



Supreme Court of Appeals State of West Virginia

News

Administrative Office
1900 Kanawha Blvd., East
Bldg. 1, Room, E-316
Charleston, West Virginia 25305
(304) 340-2305 Jennifer Bundy
(304) 340-2306 April Harless
(304) 558-1212 FAX
Web Site: www.courtswv.gov
Facebook: [wvjudiciary](https://www.facebook.com/wvjudiciary)
Twitter: [WVCourts](https://twitter.com/WVCourts)
SmugMug:
<https://wvcourts.smugmug.com/>
Email: Jennifer.Bundy@courtswv.gov
Email: April.Harless@courtswv.gov

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

For immediate release Tuesday, September 28, 2021

WHEELING, W.Va. – First Family Court Circuit (Brooke, Hancock and Ohio Counties) Judges Heather Wood and Joyce Chernenko will test a new system to allow victims of domestic violence and sexual assault to file petitions for protective orders without going to a courthouse.

The test will take place at 10 a.m. Wednesday, September 29 in Judge Wood's courtroom on the second floor of the Ohio County Courthouse Annex, 51 16th Street, Wheeling.

Ohio County is the second county to pilot the program, which also allows victims to attend follow-up hearings in magistrate court and family court virtually from an advocacy office, rather than in person, so they do not have to be in the same room with their alleged assailants.

Cabell County began using the new system in August. The system will become operational in Ohio County on Monday, October 4. Because family court cases are closed to the media and the public, the final test of the system on Wednesday will be open to the media.

“The use of remote technology during the COVID-19 pandemic has built our confidence and comfort in ensuring justice is delivered in a safe and secure way. This new system will provide an option to victims to help keep them safe from the people they allege assaulted them. We also are ensuring every person's constitutional rights are protected,” Chief Justice Evan Jenkins said.

Previously, victims of domestic violence and sexual assault had to go in person to a magistrate court to file petitions for domestic violence protective orders or petitions for personal safety orders and attend follow-up hearings. Unfortunately, the alleged assailants sometimes follow victims to their cars or try to prevent them from entering court facilities. As a result, some victims may not feel safe filing a petition or attending a hearing.

Under the pilot, victims still can go to court buildings, but they will now have the option of going to the YWCA Family Violence Prevention Center or the CONTACT Sexual Assault Help Center to file a petition remotely with the help of a victim's advocate. Victims should call ahead to make appointments. The YWCA number is (304) 232-2748 and CONTACT's number is (304) 234-1783. CONTACT's service is provided 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. At other times, victims can call CONTACT at (800) 884-7242 or the YWCA at (800) 698-1247, the 24-hour hotlines, and speak with an advocate.

Petitions can still be filed after hours and on weekends through Ohio County Magistrate Court by calling 911.

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

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