



MICHIGAN COURTS NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Videoconferencing Saves Money and Time, Increases Safety

Mt. Pleasant, MI, November 19, 2014 – In a demonstration today at the Isabella County Courthouse, Trial Court Chief Judge Paul Chamberlain highlighted the benefits of the expanded use of videoconferencing technology to create “virtual” courtrooms. Because of this Michigan Supreme Court initiative, prisoners and mental health patients can participate in court hearings without the risks and costs involved in transporting them to court.

The savings generated by videoconferencing are substantial. For example, in fiscal year 2014, the Michigan Department of Corrections (MDOC) saved more than \$2.6 million because 4,058 “video transports” replaced physical transport of prisoners. Additional savings are garnered by local jurisdictions and those benefits were highlighted in the demonstration today, including freeing up deputy sheriffs for other public safety functions instead of transporting prisoners.

Since its launch in 2010, the program has expanded so that high definition videoconferencing is installed in at least one circuit, district and probate court in all 83 counties. In 77 counties, every courtroom with an assigned judge is now a “virtual” courtroom as well.

With MDOC “video” transports representing approximately 30 percent of requested court proceedings, savings from the program are expected to continue growing. Indeed, the savings in the last year alone have exceeded the video system budget. Just as important, savings to local units are estimated to far exceed savings to the state.

In addition to MDOC, partners with the Michigan Supreme Court in this project include the Michigan State Police Forensic Lab and state mental health facilities. Through this initiative, police technicians can also use videoconferencing to participate in arraignments, pretrial conferences, and other court hearings without the time and expense of travel.

The videoconferencing initiative is part of a broader Michigan Supreme Court priority to help local trial courts work smarter by implementing new technology. Other highlights include:

- 85 percent of Michigan citizens have access to online ticket payment programs.
- Nearly 100 percent of courts contribute to the 45 million records in the Judicial Data Warehouse. Courts, law enforcement and state agencies accessed this database nearly 400,000 times in 2013.
- There are more than 14,000 visits each week to MichiganLegalHelp.org, a website dedicated to helping Michigan residents solve their legal problems. Already one of the top three websites of its kind in the nation, a Spanish language version was launched in September, 2014.