

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

Meeting Minutes – November 7, 2024

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Committee Chair Scott Griffith called the meeting to order at 12:00 p.m. via Teams. Members present included Julie Bronson, Jim Dumont, Roger Garrity, State’s Attorney Erica Marthage, Marshall Pahl, Marcia Schels, Matt Shagam, Rick Swan, Judge Timothy Tomasi, Jessica Van Buren, and Maggie Villeneuve. Court Administrator’s Office staff members Andy Campbell, Sophie Conway, and Joe Paquin were also present.

**I. Welcome and Approval of December 5, 2023 Meeting Minutes**

Scott Griffith recognized new member Matt Shagam from Vermont Legal Aid. Scott then called for a motion to accept the minutes of the May 8, 2024 meeting. Judge Tomasi moved to accept the minutes and Marshall Pahl seconded. The minutes were accepted.

**II. New Business**

**a. Hearings by Hearing Type Data**

Scott summarized the latest installment of hearings by hearing type data from Odyssey (Enterprise Justice). Discussion followed. Jim Dumont asked if the data includes status and pretrial hearings, noting that his experience with these types of hearings is that they are all remote. Judge Tomasi said that he prefers hybrid hearings and suggested breaking down the data by court division. Jim Dumont suggested separating the Environmental Division’s data from the Civil Division’s data. Rick Sawn suggested breaking the data down by county.

Marshall observed that it is not surprising that the data shows a shift toward hybrid hearings, saying that he finds them to be effective. He also noted that the standing order page on the Judiciary’s website does not seem to be a reliable way to get information about the type of a hearing. Roger Garrity said that it is frustrating for media to not know if a hearing will be in-person, hybrid, or remote and indicated that the media prefers hybrid hearings. State’s Attorney Marthage registered a preference for hybrid hearings. Several members commented on the benefits of parties being in person in certain circumstances.

Marshall talked about the challenges associated with remote hearings as it relates to parties who participate from Department of Corrections facilities. State’s Attorney Marthage agreed.

Scott asked court staff for their thoughts on the data. Maggie Villeneuve said that it aligns with what they are seeing in court.

## **b. Plan for follow up court user survey**

Scott discussed the first attorney survey and asked members for their thoughts about surveying attorneys separately from court users. Rick suggested that more focused surveys would give us better information. Jim noted he is in favor of a separate attorney survey.

Discussion followed about the scope and design of follow-up surveys and the benefits of surveying in-person court users about their remote hearing and hybrid hearing experiences.

## **c. Remote Hearing Technology Update**

Scott asked Joe Paquin to give an update on the technology being used to support remote hearings. Joe noted that Webex devices have been installed in all correctional facilities. He also gave an update on plans to put court wi-fi in all facilities to support the use of mobile devices. He spoke of challenges associated with limited staffing in the facilities. State's Attorney Marthage noted that she felt this was a problem.

Joe the reported that the Cisco devices that support the use of Webex are nearing "end of life" and that the Judiciary is looking at replacement of the physical hardware in courtrooms and correctional facilities and considering remote hearing platforms other than Webex. Marcia Schels noted that Cisco is not updating features of Webex on which the Judiciary relies. Joe summarized next steps in the process of planning for a move away from Webex, which include funding and related issues.

## **III. Adjourn**

Scott will make edits to the surveys and send them to members for their review.

There being no other business, the meeting was adjourned at approximately 1:00 p.m.

Submitted By:  
Scott Griffith  
Committee Chair