



90TH DISTRICT COURT NEWS RELEASE

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Judge Lasher Keeps District Court Moving Along

It had not yet been a month since the swearing in of 90th District Court Judge Angela Lasher when nearly every aspect of our daily lives was turned upside down.

When the outbreak of the novel coronavirus COVID-19 prompted Governor Gretchen Whitmer to declare a state of emergency on March 10, the Michigan Supreme Court and the State Court Administrative Office (SCAO) began issuing communications to trial courts with directions on how the judicial branch would adjust while also providing essential functions.

Michigan courts have been issued numerous directives over the past month and gone through a series of changes to comply with executive and emergency orders. Judges across the state are now working with administrative and technical staff to find new ways forward.

Judge Lasher, who splits her time between Emmet and Charlevoix counties, was eager to figure out how she could keep the 90th District Court functioning during this unprecedented time.



90th District Court Judge Angela Lasher conducts a plea and probation violation hearing for an in-custody defendant using Zoom, a virtual meeting platform, where she interacted on screen with an Emmet County assistant prosecutor, defense attorney and the defendant who joined in from the Emmet County jail. (Photo courtesy of Amanda Miller)

"The court must protect both people's rights and the health of all involved and Zoom technology allows us to do this," said Judge Lasher. "We are expanding the use of virtual court hearings to handle criminal and civil cases and continue to provide support to our sobriety court participants."

Judge Lasher began using the online video conferencing platform last week for in-custody defendants after she was assigned a license for the Zoom Virtual Courtroom by the Michigan Supreme Court. Though most court hearings have been adjourned to comply with COVID-19 physical distancing orders, the courts are required to hold some hearings in accordance with statute and the virtual courtroom allows that to happen.

With the extension of the stay-at-home order from Governor Whitmer earlier this week, the 90th District Court now plans to expand the use of Zoom for more hearings in both Emmet and Charlevoix counties. For example,

the 90th District Court runs a Sobriety Court, a treatment court for offenders of certain drunk driving offenses where use of Zoom virtual meetings is allowing this program to continue offering intensive support to participants.

District court administrators, Dean Viles and Amanda Miller, credit others who have supported the court's new direction.

"Emmet County's IT Department was a huge help in getting our court set up for this," said Miller. "Corrections officers at the jail have also been amazing in picking up on using Zoom as have prosecutors and local attorneys. Everyone has been accommodating, flexible, patient, and helpful during this process, showing how we are all in this together."

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For more information, please contact Amanda Miller at (231) 348-1754 or amiller@emmetcounty.org