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LA Superior and CAALA take positive steps owing to the pandemic

A TERRIBLE, TRAGIC YEAR HAS LED TO SOME IMPORTANT ADVANCES

Governor Gavin Newsom has announced that by June 15, 2021, California will fully reopen and will have implemented the Center for Disease Control's updated COVID-19 guidelines. Pre-pandemic, there seemed to be few places for lawyers to trim work-related obligations to improve quality of life. But the pandemic lockdowns forced the legal community to adapt in long-overdue ways. The efficiencies from these advancements have saved time, one of our most precious commodities.

A more technologically advanced court

First and foremost, the Los Angeles Superior Court finally evolved into a more technologically advanced public service. We now can make appearances via video, not just via an inferior phone call or the resource-intensive in-person appearance. For most appearances, video is the way to go.

That said, as with most new technology, the Los Angeles Superior Court's LACourtConnect video platform has had many problems. Lawyers have been dropped in the middle of oral argument, leaving blanks in the transcript; they've missed the opposing counsel's argument, and other disastrous experiences. Thankfully, the Court is transitioning to a more stable video platform – Microsoft Teams. The transition began on May 10 and will be completed by June 10, 2021, which means we all need to prepare.

Getting ready for Microsoft Teams: get the app

Most importantly, download the Microsoft Teams app. Do not attempt to connect through a browser; use the Microsoft Teams app. Use your computer, not your cellphone, because the phone will only display your phone number instead of your name. Ensure that you have the proper bandwidth, which is a minimum of 3.0 Mbps up and down. If you do not follow these best practices, your video connection will suffer and may drop.

Join the hearing five minutes early and be sure to mute your devices and apps. Join with your microphone muted and your camera off. Unmute only when it is necessary to speak. When you join, you will be placed in the meeting lobby (a virtual waiting room) before the hearing begins

for up to 15 minutes. If you are in the meeting lobby for more than 15 minutes, Microsoft Teams will automatically end the session, and you will need to rejoin. You rejoin by referring back to your email confirmation and re-clicking the Join Appearance link. Finally, pin the courtroom and the judge, so their videos are always available, regardless of who is speaking.

The Court has valuable guides to assist with using Microsoft Teams, called "Best Practices and Tips for Successful Remote Appearances in Microsoft Teams" and "LACourtConnect (LACC) Teams – Teams Screen Overview," which you can find here: https://my.lacourt.org/lacwelcome/content/Best_Practices_and_Tips_for_Successful_Remote_Appearances_in_Microsoft_Teams.pdf.

With the Los Angeles Superior Court transitioning to a stable video appearance platform, the promise of seamless video appearances is in reach, but there's a catch. The Court's authorization to utilize video appearances was granted by the Judicial Council in Emergency Rule 3, which sunsets 90 days after Governor Newsom's state of emergency order ends on June 15, 2021. Luckily, Consumer Attorneys of California is hard at work on legislation that would permanently authorize Superior Courts to offer video appearances. If you hear the call to support SB 342, please answer it. Video appearances are a boon to our quality of life, and the ability to choose that form of appearance needs to remain, as the Court would say, *ad infinitum*.

Virtual education programs

Video participation has positively impacted CAALA members. For example, CAALA members have held virtual meetings with legislators and candidates and reported an increased connection due to the virtual meeting format. CAALA's Legal Staff Support Group (LSSG) is offering its first-ever virtual Staff Academy, with in-depth training that our LSSG members can get without factoring in commutes or childcare just to grow their knowledge and skills. CAALA Board and Committee members have been able to attend leadership meetings virtually instead of sitting in hours of traffic to devote volunteer time to the organization. As a result, we have seen attendance at meetings increase. No new legislation is needed for these changes to be permanent.

Online MSC program

Lastly, June will see the launch of Resolve Law LA, an online volunteer-staffed Mandatory Settlement Conference ("MSC") program arising out of a justice partnership between CAALA, Beverly Hills Bar Foundation, ASCDC, LA-ABOTA, and the Court. Initially the judges in the PI Hub Courts will order cases into the Resolve Law LA MSC Program at the Final Status Conference. The program will accommodate up to five MSCs each morning, 9:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m., and five in the afternoon, 1:30 – 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday. With a capacity of 50 MSCs per week, even at the pre-pandemic in-person program settlement rate of 50%, 25 cases per week could settle through this program.

And the Resolve Law LA platform is scalable. We can increase the number of virtual MSCs and add capacity to focus on specific case types, like employment cases. Since employment cases are approximately 20% of the Individual Calendar (I/C) courts' dockets and are among the most labor-intensive cases, a virtual MSC program will help reduce the burden on the I/C courts.

You will hear us ask for volunteer plaintiff settlement officers for this vital program. There will be no need to drive downtown, park, and endure the security check at the Spring Street Courthouse. Instead, you can act as a settlement officer from the comfort of your own home or office or on location at the beach if you can get a reliable signal. Please volunteer early and often; only through our collective efforts will we arrive at our new post-pandemic normal.

Advancements brought on by the pandemic were born of necessity and rooted in flexibility. Virtual video appearances, MSCs, and CAALA participation options are here to stay. But the pendulum swung too far.

Though the flexibility and efficiency of virtual participation is a welcome improvement for CAALA members' lives, nothing beats the connection and camaraderie of CAALA's in-person events. With Governor Newsom's announcement that California will reopen as of July 15, the best news of all is that we can soon choose whether to participate virtually or in person. Whatever your choice, I look forward to seeing you soon.

