



Moving Court Operations Online During a Crisis

When COVID-19 and the resulting public health measures drastically changed the way courts were able to safely operate Geauga County, Ohio, pivoted their courts in a matter of days to a paperless system with a remote workforce.

"I am proud of the efforts of our court IT department, Court Staff and Clerk of Courts Staff have made over the last 5 years to implement, learn and improve our e-filing capabilities," said Geauga County Administrative Judge Carolyn J. Paschke. "Little did we know back in 2015 or even 6 months ago, how important and helpful this transition would be now that we are facing this crisis. Because of e-filing, we are able to continue a significant amount of our work and court functions electronically and often by remote."

Here's the Geauga County court IT checklist for a crisis-situation move to online:

Hardware

- Laptops – When replacing existing laptops, wherever possible Court IT kept the prior unit and kept it upgraded and maintained. These were the first units out the door with staff.
- Monitors – We had a few spare monitors in storage, and when necessary we pulled non-essential second monitors and sent them home.
- Mini Workstations – We had a few new HP EliteDesk 800 G4 which also run on wifi, and those were configured for home use. We also had a couple of mini workstations that had recently been removed from courtroom video display units. Due to the size and wifi we used those for staff to work from home.
- Wireless keyboards - These improved ergonomics for those working remotely.
- New laptops – We were able to acquire 6 new laptops in March as a result of the Supreme Court's Technology Grant. These laptops replaced older models in courtrooms to enable the running of Webex Video Conferencing hearings.
- Each Judge's Courtroom (2) has a video display with the following:
 - HP EliteDesk 800 G4
 - Cisco SX 80 or SX 20 Video conferencing unit
 - Laptop at Bailiff's Station running Webex Vide hearings
 - BIS Digital Recording systems
- Each Magistrate's Courtroom (2) has a video cart with:
 - HP EliteDesk 800 G4
 - BIS Digital Recording systems
- Document EVERYTHING. Document your field inventory, any special configuration procedures for remote workstations, and clear user instructions.

Software

- [eServices](#) enabled the Clerks to work from home receiving and docketing filings from attorneys and the Court staff. Court staff was able to move along filings to Judges for decisions, and the workflow was seamless.
- AnyConnect VPN & Remote Desktop Connections – IT loaded these to all equipment for remote work.
- Cisco SX80 and SX20 – These allowed us to directly connect to the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections (ODRC) and our Safety Center.
- Webex – Software loaded to the bailiff workstation in each Judge's courtroom and the video cart in each Magistrate's courtroom. Geauga County IT was able to configure the Cisco equipment to auto answer to a Webex invite, which then opened up the ability to invite remote attorneys, Prosecutors, Public Defenders to join meetings with the Court and defendants at the Safety Center.

"Our Court Staff and Clerks were patient and willing to try technology we pushed out and in many cases provided feedback to improve initial attempts," said Debbie Urrankar, IT Officer, Geauga County Court of Common Pleas. "The teamwork was truly an amazing phenomenon."

"IT professionals may have their specific area of expertise," Unraker added. "But I believe we all share the same qualities: Resourceful, Flexible, Willingness to think outside the box, and Determination to make things work."