



COVID-19 *and the* COURTS

2020 Follow-Up Interviews
Addendum to the Full Report



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Introduction

The Ohio Criminal Sentencing Commission’s COVID-19 and the Courts Report¹ incorporated notes and quotes from a number of follow-up interviews with survey respondents from courts across the state. These interviews covered a range of topics and the insights from respondents went beyond the scope of the main survey report. For this reason, this addendum report to fully explore the experiences shared during the interviews was created.

Interview Sample and Methods of Analysis

As part of the commission’s COVID-19 survey, respondents were asked if they would consent to being contacted for a follow-up interview. Out of 292 court respondents to the original survey, 169 (57.8 percent) agreed to be interviewed.

Due to time and resource constraints, 42 judges and court administrators were randomly selected from a stratified sample, assuring appropriate representation by geography, county population, and court type and were contacted for a follow-up interview. Ultimately, 19 judges and court administrators participated. While this represents a small number of overall participants, the responses provided robust information and tended to be similar, suggesting that the number of interviews was large enough to adequately represent respondents.

Follow-up interviews were conducted between July 15, 2020 and August 6, 2020 via Zoom, recorded with permission. The interviews lasted anywhere from 15 minutes to nearly an hour. While a small number of open-ended questions were specified for the interview, many conversations expanded in their focus and covered a range of topics, and included a great deal of nuance not found in the survey responses.

Notes taken during the interviews were analyzed for common themes by researchers and a subsample of interviews was used to measure intercoder reliability.² Results indicate a high degree of correspondence in analysis by different researchers. Further, portions of the recordings were transcribed from saved audio files as necessary for reporting.

Quotes included in this report were edited only for readability, including language in brackets to clarify meaning, or to protect confidentiality. The results of the interviews are reported anonymously and the list of participating courts will not be released to protect confidentiality.

This addendum particularly focuses on the experiences and outcomes courts had in relation to the dramatic changes – technological, administrative, and physical – that they had to implement to adjust to the challenges of COVID-19. While this report is not exhaustive of everything said in the follow-up interviews, it does cover the dominant themes that emerged from conversations with the courts. The report is organized by sections covering each key theme.

1 See the full report posted on the Ohio Criminal Sentencing Commission website: sc.ohio.gov/Boards/Sentencing.

2 Intercoder reliability is the widely used term for the extent to which independent **coders** evaluate a characteristic of a message or artifact and reach the same conclusion. (Also known as intercoder agreement, according to Tinsley and Weiss (2000)).

Virtual Hearings

One of the most common modifications to court operations during the COVID-19 pandemic, according to survey responses, is the use of virtual hearing appearances. Although this practice was generally treated as a necessary modification during the pandemic it is worthwhile to use the opportunity to evaluate the benefits and drawbacks and assess the long-term utility of virtual hearings.

Of note, some organizations, such as the National Center for State Courts (NSCS), hypothesized that an increase in virtual hearings would increase certain positive outcomes in courts. In particular, the NSCS cited evidence from North Dakota, New Jersey, and Michigan that failure-to-appear rates drastically decreased with the expanded use of virtual hearings.³ Other groups, such as the National Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers (NACDL) advocate limiting the use of virtual hearings in pretrial situations and making this solution temporary in order to protect the “constitutional, statutory, and customary” rights of defendants.⁴

In the interview, judges and court administrators were asked to describe their experiences using virtual hearings, noting any perceived changes in outcomes and whether they planned to adopt any changes long term.

Impact of Virtual Hearings on Appearance Rates

It is important to note that the information contained herein is anecdotal. We did not ask for data regarding appearance rates and understand that it generally is not collected. Thus, conclusions cannot be drawn about why people failed to appear or any change in failure-to-appear rates. The lack of quantitative data about court appearances also renders evaluation of the long-term impacts of these pandemic trends difficult.

Ten judges spoke specifically on the impact of virtual hearings on appearance rates. Of these, most common pleas and municipal court judges did not see any significant impact for court appearances. But, several juvenile judges indicated a slight increase in participation with virtual hearings.

Multiple judges commented that there was no impact for court appearance, citing that people who already were compliant were attending hearings virtually and doing what they were asked, and that the percentage of people who were no-shows remained static. As one municipal court judge remarked, *“the people who don’t show up are the ones that we can’t get ahold of in the first place to confirm that they are going to show up to the virtual hearings.”*

Two juvenile court judges specifically found that attendance in court appearances was up, anecdotally. As one juvenile judge remarked, *“parents, instead of missing a day of work, they take a break and jump into the hearing.”* Another municipal court judge similarly found a unique circumstance where virtual hearings aided the defendant in participating:

“Some defendants are more comfortable appearing by Zoom. It has helped with some of the transportation issues. We don’t have good public transportation

3 The National Center for State Courts, *Will remote hearings improve appearance rates?* (May 2020). <https://www.ncsc.org/newsroom/at-the-center/2020/may-13>.

4 National Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers, *Criminal Court Reopening and Public Health in the COVID-19 Era: NACDL Statement of Principles and Report* (June 2020). <https://nacdl.org/getattachment/56802001-1bb9-4cdd-814d-c8d5c41346f3/criminal-court-reopening-and-public-health-in-the-covid-19-era.pdf>.

outside of the city. Those who have trouble appearing are most appreciative of virtual hearings.”

A juvenile judge echoed this statement on transportation issues, saying:

“You know, we’ve noticed that people are on time, they’re prepared, we get work done very quickly. Especially in a juvenile court, when many of the individuals that we’re working with may have transportation challenges, we’re not requiring them to get on a bus, change buses, go from one place to another, to walk through security, to go upstairs to the court just to find out that we’re just going to get dates and then they have to reverse the process and go home.”

The overall sentiment among judges interviewed was that virtual hearings specifically were not having a large impact on appearance rates, except in the circumstances mentioned where parents found it easier to appear virtually in juvenile cases and in areas where defendants had transportation issues.

Although not prompted, multiple judges and a municipal court administrator spoke of increased incidences of failure-to-appear resulting from policies to keep the jail population down. A municipal court administrator described:

“One thing’s that’s been an issue for us and for police departments in our county is that our jail is very restricted on who they take. When we have to issue a bench warrant for someone who hasn’t appeared in court, those bench warrants aren’t able to be served. So, we do have a lot of people in the county who have realized that warrants aren’t being served. They can’t be picked up on their warrants because the jail restrictions, so our appearance rates have gone down significantly for a lot of our criminal cases where people realize that there is no reason for them to appear because the jail isn’t going to take them on a warrant, that there is really going to be no negative consequences from ignoring orders from the court.”

One court described its effort for a warrant-amnesty day where people with outstanding warrants could turn themselves in and proceed as if there was no warrant from the beginning and they would not be punished for failure to appear. Only a handful of people responded to this effort.⁵ The county jail also attempted a jail roundup, in which the jail tried to pick up multiple people on outstanding warrants at once and quarantine them separately, but this proved difficult because of bad contact information and addresses.

Ultimately, changes to warrant issuance, processing, and jail admissions caused a backlog of cases for people who failed to appear in court, something the interviewee felt would not be resolved until jail began to accept more people.

A common pleas judge in a large county described a similar issue:

“It was a policy of ‘let’s make more effort to get people in here on their own.’ More efforts with phone calls, that type of thing. More continuances, absolutely, a significant increase in failures to appear. Our typical policy is: if you are summoned for an arraignment and you don’t appear the first time it’s continued for two weeks and our case management staff sends a letter to every known address with the new

⁵ The interview did not clarify the timeframe during which this initiative occurred and whether individuals were asked to physically go into the courthouse.

date. If you don't appear on the new date a warrant would be issued; well, even now, those continuances are six, seven, eight weeks instead of two weeks... My attitude in my own docket is: you fail to appear the first time for your scheduling conference – unless it's a really significant, serious offense of violence for which somebody has posted bond – I'm always going to give it at least one continuance. Well now, it might be two. But, definitely, the failure to appear rate is, I'm even going to use the term, dramatically higher. Failures to appear for probation hearings, certainly the failure to communicate with probation officers. Again, like I said, those people who were compliant have generally remained compliant. Those people who were on the edge of compliance, significant failure rate... Our whole objective there is just to get the person's attention, it's not to put the person in jail. It's just to get your attention, 'just comply, you know, it's not that hard.'... definitely greater failure-to-appear rates, but we are issuing fewer warrants when the risk appears to be lower."

Another municipal court judge echoed similar concerns in relation to jail management for their misdemeanor docket:

"We initiated virtual arraignment where we send them a notice and direct them to go to our website and put in all the information. We more or less enter a not guilty plea for everyone and assign a public defender to those individuals entitled to it. A lot of people don't do that. It is not a matter of not showing up, but they don't contact their public defender and they don't phone in for telephone... The other problem we have is that I'm not going to issue a warrant to somebody because I don't want to be that person who brings COVID into the jail for somebody who doesn't show up for an open container charge. We have a lot of issues keeping the docket moving because lawyers say they haven't heard from their client. Those kinds of things are always an issue in misdemeanor court, but now it is chronic. When you have 14,000 cases a year, and one judge, you have to keep things moving."

Another county court administrator mentioned they had some repeat offenders due to issuing more "released on own recognizance" (OR) bonds and cite-and-release tactics, rather than traditional arrests. Two other municipal court judges explained they were continuing strategies to reduce the jail population, including increased use of OR bonds and decreased use of warrants, but did not experience serious adverse effects due to those changes.

Long-Term Adoption of Technology Changes

Despite some reported initial difficulties in setting up and using new or expanding the use of virtual-hearing technology during the pandemic, many courts expressed positive experiences with the virtual hearings and even decided to implement some changes permanently.

It is important to note that while the survey questions initially were geared toward long-term changes "post-pandemic," many judges interviewed expressed the adoption of permanent technological changes to their court because of their belief there would be no return to pre-COVID operations.

Nine of the respondents interviewed said they were continuing virtual hearings for the foreseeable future. One municipal court administrator noted, "We will probably continue to use it [the video system] and give people the option. We get a lot of people from states away. It is useful for those people for sure. We've made it known that that will always be an option for people who are sick or otherwise can't or don't want to come into court."

Another common pleas court administrator said, *“If we can do it, and it’s working and it’s making people more comfortable, we should do it.”* They noted that even though some judges were uncomfortable with virtual hearings, the annoyances were outweighed by the benefits and the practice likely will continue long term.

Video conferencing for jails particularly has been useful for courts, especially for release hearings because they can be done and the defendant can be directly released. The increased use of virtual hearings with incarcerated individuals was a major common theme among courts interviewed as they saw it largely as safer and just as effective as in-person. As one common pleas court judge explained, *“Because I am a single-judge court, when we get incarcerated defendants we want to get them over [to the court] as quickly as possible. We have a three-person public defender serving municipal court, juvenile court, common pleas court, and two or three magistrates in those courts, so their time is precious.”*

Multiple interviewees noted that it makes sense to conduct arraignments, preliminary hearings, record sealings, traffic cases, and preliminary probation hearings virtually. Video hearings are especially useful for defendants with convictions in multiple counties, so the person does not have to be transported across the state for hearings, according to one of the court administrators interviewed.

But the more difficult hearings that include witness testimony, for example, are preferred to be in person. As one county court judge remarked, *“Pretrials, specific hearings on motions, I’m going to probably prefer that those go back to being in-person hearings, just because I think a defendant needs to understand the brevity and the gravity of what is occurring and it’s hard for that to occur over video or telephone.”*

Multiple judges also communicated they are continuing to use virtual hearings for the sole fact that it is the safest way to conduct them amid the pandemic, especially for vulnerable individuals.

Among five juvenile court judges interviewed, there was universal agreement that virtual conferencing was highly beneficial in certain circumstances and will be continued permanently. One juvenile judge stated:

“I would say 99 percent of the time there isn’t a reason why we can’t conduct business in the preliminary stages by phone or Zoom. In virtually all of our hearings we are entering a denial to the charges and appoint[ing] counsel. So somebody has taken off work to get on a bus to come into the court so that we can read them their charges and rights and give them a lawyer only to come back later. We want them to come to court for a purpose.”

Another juvenile court judge concurred, explaining the ease of virtual hearings on families, saying, *“I run a family-dependency treatment court, and we have done nothing but Zoom hearings. It has worked well for us. A lot of the participants enjoy the fact that they are able to sit in their front porch or living rooms and see everyone in the hearings.”*

A juvenile court judge also noted that the pretrial hearings are running very efficiently as attorneys are going to court having had pretrial conversations prior to arriving. Whereas pretrials lasted more than 45 minutes before, it takes 15 minutes virtually. The judge further felt that attorneys were processing their cases more thoroughly with clients prior to going to court.

Multiple juvenile judges also commented that children particularly seemed to be even more comfortable appearing virtually. One judge stated, *“I am convinced many of our cases have an underlying mental-health condition. It almost seems they are more relaxed in their own environment and I can get better feedback with them.”*

Another juvenile judge echoed those sentiments:

“The youth we are dealing with are really open on a call maybe more so than face to face. That has been an unexpected positive. We went so far as to purchase some smart phones with our reclaim grant for kids who don’t have access to wi-fi or a phone. They can do counseling and check-ins over the phone. It is actually working well enough that we are making the technology available to kids who may not have it on their own.”

Multiple judges in both common pleas and municipal courts commented particularly on the utility of virtual pretrial hearings as useful, efficient, and time-saving measures. As one municipal court judge stated, *“Right now we are doing the initial pretrials by telephone. When you make a lot of these changes, it dawns on you, why do we have all these people coming in here anyways? It doesn’t seem to interfere with having a meaningful discussion on the case, so we will probably continue that.”*

A common pleas court administrator made similar comments, stating, *“We have been able to move pretty quickly and adapt quickly. I find this is a much more effective way to do this and [it] avoids having people in the courthouse. Looking at timeliness, phone status conferences have been more effective. This has been good for detained individuals because cases move more quickly.”*

A common pleas judge noted positive experiences in changing probation and pretrial reporting requirements to virtual rather than in person:

“We’ve modified some of our probation reporting requirements, some of our pretrial reporting requirements – for low-level, low-risk offenders, to have them actually physically show up. High risk, obviously, you need to continue to see them in person. But those low-risk offenders, you know, we had protocol, you’d show up once a month, you’d show us your pay stub, you’d verify where you were living, etcetera. We can do a lot of that stuff remotely. You can email your pay stub, you can fax your pay stub, you can do a Zoom conference, so, you know, I think Zoom, I think we all wish we would have invested in Zoom in January... We’re going to likely do much more communication remotely with our probationers, when it’s appropriate, even in the future. Because it creates efficiencies for our staff too.”

One common pleas judge conducting jury trials also found a positive experience with victims being able to participate virtually:

“I think by adding the option and one thing I guess I forgot to add, when we’re doing sentencings here at the courthouse – I won’t say frequently – but a number of times, we’ve just had the victim call in and we have the equipment so what they say can be piped in through the room and everyone can hear. So victims have participated that didn’t want to come into the courtroom because of COVID are able to participate in sentencing. Talking to them afterwards, they liked it and

thanked the judge for allowing them to participate that way. Victims are feeling they can fit it in to their scheduled and appear.”

The judge noted that this may be an option that is continued permanently because victims have reacted favorably to it, particularly victims who are located far away from the courthouse.

Particularly for lower-stakes procedural matters, judges and court administrators found many benefits and efficiencies created by virtual hearings and also found that defendants and attorneys appreciated the opportunity to appear virtually as well. Most judges continue to hold virtual hearings due to COVID-19 and many indicated that some changes were so beneficial and common-sense that they would permanently implement them.

Negative Experiences with Virtual Hearings

Not all judges and court administrators found their experience with virtual hearings positive. Judges notably expressed difficulty communicating, especially in high-gravity hearings, such as pleas, sentencing, and certain pretrial hearings. One municipal court judge commented, *“As a rule, we are not getting as much out of the hearing as you would in person... It is more difficult for me to have a meaningful dialog with someone virtually because I can't really tell what is going on in the room.”* The judge felt that arraignments were less meaningful for people when they did not go into the courtroom, so they treated the it less seriously.

Multiple judges similarly commented on the loosening of decorum and difficulty in communicating the seriousness of the situation. One county court judge specifically said:

“There is a significant loosening of decorum [with telephone hearings]. If you're in court, you can get them in line easily. On the phone, you can't control defendants, so you have to use a lot more tact. I had a defendant who may have been under the influence.”

Another common pleas court judge concurred they were uncomfortable doing plea and sentencing hearings virtually because it is difficult to convey the seriousness of the situation when not in person.

One judge even went back to conducting all in-person pretrial hearings, remarking in regard to virtual pretrial hearings:

“I found it to be unsatisfying. In [the judge's county] we did it all by telephone conference. You are relying on the defense attorney to make sure she or he is accurately relaying information about clients about the problems they are having on pretrial. My ability to address [those problems] with the defendant, that is delayed because I am relying on the defense attorney to convey the information. There are issues with communication and not being able to take immediate action. You have a very distant relationship with the client.”

The judge elaborated that there were more reports of drug use while defendants were out on bond because, in the judge's opinion, the more relaxed culture of court proceedings negated face-to-face accountability.

Another common pleas court administrator brought up similar difficulties for the probation department, irrespective of the change to virtual hearings. The administrator noted the rise of heroin use, overdoses, and the “snowball that turns into an avalanche” for probation departments that are

attempting to manage their caseload while also trying to keep people out of jail. The administrator stated that there was a revolving door *“as putting fewer people in jail and less in person reporting removes accountability, and they are seeing people that may have been incarcerated are being revoked.”*

Technology Challenges

Nearly all judges and court administrators mentioned some sort of initial technological challenge to making COVID-19-related changes to their court operations. Although a few interviewees described some ongoing minor technological challenges, everyone eventually resolved their issues to continue court operations.

Monetary resources needed to acquire the technology was, unusually, not the major roadblock as the Supreme Court of Ohio distributed \$6 million to local courts for technology grants to continue operations during the pandemic. Technological difficulties among the courts largely fell into two camps: (1) initial inability to acquire the appropriate technology; and (2) difficulty in setting up and running technology needed for smooth virtual operation.

Difficulty Acquiring Technology

Five judges and court administrators specifically mentioned that in the initial stages of reacting to COVID-19, they lacked the proper equipment to conduct business virtually. Multiple courts mentioned lacking the appropriate equipment for streaming, such as laptops, webcams, and tablets.

The interviewees expressed that their issues with funding were adequately addressed by the Supreme Court’s technology grants, but there was difficulty ordering equipment. As one juvenile judge remarked, *“Everyone was trying to get the same equipment at the same time. Things were on back order. It was hard to get in some of the things we needed.”* Another common pleas court judge described a difficulty in physically getting equipment installed:

“[Chief] Justice O’Connor was very generous in authorizing millions of dollars to be disbursed to local courts to have video conferencing with prisons and jails. That was great and we signed right up. We did not have a video conferencing system with the prison. We had something with the jail. The vendor in charge of implementing the program canceled all their services because of COVID. We couldn’t get the equipment because the company wasn’t dispatching people to courthouses. We got the funding, but we couldn’t use it.”

Other courts expressed similar difficulties in setting up video systems. One municipal court administrator said their court had a couple of weeks of delay in getting the new system to function and could not do cases for a month. All of the courts interviewed eventually ironed out their technological difficulties.

Two courts specifically mentioned that having a dedicated information technology (IT) fund and a recently updated video system saved them major headaches because they didn’t have to scramble for scarce equipment or funding. Although the courts mentioned having initial difficulties acquiring equipment, they acknowledged the investment will continue to benefit them in the future.

Difficulty Utilizing Technology

Seven courts interviewed described difficulty in using technology and in coordinating all of the various parties needed to hold hearings or issues with the technology platform itself. Multiple judges mentioned issues with attorneys unable to get technology issues resolved or not having the

appropriate technology to hold video hearings, so they had to resort to telephone hearings in those cases.

One juvenile judge described the difficulties in presenting evidence during custody hearings saying, *“It is a little more awkward for everyone. They are challenging when you have multiple attorneys and various witnesses. It is difficult for the court to organize and control the flow of the hearings.”*

Another juvenile court judge described the procedural difficulty in arranging hearings: *“In juvenile court, individuals are cited into court for one hour, and we may have anywhere from 15-20 people. So we have to contact each of those people and give them individual times for Zoom hearings. It has been a challenge and takes more time than in-person hearings.”*

One common pleas court judge explained the initial difficulty in holding virtual hearings with defendants in jail, but the issue has since been remedied by upgrading the jail’s communication system. Another municipal court judge expressed similar concerns in coordinating with large groups of people:

“Video arraignments have been a real nightmare and headache. You know, you would think in this day and age, pretty much it’d just be plug and play. No. We have a number of interested parties and stakeholders, the prosecutor, the public defenders, the private bar, the court itself, of course, and 15 judges on our court. And the sherriff’s department that houses the prisoners and has to provide cooperation in setting things up at their end and instead of loading 80 prisoners up on a couple of buses and bringing them down to the courthouse, now they have to corral those prisoners 10 at a time to bring them down to the place where the video camera is and then take those 10 out and bring the next 10 in and do some kind of rotation.”

Another municipal court judge spoke of the difficulty in using their specific video platform, saying:

“There have been issues with the sound and lag. I’m very concerned about the record in more serious cases. The signal is not good and the platform is not user friendly at all, especially with older defendants and less-educated defendants. The server has gone down three times, so they are trying to replace the entire computer system, which is difficult to do in the middle of everything.”

Along with the difficulty of coordinating with many different parties, multiple courts brought up the particular challenge of trouble-shooting technological problems without a dedicated IT staff. One common pleas court administrator remarked, *“Can the Supreme Court just have a huge grant fund to give courts their own IT department? That would be great. Our county has an IT department and we have a good relationship and they are helpful to the extent they can, but everyone needs it.”*

The court administrator went on to describe how they had to manage challenges of setting up and running video hearings themselves without expert support because the city IT staff had a backlog of several months’ work.

A municipal court judge without a dedicated IT staff agreed, saying:

“My court reporter has been the primary resource for setting up [technology to hold hearings]. I have some proficiency myself and can find solutions, but not an IT-level proficiency. The IT department is the citywide IT department and they are busy with the entire city’s issues and we get a fraction of their time.”

This judge added that it would be helpful if there was a resource from the Supreme Court or someplace else for guidance and that their main issue was not equipment, but the lack of IT expertise.

Coordinating and Managing a Cohesive Response

Technological barriers were not the only roadblocks in creating a cohesive response to COVID-19. One common pleas court judge described “being caught flat-footed” at the beginning of the pandemic. The difficulties in coordinating large groups of people and systems presented major challenges for some courts. Three interviewees specifically mentioned that lack of coordination and cohesive planning made responding to the pandemic exceptionally difficult.

One emerging theme was the initial lack of information and consistency of response to the pandemic. One administrator noted, *“I work with four judges. Some were either scared to death or don’t care. My biggest challenge was coming up with a cohesive plan.”*

A common pleas court judge added:

“Everyone had a lack of information, judges included. [The] public defenders’ office was a big challenge, saying you couldn’t put someone in jail because they may die. I felt I didn’t know who I could believe. There was some worry that it became an excuse. That became a real challenge and you didn’t know who to believe.”

A common pleas court administrator also highlighted the challenge of achieving consensus from attorneys and judges on the use of technology and how the court should operate when they all have different levels of resources, capabilities, and technological literacy.

The interviewees concluded that although the lack of information and lack of cohesiveness was an initial challenge, most issues were overcome and operations were running smoothly. One court administrator summarized, *“It was a process, but now that everyone is on board, it is going well. It’s hard to think back about how hard it was.”*

Jury Trials

Interviewees were not specifically prompted to speak about their experiences with jury trials, as most of the pool of participants in the original survey indicated they had not resumed jury trials. Four judges indicated in interviews that they began holding jury trials again over the summer and spoke about their experiences.

One common pleas judge said resuming jury trials was one of the biggest roadblocks their court faced. Among the challenges was *voir dire* (the jury selection process), specifically attorneys stated the need to see the reaction of jurors throughout the process. Some of the attorneys in this county requested for *voir dire* to be done mask-less, but the judge denied this request. Another issue was the spacing that jury boxes allowed for social distancing. While the jury box had enough room for 14 people, for *voir dire*, 36 potential jurors needed to be brought in and assuring adequate space between potential jurors was an issue.

Three of the judges commented that while holding jury trials, they did not have difficulty in recruiting jurors. Two of the judges noted their county health departments approved and published a juror protocol which made jurors feel safer. Further, as a rule, jurors who indicated they would not wear a mask were removed from the jury pool. One municipal court judge dissented, however,

stating, *“I still struggle with getting jurors. I still have some reservation in my mind, should I be bringing people in?”* In general, though, those who commented on jury trials felt that they were running smoothly.

Conclusion

A common pleas court judge succinctly summarized the various challenges, opportunities, and experiences due to COVID-19-related changes in courtroom operations, saying, *“We’ve all learned a lot from this that we can use. It caused us to look at things that we hadn’t looked at in a long time and that is not a bad thing.”* A court administrator echoed those comments, noting they were impressed by the judges and staff and their willingness to change. They added that once people became used to the changes, they began to wonder why they had not implemented them sooner. Responding to COVID-19 required many courts to move away from historical practices and “the way things have always been done.”

It is important to note, that a large part of the commission’s mission is not only to record and explain what is going on in Ohio, but also to analyze the impact changes. All of the interviewees were asked to comment on the outcomes of their changes to courtroom and operations and many responded that it was too soon to tell or that they only had anecdotal data.

As we move forward, it is necessary to go beyond documenting the how and why surrounding COVID-19-related changes to courtrooms and operations; we must delve into and analyze the outcomes of the changes to offer recommendations and suggest best practices for all courts in Ohio.

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