

Cass County Courts



Cass County Courts continue to provide the public with access to justice via Zoom during COVID-19 as part of the million+ hours of Zoom hearings statewide

Cassopolis, Michigan, September 29, 2020 – The Michigan Supreme Court has tracked over 1 million hours of Zoom hearings by Courts across the state of Michigan, including the Cass County Courts. The Michigan Supreme Court provided Zoom licenses to state courts in March 2020 to facilitate state courts moving online during COVID-19. Nearly 1,000 judges and other court officers are using Zoom licenses provided by the State Court Administrative Office.

In testimony before the state Senate Committee on Judiciary and Public Safety, Michigan Supreme Court Justice Bridget M. McCormack said, “I believe strongly that the more access the people have to court proceedings, records, and case-related data, the more trust they have in our judicial system and willingness to abide by court orders. Conducting 1 million hours of hearings in less than six months’ time is simply remarkable. At the same time, we build trust by making sure those proceedings can be viewed by the public.”

To enable public access and transparency, the Supreme Court launched a Virtual Courtroom Directory that enables the public to click a map to find their court and watch. Courts are required to either live stream proceedings to YouTube live or to post a video of those proceedings immediately after the event. Since its launch in May, the public has used the directory more than 80,000 times and trial court YouTube pages have more than 30,000 subscribers. Cass County Courts’ Virtual Courtrooms can be found [HERE](#). The YouTube feeds for the Cass County Courts only have content when Courts are in session.

Chief Judge Susan L. Dobrich implemented Zoom hearings by the Cass County Courts in March 2020. By April 2020, most Court proceedings were occurring by Zoom. This necessitated Zoom training for Court staff and Judges as well as taking a new look at how things should be done in the new world of virtual hearings. According to Chief Judge Dobrich, “Zoom hearings create new challenges and cannot be a ‘one-size-fits-all’ solution for the Courts during COVID-19. However, Zoom hearings have created scheduling efficiencies and more accessibility for children and other vulnerable populations by allowing participation from a non-public place they consider safe.”

Circuit Court is regularly doing Zoom hearings for most of its cases including doing pre-trial conferences, pleas, and sentencing in felony criminal matters via Zoom. District Court is also regularly doing Zoom hearings for most of its cases including doing pre-trial conferences, pre-exam conferences, preliminary examinations, pleas, and sentencings in criminal cases as well as landlord tenant proceedings via Zoom. Probate and Juvenile Court are also regularly doing Zoom hearings for most of their cases including handling guardianships, estate matters, juvenile delinquency, and child protective proceedings via Zoom.

The Cass County Friend of the Court is doing all Attorney Referee hearings and child interviews via Zoom for the foreseeable future. According to Carol Montavon Bealor, Court Administrator and Director of the Cass County Friend of the Court, “Child interviews have been more interactive on Zoom. It was just a different kind of interaction than we would have had in the past in our office because the children are more comfortable in their own environments. Interviewing children via Zoom has made me realize the harm we’ve done to kids having them come into our office just because that’s the way we’ve always done things.”