

**VERMONT SUPREME COURT**  
**SPECIAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON REMOTE HEARINGS**

Meeting Minutes – December 5, 2023

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Committee Chair Scott Griffith called the meeting to order at 12:00 p.m. via Teams. Members present included Justice William Cohen, Cedric Baele, Julie Bronson, Judge Alexander Burke, Judge Thomas Carlson, Amelia Darrow, Jim Dumont, Judge Jodi French, Roger Garrity, David Koeninger, Laura La Rosa, Marshall Pahl, Marcia Schels, Rick Swan, Judge Timothy Tomasi, and Judge Helen Toor. Court Administrator's Office staff Andrew Campbell, Seema Kumar, and Joe Paquin were also present, as was Deputy Supreme Court Clerk Emily Wetherell.

**I. Welcome and Approval of May 2, 2023 Meeting Minutes**

Scott called for a motion to accept the May meeting minutes. Judge French moved to accept the minutes and Judge Toor seconded. Scott called for discussion. Hearing none, the minutes were considered accepted.

**II. New Business**

**a. Update on November 13, 2023 Legislative Committee on Judicial Rules (LCJR) Meeting**

Emily Wetherell reported that the rules had been discussed at a recent LCJR meeting. She noted that the response of committee members to the rules continues to be generally positive, and that they asked for data regarding various aspects of remote hearings, which she noted the Court Administrator will likely respond to. She noted that the LCJR meetings are recorded, and she posted a link to the recording of the meeting in the chat.

**b. Update on Remote Hearing Operations – Staffing Support and Technology Issues**

Andy Campbell gave an update on the work of the Operations Assistants (OA) and the Remote Service Delivery Analysts (RSDA), noting that the OAs, who handle Webex duties, are limited-service employees whose term of service will end on June 30 of this year. Andy indicated that in anticipation of the OAs leaving that Webex duties are being transitioned to Judicial Assistants and that the RSDAs are assisting in their training.

Joe Paquin gave an overview of the work being done to migrate the Judiciary's network away from the Agency of Digital Services. This will require a change in email addresses for Judiciary staff. He also gave an update on the Judiciary's efforts to increase and enhance internet bandwidth in the courts. Discussion followed regarding the email address transition and its impact on Webex invitations.

### **c. Discussion of Outstanding Remote Hearing Policy and Operational Issues**

Roger Garrity related an experience he had recently in a hearing in Chittenden Civil Court in which the judge who presided over the case appeared remotely, though all other participants were in person. Judge Toor noted that the case in question was hers and that she was sick and another judge was asked to cover and presided from home that day. She noted that such an arrangement is not the norm.

Jim Dumont said that he was concerned about several of the results in the user survey. Scott noted that another survey is up for consideration. Rick Swann profiled the open-ended comments from the survey, having sorted them into several categories.

Amelia Darrow asked about the process used by parties to let court staff know they were having Webex difficulties. Cedric Baele noted that calls from such users usually go to the Information Center and then get routed to the OAs. He indicated that this process seems to work well. Judge Toor suggested that there be a dedicated help line for Webex issues.

Judge French noted that she is concerned about the impact on litigants relating to the plan to migrate away from ADS given that for already scheduled hearing new meeting numbers and passwords will be needed. Discussion followed, and Marcia Schels reported that she would be sending out information about the transition and its impacts. Seema Kumar noted that it will be important to make sure we are hearing from court users about the impact of the use of new technology, and that a follow-up survey would be useful.

Scott noted that pursuant to its charge and designation, the committee is to sunset in June 2024 and that a memo is due to Teri Corsones and Judge Zonay regarding remote hearing operations and issues. He noted that the kind of work that the committee has been doing could likely be absorbed into Court Administrator's Office operations after June but that conducting a shorter, more targeted survey might be helpful. Amelia asked if there would be a role for the committee beyond June. Scott noted that he has spoken about the committee's work with Teri.

### **d. Discussion Regarding Information to be Provided to State Court Administrator and Chief Superior Judge**

Scott indicated he would draft the memo that is due to Teri and Judge Zonay.

Marshal Pahl raised the issue of the standing orders, noting that he does not consider the page on the Judiciary's website where they are housed to be a reliable source of information about hearing practice, though he noted it was helpful when the orders were first issued. Discussion followed and Andy Campbell suggested that the orders be updated and organized by county and division. Judge Toor noted that the hearing notices can sometimes be confusing.

**e. Committee Next Steps and Adjourn**

Scott asked for any volunteers to help with the draft memo and to further discuss the follow-up survey. Jim Dumont and Rick Swan volunteered. Scott will schedule a meeting. Judge Tomasi suggested that the memo analysis be in the form of an interim document since the committee's work will likely be ongoing through June.

The meeting adjourned at 1:00 p.m.

Submitted By:  
Scott Griffith  
Committee Chair