

New York State Courts Prepare to Expand Virtual Courts Program

Written by Peter A. Sullivan

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Since the issuance of stay-at-home [orders](#) relating to COVID-19 on March 20, 2020, the state courthouses in New York have been mostly inaccessible to litigants, closing their doors to all “nonessential” matters, which includes most civil litigation matters. Only essential and emergency matters would be heard at the courthouse. All other matters requiring the court’s intervention were rescheduled; there were no other options.

Earlier this week, the New York State Court System rolled out the “Virtual Courts” program to hear essential and emergency matters remotely using video and audio technology. This program allowed the courts to avoid having to hear these essential and emergency matters in person, putting counsel and court personnel at risk of COVID-19 exposure. Based on the success of the Virtual Court program as applied to emergency and essential matters, the New York state courts plan to expand the program to hear other matters remotely. Starting April 13, the Virtual Courts program will allow for remote hearings using this technology for nonessential matters.

Providing access to these remote hearing tools will be a welcome first step in restarting civil litigation in the New York state courts. New York lawyers must now learn to use these tools for video hearings, and master the unique challenges they raise in preparing and presenting cases.

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