



RESOURCE LIST

# TRANSFORMING CHILD WELFARE SYSTEMS

## Where can child welfare leaders learn more about virtual court hearings?

Any court hearing that is progressing a child closer to permanency is essential to that child and family. During the pandemic, many courts shifted to virtual or remote hearings to ensure that due process rights of children and families are protected. As a result, virtual hearings, via phone or video, have emerged as a viable strategy to prioritize progress toward permanency and prevent backlogged dockets. Virtual hearings may also hold promise for timeliness and efficiency of regular court processes going forward, but more evaluation and research is needed.

This resource list provides materials that national and state court partners have developed to support judges and court staff in effectively implementing virtual hearings. Additionally, it highlights federal announcements to support technology needs and barriers that may exist. For an overview of virtual court hearings, why they are important during the pandemic, and potential benefits and challenges for consideration, please see [Why are virtual court hearings essential for permanency?](#)



### Which states are using virtual hearings?

The **National Center for State Courts** has developed an interactive [Tableau site](#) that provides information on which states are conducting virtual hearings, and the technology those states are utilizing.

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## How should courts conduct virtual hearings?

The **Capacity Building Center for Courts** has produced guidance and tips for [Conducting Effective Remote Hearings in Child Welfare Cases](#).

The **Joint Technology Committee** established by the Conference of State Court Administrators, the National Association for Court Management, and the National Center for State Courts released an informative guide, [Strategic Issues to Consider when Starting Virtual Hearings](#) to help courts succeed with efforts to provide virtual hearings.

The **National Center for State Courts** produced a [Checklist for Judges in Virtual Proceedings](#), which includes a remote proceeding bench card and checklist; FAQ from Michigan; legal standards on public right to access; and a live stream bench card from Texas. The Center also developed several video resources, including a short piece on the [digital divide](#); [Mock Video Conference Hearing: Pierce County \(WA\) Superior Court](#), which offers a scripted video featuring Superior Court Judge Tim Ashcraft and example scenarios during virtual hearings; and the [Lights, Cameras, Motion! webinar series](#), which features perspectives of state court administrators and judges who have implemented remote hearings, including operational software security, procedures for introducing evidence, and considerations for language access and self-represented litigants.

The **Children's Commission** of the Supreme Court of Texas has released a number of [resources, tools, and trainings](#) to assist courts in the implementation of virtual hearings. This [resource letter](#) for judges and attorneys discusses the benefits of utilizing technology in the courtroom. The Commission also hosted a [webcast](#) for practitioners to share best practices when preparing cases and clients for a virtual hearing. In addition, this [Video Conferencing: Best Practices & Tips](#) resource provides ideas and considerations when implementing a virtual court hearing.

An **American Bar Association Center on Children and the Law** webinar, [COVID-19 and Child Welfare Cases](#), highlights the federal government's recent guidance on emerging legal issues in child welfare cases, along with guidance in case-by-case decision-making on topics such as visitation and family time, access to services in the case plan, due process and civil rights protections during remote court hearings, reasonable efforts findings, family reunification, termination of parental rights timelines, and other important aspects of a child welfare legal proceedings that may be affected by the pandemic. The Center has also developed a summary of [tips](#) for how attorneys can maintain consistent connection with child clients during the pandemic while ensuring lawyer-client confidentiality is not breached.



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## What about supporting specialty court hearings for older youth?

The **National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges**, in collaboration with the [National Association of Drug Court Professionals](#), hosted a [three-part online learning series](#) for juvenile drug treatment court teams:

- How to Enhance Supervision Strategies While Social Distancing
- How to Keep Youth and Families Engaged in Treatment While Practicing Social Distancing
- How to Continue Helping Youth Build Skills While Practicing Social Distancing

## What funding is available to help support technology for remote hearings?

The federal **Children's Bureau** released guidance to engage Court Improvement Programs in assisting dependency courts to respond during COVID-19. [Court Improvement Program funds](#) can be used to purchase technology and support virtual hearings. The Children's Bureau also provided guidance regarding statutory requirements and encouraging jurisdictions to work in partnership to ensure that parents, children, and youth are represented and able to participate in all proceedings, whether conducted in-person or virtually. The Children's Bureau included, as an attachment to the guidance, a [list of low cost or no cost communication platforms and applications](#) used around the country for participation in hearings, reviews, and attorney communications.

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