



# Supreme Court of Appeals State of West Virginia

## News

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### **Jefferson County to Test Remote Technology Project to Promote Access, Safety in Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Cases**

For immediate release Thursday, November 4, 2021

CHARLES TOWN, W.Va. – Next week, Jefferson County court officials will test a pilot program that allows victims of domestic violence and sexual assault to file petitions and attend follow-up hearings without having to visit a courthouse.

The test will take place at 10:30 a.m. on Tuesday, November 9, in Jefferson County Magistrate Court in the Jefferson County Judicial Building, 110 North George Street in Charles Town. The test is open to the public and the media.

Jefferson County is the fourth county to pilot the program. Previously, victims of domestic violence and sexual assault had to go in person to a magistrate court to seek domestic violence protective orders or personal safety orders and attend follow-up hearings in person.

Under the pilot, victims can still go to court, but they will now have the option of going to the Eastern Panhandle Empowerment Center to file petitions and virtually attend hearings. The center's confidential location is open from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. weekdays. Victims should call ahead (304) 725-7080 to schedule an appointment.

Cabell County began using the new system in August, and Ohio and Kanawha Counties began using it in October. The system will be operational in Jefferson County on November 15.

“The courts play an important role in public safety. Sometimes those seeking justice are afraid their assailant will follow them to or from the courthouse, so they just don’t go. This program will allow victims to access the court system without so much fear,” said Supreme Court Chief Justice Evan Jenkins.

“The accused has legal rights too, and this program allows them to face their accusers, just not in person. Both the accuser and the accused can enter exhibits virtually, ensuring both sides in these cases can present their full arguments,” said Chief Justice Jenkins.

Petitions can still be filed during weekdays, after hours, and on weekends through Jefferson County Magistrate Court by calling 911. Magistrates are on call 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

The Remote Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Outreach Pilot Project is made possible by funding through the West Virginia Department of Homeland Security's Division of Justice and Community Services, the state administering agency for the STOP Violence Against Women Grant Program.

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