**Notes for Fellows Meeting 7/22/20**

Stephani Hess, Deputy Administrative Director, Ohio Supreme Court, was invited to talk to the class about how the Supreme Court has responded to the COVID crisis and what the future holds. This would invite conversation of the class to help discern the class project.

Presentation Stephanie Hess - Ohio is a non-unified State. All of our judges are individually elected. We have a set of rules of Superintendence, promulgated by the Supreme Court, and these provide guidance. But this is superintending authority, i.e., the Chief does not have the authority to tell the courts what to do, allowing courts to operate independently.

Throughout the pandemic, the Chief made it clear that closing the courts was not an option.

Over $6M has been dispersed since the pandemic hit. Local courts weren’t prepared-didn’t have laptops, Zoom capability, etc. Asked courts what was needed. Loaned laptops, purchased Zoom and software licenses. Some people had internet access issues depending on their location, and the courts provided rooms to those people so they could have internet access.

The Supreme Court has also issued guidance to re-opening, such as how to screen, etc. As Ohio re-opened, Chief tried to stress to judges that people coming to courts don’t have the option about whether or not they were coming, and because of this courts needed to follow all protocols and allow remote participation when necessary.

Also trying to resolve cases outside of trials in order to avoid jury trials.

Per a National Center for State Courts poll, the public has more confidence in judicial branch as opposed to executive and legislative. This year, the poll was on the pandemic. Chief has relayed to courts that technology should be used well beyond the pandemic.

Questions for Stephanie

Steve Moyer: What would you like to see, if you could get a lift from our group, what would you like to see us do that would be of help to the Court?

Loaded question. We struggle with communication out to the public. How to do a better job of explaining to the public what we do, why and how we do it. How do we communicate what we’re conducting virtually/remotely vs. in-person? Also nuts-and-bolts stuff. How to move forward with jury trials.

Lisa Ray question to Nikki Xarhoulacos: How has your court been affected?

Nikki: All of our courtrooms are outfitted with large-screen televisions, all of the laptops are getting configured. Utilizing OWLs. If we have the ability to do a hybrid hearing, where some are on Zoom and some in person, we do. Nikki doing a lot of hybrid hearings. A lot of citizens don’t have the technology so don’t have the option of attending remotely. Staff is trying to get contact information such as email address for each person. Care providers and others in the community are working together to maintain social distancing and efforts to keep everyone safe.

Velda: Interested that hearing communication is not just a problem during the pandemic but all the time. One of the things we’re interested in is a week of service for Fellows to participate in for all of the Fellows around the State. Is this something we can address/reach out to people/set up presentations to provide information about court communications?

Judges would love to have time to do those kinds of presentations, but don’t, so would probably welcome assistance from our group in doing those kinds of things. We’re usually seeing people at court on their worst days. The more people that see a friendly face on the judiciary, the better.

Azure’D Metoyer: Often hard to get in contact with pro se plaintiffs in civil matters, especially when there’s a last minute change or request for continuance.

Lisa Ray: Since it isn’t unified, everyone is doing something different. Interesting thing to deal with.

It’s a very wide divide, and trying to create a one-size-fits-all system isn’t really realistic. One other thought-how it’s impacting schools. We have a really active education program at the Court and offer grants to bring students in to tour. But currently struggling with doing that since we can’t bring students into the Court. How do we continue that program virtually?

Stephanie Gone. Going around the squares:

Chris Teodosio: Hardest part of this is going to be how we implement the process. A lot of the ideas seem to call for face-to-face interaction, especially when people have issues with internet access.

Jasmin Hurley: Agree. Also heard from panel of Republican judges, and noticed how each court has done something differently. Capturing the difference is going to be difficult. Not only county by county, but even within the county. How to get people to understand that depending on their case, may have different implications. Will the technology changes be only COVID-related or will it extend?

Lisa: Is there anything standard, across the court systems, that we can sink our teeth into?

Stephen Moyer: COVID has turned everything into the Wild Wild West. It’s hard to write up a script for one-size-fits-all. Is there a toolbox we can prepare for courts and litigants? Set up Zoom account, where to get masks, etc. Would be nice to get text messages, seems to be doable for the private industries.

Nikki: Need to be mindful that every court handles a different type of case. So standard depends on type of case.

Kelly Parks: I primarily do family law, so a lot of domestic. Clients don’t have confusion on when to go to court or procedures for getting into court, the problems I’m running into the most is how long are things backed up and what to do with parenting schedule.

Lisa: Maybe part of the toolkit would have an FAQ?

Andromeda Morrison: Perspective is a little different, being in-house at a state agency, but struggle with the same questions. Picked up in increase in ADR. We have all these immediate changes, what’s the long-term impact on what we’re doing.

David Bressman: In terms of communication, need to make distinctions between rural community and more populated community. Civil law usually doesn’t come up with issues like we might with criminal.

Naomi Maletz: Is there a way to have efiling established in every court?

Laura Hillerich: Issues with how we’re treating the tolling order, especially discovery. Maybe squeeze in some presentations at schools before we get shut down again.

Velda: We try to do a week of service in the Spring, keep that in mind for going to schools. Overall, what I’m hearing, three different audiences: Public, Courts, and Lawyers.

Moving forward: let’s get back into small groups and break things down.