDICIAL OFFICERS & COURT STAFF		
12	Interpretation & Accommodation	When an interpreter is needed, judicial assistants should make arrangements for simultaneous interpretation if possible (or direct the party or attorney on how to arrange for simultaneous interpretation). The process for requesting other accommodations should be clearly communicated to participants.
13	Ongoing Training	Judicial officers and judicial assistants should receive ongoing training on Webex and other necessary virtual hearing technology.
14	Experience Sharing	The courts should provide regular opportunities for judicial officers, court staff, patrons, and stakeholders to share their feedback on the use of virtual hearings.

### Best Practices for Court Patrons

COURT PATRONS		
1	Decorum Expectations	<p>Participants <b>SHOULD</b>:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) remember that a virtual courtroom is subject to the same standards of behavior and decorum as in-person court;</li> <li>b) dress appropriately for a court appearance;</li> <li>c) be focused on the proceedings by pre-arranging care for other obligations that may need attention during the hearing (e.g., children and pets); and</li> <li>d) if late for a hearing, remain in the Webex proceeding until the judicial officer has finished calling through the other scheduled hearings before alerting the judicial officer.</li> </ul> <p>Participants <b>SHOULD NOT</b>:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>e) speak over another party or an interpreter;</li> <li>f) interrupt when joining a virtual hearing that has already started (remain muted until their case is called); and</li> <li>g) eat, drink, smoke, or drive during the hearing.</li> </ul>

COURT PATRONS		
2	Technology Expectations	<p>Participants <b>SHOULD</b>:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) <b>Location</b> – plan on joining the virtual hearing from a suitable location that is quiet, private, and allows the participant to focus;</li> <li>b) <b>Camera</b> – have video enabled and be visible to the court when participating in a proceeding, choosing a camera angle that avoids background distractions;</li> <li>c) <b>Lighting</b> – avoid camera angles that position a window or other bright light behind the participant (this often results in poor video quality and obscures the participant’s face);</li> <li>d) <b>Audio</b> – be aware of and try to minimize background noises;</li> <li>e) <b>Calling in on a non-smartphone</b> – avoid joining a virtual hearing via a non-smartphone, as it will limit Webex functionality (e.g., the participant won’t be able to be moved into a separate virtual room to talk with an attorney); and</li> <li>f) <b>Bandwidth</b> – use a network with sufficient bandwidth for a stable connection to the virtual hearing OR use a computer kiosk at the courthouse to join a virtual proceeding.</li> </ul>

Best Practices for Attorneys

ATTORNEYS		
1	Expectations	<p>Expectations for attorneys should be outlined and disseminated. For example, attorneys <b>SHOULD</b>:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) <b>Title &amp; Name</b> – ensure their Webex name displays their title followed by their full name (e.g., Defense Attorney Atticus Finch);</li> <li>b) <b>Camera</b> – have video enabled and be visible to the court when participating in a proceeding, choosing a camera angle that avoids background distractions;</li> <li>c) <b>Audio</b> – be aware of and try to minimize background noises, and use a quality microphone to help ensure an accurate record;</li> <li>d) <b>Attire</b> – dress appropriately for a court appearance;</li> <li>e) <b>Simultaneous hearings</b> – log into multiple simultaneous hearings only if the attorney can effectively manage participation in each hearing, ensuring appropriate, timely, and responsive communication with each court; and</li> <li>f) <b>NEVER</b> drive during an appearance.</li> </ul>

Best practices for jails and prisons

PRISON & JAILS		
1	Stakeholder Meetings	<p>Stakeholder meetings should be held to discuss and establish best practices between the courts and the prison and jails, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>a) communication processes to notify the correctional facility if a hearing will be in person or virtual so appropriate transportation or virtual appearance can be arranged;</li><li>b) the need for each correctional facility to provide at least two Webex-equipped rooms per court calendar to facilitate attorney-client communication in a breakout room, while the court moves forward with other cases in the main room; and</li><li>c) the need for each correctional facility to have a dedicated phone that an interpreter can use to provide simultaneous interpretation during the hearing to an inmate with limited english proficiency.</li></ul>

TO: Lauren DiFrancesco

FROM: Tim Pack

DATE: November 28, 2023

RE: Remote Hearing Subcommittee Updated Memo

The Utah Supreme Court has asked the Civil Rules Committee to consider whether there should be a rule or procedure regarding when and if to hold remote versus in-person hearings. In May 2023, the Remote Hearing Subcommittee met and discussed this issue including:

- the current process and practice for holding remote versus in person hearings;
- what types of hearings, if any, should be normally heard in-person;
- the injustice or unfairness to parties, including pro se parties, if there is not a procedure to request an in person hearing or to object to a Court's decision to deny an in person hearing;
- any proposed changes to the rules.
- the consequences that may result from implementing a procedure to request an in person hearing or object to a Court's decision deny such a request.

The Subcommittee did not reach a unanimous decision or recommendation. The Subcommittee does not have enough evidence to determine whether parties are suffering harm or injustice because of an inability to appear before Courts in-person. The Subcommittee determined that implementing any additional procedures will naturally cause more work for the parties, Court staff, and judges. As a result, the entire Civil Rules Committee should consider this question.

During the May 2023 Civil Rules Committee meeting, there was not a consensus among the members as to whether there should be a rule of procedure that: (1) allows participants to request an in person or remote hearing; (2) presumes hearings will be in-person or held remotely; and (3) allows a party to challenge a court's decision to hold a hearing in-person or remotely. See attached May 2023 meeting minutes. In general, member-judges expressed an interest to maintain discretion and make determinations on a case-by-case basis.

On November 1, 2023, the Subcommittee met to discuss the member's comments from the May 2023 meeting. Given the member-judges preference to maintain discretion and the lack of evidence of litigants who have been harmed due to the lack of a relevant procedural rule, the Subcommittee decided not to propose any new rules or amendments.

Tim Pack

# Tab 4

**CHANGES REQUESTED FOR MYCASE TRANSITION**  
**RULE 76**  
**At the request of the Self Help Center and MyCase developers**  
**October 25, 2023**

**CURRENT RULE 76**

**Rule 76. Notice of contact information change.**

***Effective: 11/1/2022***

An attorney and unrepresented party must promptly notify the court in writing of any change in that person's address, e-mail address, and phone number for purposes of receiving service and communications from the court and other parties. The same notice must be provided to other parties, unless a protective order, stalking injunction, or other court order provides otherwise.

**WHY WE REQUEST IT BE MODIFIED**

We are close to having functionality available in MyCase such that when a MyCase user updates their email address, their email address in CORIS updates automatically. When that happens, there will be a note entered in the case history. That means that the need for this update to URCP 76 will become more acute - because if the rule is *not* changed, then lots of folks (litigants, lawyers, JAs) will likely be confused.

**PROPOSED MODIFICATIONS**

**Rule 76. Notice of contact information change.**

Attorneys and self-represented parties must keep their contact information (address, email and phone number) current with the court while involved in a court case so they can receive notices from the court and from other parties. If their contact information changes, they must promptly file with the court a Notice of Contact Information Change and must provide a copy of the Notice to all other parties in the case through informal (Rule 5) service unless prohibited from doing so by a protective order, stalking injunction, or other court order. If a party needs to change their email address only, they may update it in MyCase, which satisfies the requirements of this rule and notifies the other parties in the case who have electronic filing accounts.

■ Rule 76. Notice of contact information change.

*Effective: 11/1/2022*

~~An Attorneys and unself-represented party-part-ies must keep their contact information promptly notify the court in writing of any change in that person's (address, e-mail ~~address~~, and phone number) current with the court while involved in a court case so they can receive notices for purposes of receiving service and communications from the court and from other parties. If their contact information changes, they must promptly file with the court a Notice of Contact Information Change and must provide a copy of the Notice to all other parties in the case through informal (Rule 5) service unless prohibited from doing so by ~~The same notice must be provided to other parties, unless~~ a protective order, stalking injunction, or other court order ~~provides otherwise~~. If a party needs to change their email address only, they may update it in MyCase, which satisfies the requirements of this rule and notifies the other parties in the case who have electronic filing accounts.~~

**FINALLY, HERE IS WHAT CLAUDE AI CHANGES 76 TO (at a 5<sup>th</sup> grade level):**

Lawyers and people representing themselves must keep their address, email, and phone number updated with the court during a case. That way the court and other parties can contact them. If their contact information changes, they must quickly file a Notice of Contact Information Change with the court. They must also give a copy to all other parties, unless a court order stops them. If they only need to update an email address, they can do that in MyCase. That will notify parties with electronic filing accounts.

[Might need to be more specific, re a court order that prevents them from communicating with the other party like a stalking injunction or a protective order.]

# Tab 5

**Rule 12. Defenses and objections.****(a) When presented.**

(1) ~~In actions other than domestic relations.~~ Unless otherwise provided by statute or order of the court, a defendant must file and serve an answer within 21 days after the service of the summons and complaint ~~is complete~~ within the state and within 30 days after service of the summons and complaint ~~is complete~~ outside the state. A party served with ~~a pleading stating~~ a cross-claim must file and serve an answer ~~there to~~ the crossclaim within 21 days after ~~the~~ service. The plaintiff must file and serve an answer to a counterclaim ~~in the answer~~ within 21 days after service of the counterclaim ~~answer or, if a reply is ordered by the court, within 21 days after service of the order~~, unless the court orders otherwise ~~directs~~. The service of a motion under this rule alters these periods of time as follows, unless a different time is ~~fixed by~~ ordered by ~~of~~ the court, but a motion directed to fewer than all of the claims in a pleading does not affect the time for responding to the remaining claims:

(A) If the court denies the motion or postpones its disposition until the trial on the merits, the responsive pleading must be served within 14 days after notice of the court's action;

(B) If the court grants a motion for a more definite statement, the responsive pleading must be served within 14 days after the service of the more definite statement.

(2) ~~In domestic relations actions. A party served with a domestic relations action must serve an answer within 21 days after service of the summons and petition is complete within the state and within 30 days after service of the summons and petition is complete outside the state. Any counterpetition must be filed with the answer. A party served with a counterpetition must serve an answer within 21 days after service of the counterpetition.~~ For purposes of domestic relations actions as defined in Rule 26.1, and as used in this rule, the terms "plaintiff" means petitioner,

the term “defendant” means respondent, the term “complaint” means petition, and the term “counterclaim” means counterpetition.

**(b) How presented.** Every defense, in law or fact, to claim for relief in any pleading, whether a claim, counterclaim, cross-claim, or third-party claim, must be asserted in the responsive pleading thereto if one is required, except that the following defenses may at the option of the pleader be made by motion: (1) lack of jurisdiction over the subject matter, (2) lack of jurisdiction over the person, (3) improper venue, (4) insufficiency of process, (5) insufficiency of service of process, (6) failure to state a claim upon which relief can be granted, (7) failure to join an indispensable party. A motion making any of these defenses must be made before pleading if a further pleading is permitted. No defense or objection is waived by being joined with one or more other defenses or objections in a responsive pleading or motion or by further pleading after the denial of such motion or objection. If a pleading sets forth a claim for relief to which the adverse party is not required to serve a responsive pleading, the adverse party may assert at the trial any defense in law or fact to that claim for relief. If, on a motion asserting the defense numbered (6) to dismiss for failure of the pleading to state a claim upon which relief can be granted, matters outside the pleading are presented to and not excluded by the court, the motion must be treated as one for summary judgment and disposed of as provided in Rule [56](#), and all parties must be given reasonable opportunity to present all material made pertinent to such a motion by Rule [56](#).

**(c) Motion for judgment on the pleadings.** After the pleadings are closed, but within such time as not to delay the trial, any party may move for judgment on the pleadings. If, on a motion for judgment on the pleadings, matters outside the pleadings are presented to and not excluded by the court, the motion must be treated as one for summary judgment and disposed of as provided in Rule [56](#), and all parties must be given reasonable opportunity to present all material made pertinent to such a motion by Rule [56](#).

55 **(d) Preliminary hearings.** The defenses specifically enumerated (1) - (7) in subdivision  
56 (b) of this rule, whether made in a pleading or by motion, and the motion for judgment  
57 mentioned in subdivision (c) of this rule must be heard and determined before trial on  
58 application of any party, unless the court orders that the hearings and determination  
59 thereof be deferred until the trial.

60 **(e) Motion for more definite statement.** If a pleading to which a responsive pleading is  
61 permitted is so vague or ambiguous that a party cannot reasonably be required to frame  
62 a responsive pleading, the party may move for a more definite statement before  
63 interposing a responsive pleading. The motion must point out the defects complained  
64 of and the details desired. If the motion is granted and the order of the court is not  
65 obeyed within 14 days after notice of the order or within such other time as the court  
66 may fix, the court may strike the pleading to which the motion was directed or make  
67 such order as it deems just.

68 **(f) Motion to strike.** Upon motion made by a party before responding to a pleading or,  
69 if no responsive pleading is permitted by these rules, upon motion made by a party  
70 within 21 days after the service of the pleading, the court may order stricken from any  
71 pleading any insufficient defense or any redundant, immaterial, impertinent, or  
72 scandalous matter.

73 **(g) Consolidation of defenses.** A party who makes a motion under this rule may join  
74 with it the other motions herein provided for and then available. If a party makes a  
75 motion under this rule and does not include therein all defenses and objections then  
76 available which this rule permits to be raised by motion, the party must not thereafter  
77 make a motion based on any of the defenses or objections so omitted, except as  
78 provided in subdivision (h) of this rule.

79 **(h) Waiver of defenses.** A party waives all defenses and objections not presented either  
80 by motion or by answer or reply, except (1) that the defense of failure to state a claim  
81 upon which relief can be granted, the defense of failure to join an indispensable party,  
82 and the objection of failure to state a legal defense to a claim may also be made by a

later pleading, if one is permitted, or by motion for judgment on the pleadings or at the trial on the merits, and except (2) that, whenever it appears by suggestion of the parties or otherwise that the court lacks jurisdiction of the subject matter, the court must dismiss the action. The objection or defense, if made at the trial, must be disposed of as provided in Rule [15\(b\)](#) in the light of any evidence that may have been received.

**(i) Pleading after denial of a motion.** The filing of a responsive pleading after the denial of any motion made pursuant to these rules must not be deemed a waiver of such motion.

**(j) Security for costs of a nonresident plaintiff.** When the plaintiff in an action resides out of this state, or is a foreign corporation, the defendant may file a motion to require the plaintiff to furnish security for costs and charges which may be awarded against such plaintiff. Upon hearing and determination by the court of the reasonable necessity therefor, the court must order the plaintiff to file a \$300.00 undertaking with sufficient sureties as security for payment of such costs and charges as may be awarded against such plaintiff. No security must be required of any officer, instrumentality, or agency of the United States.

**(k) Effect of failure to file undertaking.** If the plaintiff fails to file the undertaking as ordered within 30 days of the service of the order, the court must, upon motion of the defendant, enter an order dismissing the action.

*Effective: 11/1/2021*

**Rule 83. Vexatious litigants.**

**(a) Definitions.**

(1) The court may find a person to be a "vexatious litigant" if the person, with or without legal representation, including an attorney acting pro se, does any of the following:

(A) In the immediately preceding seven years, the person has filed at least five claims for relief, other than small claims actions, that have been finally determined against the person, and the person does not have within that time at least two claims, other than small claims actions, that have been finally determined in that person's favor.

(B) After a claim for relief or an issue of fact or law in the claim has been finally determined, the person two or more additional times re-litigates or attempts to re-litigate the claim, the issue of fact or law, or the validity of the determination against the same party in whose favor the claim or issue was determined.

(C) In any action, the person three or more times does any one or any combination of the following:

(i) files unmeritorious pleadings or other papers,

(ii) files pleadings or other papers that contain redundant, immaterial, impertinent or scandalous matter,

(iii) conducts unnecessary discovery or discovery that is not proportional to what is at stake in the litigation, or

(iv) engages in tactics that are frivolous or solely for the purpose of harassment or delay.

(D) The person purports to represent or to use the procedures of a court other than a court of the United States, a court created by the Constitution of the United States or by Congress under the authority of the Constitution of the United States, a tribal court recognized by the United States, a court created by a state or territory of the United States, or a court created by a foreign nation recognized by the United States.

(2) "Claim" and "claim for relief" mean a petition, complaint, counterclaim, cross claim or third-party complaint.

**(b) Vexatious litigant orders.** The court may, on its own motion or on the motion of any party, after notice and an opportunity to be heard, enter an order requiring a vexatious litigant to:

(1) furnish security to assure payment of the moving party's reasonable expenses, costs and, if authorized, attorney fees incurred in a pending action;

(2) obtain legal counsel before proceeding in a pending action;

(3) obtain legal counsel before filing any future claim for relief;

(4) abide by a prefiling order requiring the vexatious litigant to obtain the court's ~~leave-permission of the court~~ before filing any paper, pleading, or motion, in a pending action; except that the court may not require a vexatious litigant to obtain the court's permission before filing a notice of or petition for permission to appeal;

(5) abide by a prefiling order requiring the vexatious litigant to obtain the court's ~~leave-permission of the court~~ before filing any future claim for relief in any court; or

(6) take any other action reasonably necessary to curb the vexatious litigant's abusive conduct.

**(c) Necessary findings and security.**

(1) Before entering an order under subparagraph (b), the court must find by clear and convincing evidence that:

(A) the party subject to the order is a vexatious litigant; and

(B) there is no reasonable probability that the vexatious litigant will prevail on the claim.

(2) A preliminary finding that there is no reasonable probability that the vexatious litigant will prevail is not a decision on the ultimate merits of the vexatious litigant's claim.

(3) The court shall identify the amount of the security and the time within which it is to be furnished. If the security is not furnished as ordered, the court shall dismiss the vexatious litigant's claim with prejudice.

**(d) Prefiling orders in a pending action.**

(1) If a vexatious litigant is subject to a prefiling order in a pending action requiring ~~leave-the court's permission of the court~~ to file any paper, pleading, or motion, the vexatious litigant shall submit any proposed paper, pleading, or motion, except for a notice of or petition for permission to appeal, to the judge assigned to the case and must:

(A) demonstrate that the paper, pleading, or motion is based on a good faith dispute of the facts;

(B) demonstrate that the paper, pleading, or motion is warranted under existing law or a good faith argument for the extension, modification, or reversal of existing law;

(C) include an oath, affirmation or declaration under criminal penalty that the proposed paper, pleading or motion is not filed for the purpose of harassment or delay and contains no redundant, immaterial, impertinent or scandalous matter;

(2) A prefiling order in a pending action shall be effective until a final determination of the action on appeal, unless otherwise ordered by the court.

(3) After a prefiling order has been effective in a pending action for one year, the person subject to the prefiling order may move to have the order vacated. The motion shall be decided by the judge to whom the pending action is assigned. In granting the motion, the judge may impose any other vexatious litigant orders permitted in paragraph (b).

(4) All papers, pleadings, and motions filed by a vexatious litigant subject to a prefiling order under this paragraph (d) shall include a judicial order authorizing the filing and any required security. If the order or security is not included, the clerk or court shall reject the paper, pleading, or motion.

**(e) Prefiling orders as to future claims.**

(1) A vexatious litigant subject to a prefiling order restricting the filing of future claims shall submit an application seeking an order before filing. The presiding judge of the judicial district in which the claim is to be filed shall decide the application. The presiding judge may consult with the judge who entered the vexatious litigant order in deciding the application. In granting an application, the presiding judge may impose in the pending action any of the vexatious litigant orders permitted under paragraph (b).

(2) To obtain an order under paragraph (e)(1), the vexatious litigant's application must:

(A) demonstrate that the claim is based on a good faith dispute of the facts;

(B) demonstrate that the claim is warranted under existing law or a good faith argument for the extension, modification, or reversal of existing law;

(C) include an oath, affirmation, or declaration under criminal penalty that the proposed claim is not filed for the purpose of harassment or delay and contains no redundant, immaterial, impertinent or scandalous matter;

(D) include a copy of the proposed petition, complaint, counterclaim, cross-claim, or third party complaint; and

(E) include the court name and case number of all claims that the applicant has filed against each party within the preceding seven years and the disposition of each claim.

(3) A prefiling order limiting the filing of future claims is effective indefinitely unless the court orders a shorter period.

(4) After five years a person subject to a pre-filing order limiting the filing of future claims may file a motion to vacate the order. The motion shall be filed in the same judicial district from which the order entered and be decided by the presiding judge of that district.

(5) A claim filed by a vexatious litigant subject to a prefiling order under this paragraph (e) shall include an order authorizing the filing and any required security. If the order or security is not included, the clerk of court shall reject the filing.

**(f) Notice of vexatious litigant orders.**

(1) The clerks of court shall notify the Administrative Office of the Courts that a pre-filing order has been entered or vacated.

(2) The Administrative Office of the Courts shall disseminate to the clerks of court a list of vexatious litigants subject to a prefiling order.

**(g) Statute of limitations or time for filing tolled.** Any applicable statute of limitations or time in which the person is required to take any action is tolled until 7 days after notice of the decision on the motion or application for authorization to file.

**(h) Contempt sanctions.** Disobedience by a vexatious litigant of a pre-filing order may be punished as contempt of court.

**(i) Other authority.** This rule does not affect the authority of the court under other statutes and rules or the inherent authority of the court.

**(j) Applicability of vexatious litigant order to other courts.** After a court has issued a vexatious litigant order, any other court may rely upon that court's findings and order its own restrictions against the litigant as provided in paragraph (b).

[Effective: May/Nov. 1, 202\\_.](#)

## UTAH COURT RULES – PUBLISHED FOR COMMENT

The Supreme Court and Judicial Council invite comments about amending these rules. To view the proposed amendment, click on the rule number.

To submit a comment or view the comments of others, click on “Continue Reading.” To submit a comment, scroll down to the “Leave a Reply” section, and type your comment in the “Comment” field. Type your name and email address in the designated fields and click “Post Comment.”

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Posted: October 4, 2023

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### Rules of Civil Procedure – Comment Period Closed November 18, 2023

**URCP012.** Defenses and objections. AMEND. After this rule was posted for public comment there are additional proposed changes to subparagraphs (a)(1) and (a)(2). The amendments clarify the applicability of the rules and the language for pleadings filed in domestic relations actions.

**URCP083.** Vexatious litigants. AMEND. Amendments were previously made to this rule and published for comment. Amendments are now also proposed to lines 42 and 63 to include the language “or petition for permission to” in these sentences. Furthermore, an amendment is proposed to add the language “after notice and an opportunity to be heard” to subparagraph (b) to clarify the vexatious litigants’ right to notice and an opportunity to be heard on these issues.

This entry was posted in [-Rules of Civil Procedure](#), [URCP012](#), [URCP083](#).

« [Rule of Criminal Procedure – Comment Period Closes](#)

[Rules of Appellate Procedure – Comment Period Closed](#)

To view all comments submitted during a particular comment period, click on the comment deadline date. To view all comments to an amendment, click on the rule number.

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<a href="#">December 30, 2023</a>	<a href="#">November 10, 2023 »</a>
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UTAH COURTS

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One thought on “Rules of Civil Procedure – Comment Period Closed November 18, 2023”

Justin Heideman

October 4, 2023 at 9:05 pm

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I believe that it would be appropriate to note that a 12(b) Motion to Dismiss precludes the requirement that an answer be filed. As the rule currently reads it could be interpreted to require the filing of an answer even if a 12(b) motion were filed.

- [-Rules of Appellate Procedure](#)
- [-Rules of Civil Procedure](#)
- [-Rules of Criminal Procedure](#)
- [-Rules of Evidence](#)
- [-Rules of Juvenile Procedure](#)
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- [CJA02-0106.05](#)
- [CJA02-0204](#)
- [CJA02-0206](#)
- [CJA02-0208](#)
- [CJA02-0208](#)
- [CJA02-0211](#)
- [CJA02-0212](#)
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- [CJA03-0111.01](#)

# Tab 6

**URCP Rule 74****Contact information upon withdrawal of counsel**

Judge Holmberg noticed the mailing address for a client may not be sufficient contact information when an attorney withdraws from a case. The proposal is to add that an attorney provide the physical mailing address, the email address, and the cell phone number of the client in the withdrawal of counsel.

1   **Rule 74. Withdrawal of counsel.**

2   **(a) Notice of withdrawal.** An attorney may withdraw from the case by filing with the  
3   court and serving on all parties a notice of withdrawal. The notice of withdrawal shall  
4   include the physical mailing address, email address and cell phone number of the  
5   attorney's client and a statement that no motion is pending and no hearing or trial has  
6   been set. If a motion is pending or a hearing or trial has been set, an attorney may not  
7   withdraw except upon motion and order of the court. The motion to withdraw shall  
8   describe the nature of any pending motion and the date and purpose of any scheduled  
9   hearing or trial.

10   **(b) Withdrawal of limited appearance.** An attorney who has entered a limited  
11   appearance under Rule 75 shall withdraw from the case upon the conclusion of the  
12   purpose or proceeding identified in the Notice of Limited Appearance:

- 13    ~~(b)~~(1) by filing and serving a notice of withdrawal; or  
14    ~~(b)~~(2) if permitted by the judge, by orally announcing the withdrawal on the record  
15    in a proceeding.

16   An attorney who seeks to withdraw before the conclusion of the purpose or proceeding  
17   shall proceed under subdivision (a).

18   **(c) Notice to Appear or Appoint Counsel.** If an attorney withdraws other than under  
19   subdivision (b), dies, is suspended from the practice of law, is disbarred, or is removed  
20   from the case by the court, the opposing party shall serve a Notice to Appear or  
21   Appoint Counsel on the unrepresented party, informing the party of the responsibility  
22   to appear personally or appoint counsel. A copy of the Notice to Appear or Appoint  
23   Counsel must be filed with the court. No further proceedings shall be held in the case  
24   until 21 days after filing the Notice to Appear or Appoint Counsel unless the  
25   unrepresented party waives the time requirement or unless otherwise ordered by the  
26   court.

27 (d) **Substitution of counsel.** An attorney may replace the counsel of record by filing  
28 and serving a notice of substitution of counsel signed by former counsel, new counsel  
29 and the client. Court approval is not required if new counsel certifies in the notice of  
30 substitution that counsel will comply with the existing hearing schedule and deadlines.

31 | *Effective date:*

# Tab 7

**Rule 5. Service and filing of pleadings and other papers.****(a) When service is required.**

**(1) Papers that must be served.** Except as otherwise provided in these rules or as otherwise directed by the court, every the following papers filed with the court must be served by the party filing it on every party to the case.

~~(A) a judgment;~~

~~(B) an order that states it must be served;~~

~~(C) a pleading after the original complaint;~~

~~(D) a paper relating to disclosure or discovery;~~

~~(E) a paper filed with the court other than a that may be heard ex parte; and~~

~~(F) a written notice, appearance, demand, offer of judgment, or similar paper.~~

**(2) Serving parties in default.** No service is required on a party who is in default except that:

(A) a party in default must be served as ordered by the court;

(B) a party in default for any reason other than for failure to file and serve a responsive pleading or otherwise appear must be served as provided in paragraph (a)(1);

(C) a party in default for any reason must be served with notice of any hearing to determine the amount of damages to be entered against the defaulting party;

(D) a party in default for any reason must be served with notice of entry of judgment under Rule 58A(g); and

(E) a party in default for any reason must be served under Rule 4 with pleadings asserting new or additional claims for relief against the party.

**(3) Service in actions begun by seizing property.** If an action is begun by seizing property and no person is or need be named as defendant, any service required

**Comment [LP1]:** Oct 2023 Civ Rules Committee Mtg: Sub "papers" for "documents"?

**Comment [LP2]:** We changed the list from what must be served to only those that are an exception as stated in other rules or as directed by the court.

**Comment [LP3]:** Summons must now include the bilingual notice (Rule 4 c1g) which is the court's form. Attorneys are supposed to attach the notice to their summons templates.

**Comment [LP4]:** 3-2023 Committee Mtg: hesitant to narrowly define what it means to appear so we added language instead of replacing "appear."

before the filing of an answer, claim or appearance must be made upon the person who had custody or possession of the property when it was seized.

**(b) How service is made.**

**(1) Whom to serve.** If a party is self-represented, service must be made upon the self-represented party. If a party is represented by an attorney, a paper served under this rule must be served upon the attorney unless the court orders service upon the party. Service must be made upon the attorney and the party if:

(A) an attorney has filed a Notice of Limited Appearance under Rule 75 and the papers being served relate to a matter within the scope of the Notice; or

(B) a final judgment has been entered in the action and more than 90 days has elapsed from the date a paper was last served on the attorney.

**(2) When to serve.** If a hearing is scheduled 7 days or less from the date of service, a party must serve a paper related to the hearing by the method most likely to be promptly received. Otherwise, a paper that is filed with the court must be served before or on the same day that it is filed.

**(3) Methods of service.** A paper is served under this rule by:

(A) Electronic filing. ~~except~~ Except in the juvenile court, a paper is served by submitting it for electronic filing, or the court submitting it to the electronic filing service provider, if the person being served has an electronic filing account;

(B) Email. If the party serving or being served a paper does not have an electronic filing account, emailing it to

- (i) the most recent email address the person being served has provided ~~by the person~~ to the court ~~and other parties~~ under Rule 10(a)(3) or Rule 76; or
- (ii) ~~to~~ if service is to an attorney licensed in Utah, to the email address on their pleadings and/or on file with the Utah State Bar; or

**Comment [LP5]:** Added clarity for parties self-represented.

**Comment [LP6]:** From Lauren: I think the new URCP 5(b)(3) was meant to allow electronic service wherever possible. But I came across a scenario today that did not allow for electronic service on opposing counsel – and that is a request for a foreign subpoena to be served in Utah. So Florida case needing discovery in Utah, and I have to serve opposing counsel in FL via mail because they don't meet either URCP 5(b)(3)(A) or (B). Could you all please take a look at how to encompass this scenario into the language of 5(b)(3)?

**Comment [LP7]:** Committees suggestion: (b)(3)(B)(ii) and (iii)

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(iii) if service is to an attorney licensed outside of Utah, to the email address on their pleadings and/or on file with the attorney licensing entity in the state the attorney is licensed in.

(C) **Mail and other methods.** If the party serving or being served with a paper does not have an electronic filing account or email, a paper may be served under this paragraph by:

(i) mailing it to the most recent address the person being served has provided to the court under Rule 10(a)(3) or Rule 76, or, if none, the person's last known address;

~~(ii)~~ handing it to the person;

~~(iii)~~ leaving it at the person's office with a person in charge or, if no one is in charge, leaving it in a receptacle intended for receiving deliveries or in a conspicuous place;

~~(iv)~~ leaving it at the person's dwelling house or usual place of abode with a person of suitable age and discretion who resides there; or

~~(v)~~ any other method agreed to in writing by the parties.

**(4) When service is effective.** Service by mail or electronic means is complete upon sending.

**(5) Who serves.** Unless otherwise directed by the court or these rules:

(A) every paper required to be served must be served by the party preparing it; and

(B) every paper prepared by the court will be served by the court; ~~and~~.

~~(C) every paper signed by the court but not prepared by the court will be served by the party who prepared it.~~

**(c) Serving numerous defendants.** If an action involves an unusually large number of defendants, the court, upon motion or its own initiative, may order that:

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(1) a defendant's pleadings and replies to them do not need to be served on the other defendants;

(2) any cross-claim, counterclaim avoidance or affirmative defense in a defendant's pleadings and replies to them are deemed denied or avoided by all other parties;

(3) filing a defendant's pleadings and serving them on the plaintiff constitutes notice of them to all other parties; and

(4) a copy of the order must be served upon the parties.

(d) **Certificate of service.** No certificate of service is required when a paper is served by filing it with through the court's electronic filing system account under paragraph (b)(3)(A). When a paper that is required to be served is served by email, mail or other means methods:

(1) if the paper is filed with the court, a certificate of service showing the date and manner of service must be filed with it or within a reasonable time after service; and

(2) if the paper is not filed with the court, a certificate of service need not be filed unless filing is required by rule or court order. A paper required by this rule to be served, including electronically filed papers, must include a signed certificate of service showing the name of the document served, the date and manner of service and on whom it was served. Except in the juvenile court, this paragraph does not apply to papers required to be served under paragraph (b)(5)(B) when service to all parties is made under paragraph (b)(3)(A).

(e) **Filing.** Except as provided in Rule 7(j) and Rule 26(f), all papers after the complaint that are required to be served must be filed with the court. ~~Parties~~ Attorneys with an electronic filing account must file a paper electronically. A party without an electronic filing account may file a paper ~~by delivering it to~~ with the clerk of the court or ~~to a~~ judge of the court. Filing is complete upon the earliest of acceptance by the electronic filing system, the clerk of court or the judge.

**Comment [LP8]:** Our initial change is probably premature for service by and on MyCase users so we will return to previous language for the time being.

104 (f) Filing an affidavit or declaration. If a person files an affidavit or declaration, the  
105 filer may:

**Comment [LP9]:** Track changes with Aff/Dec sub-committee

- 106 (1) electronically file the original affidavit with a notary acknowledgment as  
107 provided by Utah Code Section 46-1-16(7);
- 108 (2) electronically file a scanned image of the affidavit or declaration;
- 109 (3) electronically file the affidavit or declaration with a conformed signature; or
- 110 (4) if the filer does not have an electronic filing account, present the original affidavit  
111 or declaration to the clerk of the court, and the clerk will electronically file a scanned  
112 image and return the original to the filer.

113 The filer must keep an original affidavit or declaration of anyone other than the filer  
114 safe and available for inspection upon request until the action is concluded, including  
115 any appeal or until the time in which to appeal has expired.

116 Effective May/November 2024

117 **Advisory Committee Notes**

118 *Note adopted ~~2015~~20---*

119 Under paragraph (b)(3)(A), electronically filing a document has the effect of serving the  
120 document on ~~lawyers~~ parties who have an e-filing account. (~~Lawyers~~ Attorneys  
121 representing parties in the district court are required to have an account and  
122 electronically file documents. Code of Judicial Administration Rule 4-503.) The 2015  
123 amendment excepts from this provision documents electronically filed in juvenile court.  
124 Although electronic filing in the juvenile court presents to the parties the documents  
125 that have been filed, the juvenile court e-filing application (CARE), unlike that in the  
126 district court, does not deliver an email alerting the party to that fact. The Board of  
127 Juvenile Court Judges and the Advisory Committee on the Rules of Juvenile Procedure  
128 believe this difference renders electronic filing alone insufficient notice of a document

URCP005. Amend

Redline of January 1, 2021

December 2023

129 having been filed. So in the juvenile court, a party electronically filing a document must  
130 serve that document by one of the other permitted methods.

# Tab 8

**Rule 42. Consolidation; separate trials; venue transfers.**

*Amendment history and request from Supreme Court.*

The amendments to this rule started with a change from “new” to “single” in (a)(3). After further discussions there was also an addition made to (a)(2) that would allow any party “to either action to be consolidated” could file or oppose a motion to consolidate. These changes to (a)(2) and (a)(3) were presented to the Supreme Court and were acceptable, along with the suggested language that a party need not seek to intervene.

After the last comment period and discussion with the Justices, alternative language was proposed to be added to (a)(2), and this suggestion is being sent back to the Committee for consideration.

**Rule 42. Consolidation; separate trials; venue transfer.**

**(a) Consolidation.** When actions involving a common question of law or fact or arising from the same transaction or occurrence are pending before the court in one or more judicial districts, the court may, on motion of any party or on the court's own initiative: order that the actions are consolidated in whole or in part for any purpose, including for discovery, other pretrial matters, or a joint hearing or trial; stay any or all of the proceedings in any action subject to the order; transfer any or all further proceedings in the actions to a location in which any of the actions is pending after consulting with the presiding judge of the transferee court; and make other such orders concerning proceedings therein as may tend to avoid unnecessary costs or delay.

(1) In determining whether to order consolidation and the appropriate location for the consolidated proceedings, the court may consider, among other factors: the complexity of the actions; the importance of any common question of fact or law to the determination of the actions; the risk of duplicative or inconsistent rulings, orders, or judgments; the relative procedural postures of the actions; the risk that consolidation may unreasonably delay the progress, increase the expense, or complicate the processing of any action; prejudice to any party that far outweighs the overall benefits of consolidation; the convenience of the parties, witnesses, and counsel; and the efficient utilization of judicial resources and the facilities and personnel of the court.

(2) A motion to consolidate may be filed or opposed by any party to either action to be consolidated, without seeking permission to intervene. The motion must be filed in and heard by the judge assigned to the first action filed and must be served on all parties in each action pursuant to Rule 5. ~~A~~The movant must file notice of the motion ~~must be filed~~ in each action. The movant must, and any party may, file in each action notice of the order denying or granting the motion. ALTERNATE LANGUAGE: The movant must file in each other action notice of the motion and notice of the order denying or granting the motion. Once the court rules on the

motion in the first action the movant must file in each other action a notice of the order denying or granting the motion.

(3) If the court orders consolidation, a ~~new~~-single case number will be used for all subsequent filings in the consolidated case. The court may direct that specified parties pay the expenses, if any, of consolidation. The presiding judge of the transferee court may assign the consolidated case to another judge for good cause.

**(b) Separate trials.** The court in furtherance of convenience or to avoid prejudice may order a separate trial of any claim, cross claim, counterclaim, or third party claim, or of any separate issue or of any number of claims, cross claims, counterclaims, third party claims, or issues.

**(c) Venue Transfer.**

(1) On timely motion of any party, where transfer to a proper venue is available, the court must transfer any action filed in an improper venue.

(2) The court must give substantial deference to a plaintiff's choice of a proper venue. On timely motion of any party, a court may: transfer venue of any action, in whole or in part, to any other venue for any purpose, including for discovery, other pretrial matters, or a joint hearing or trial; stay any or all of the proceedings in the action; and make other such orders concerning proceedings therein to pursue the interests of justice and avoid unnecessary costs or delay. In determining whether to transfer venue and the appropriate venue for the transferred proceedings, the court may consider, among other factors, whether transfer will: increase the likelihood of a fair and impartial determination in the action; minimize expense or inconvenience to parties, witnesses, or the court; decrease delay; avoid hardship or injustice otherwise caused by venue requirements; and advance the interests of justice.

(3) The court may direct that specified parties pay the expenses, if any, of transfer.

**Advisory Committee Notes**

56 *Note adopted 2020*

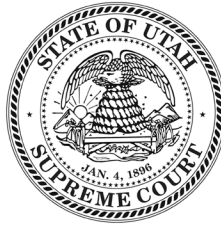
57 The addition of paragraph (c) arose in part from the Supreme Court's decision in *Davis*  
58 *County v. Purdue Pharma, L.P.*, 2020 UT 17.

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60 | ~~Effective January 1, 2020.~~ Effective: May/Nov. 1, 20

61

# Tab 9



# UTAH SUPREME COURT ADVISORY COMMITTEE

## RULES OF CIVIL PROCEDURE

LAUREN DIFRANCESCO

CHAIR

## 2024 COMMITTEE MEETING DATES

January 24

February 28

March 27

April 24

May 22

June 26

July 17

August 28

September 25

October 23

November 20

December 18