
From: Kim Alvarado

Sent: Tuesday, December 1, 2020 5:45 PM

To: Bill Bilyeu

Subject: Courts request for funding through CARES Act

Bill,

In compliance with health and safety guidelines arising from the COVID-19 pandemic, the county court at law and district judges have used video conferencing tools to hear and resolve matters remotely. The judges in Collin County were some of the first in the state to transition to virtual proceedings and have effectively disposed of thousands of cases despite the unprecedented disruption to court operations caused by the pandemic.

The judiciary's effort notwithstanding, the growing backlog will only increase as courts resume post-covid in-person jury trials. The courts hope to resume jury trials while addressing the backlog by holding double-docket – where the presiding judge and a visiting judge work concurrently, but due to COVID-19 restrictions on court operations and limited space in the courthouse, not in the same location. Additionally, the average age of Senior Judges approved to hear cases in Collin County is over 65, meaning they are at higher risk of contracting COVID-19.

Through CARES funding, the courtrooms were equipped with two laptops for remote appearances. However, these laptops were programmed with access only to the Zoom application by way of the unique IP Address in the courtroom they were installed - the laptops do not work outside the courtroom's parameters. Moreover, having these two laptops for remote appearances in the courtroom has proven crucial in hybrid proceedings and jury trials with witnesses needing to testify remotely. There was a need for more than two of these laptops in several of the post-COVID jury trials held this year. The courts respectfully request a set of laptops, with access to our case management software, to be shared by the courts to lend to visiting judges as they hear cases remotely.

Note on quantity: This request is for 4 laptops to be shared by the County Court at Law Courts, 8 to be shared by the district courts, and 3 for judges approved to hear cases in Auxiliary Court.

Please let me know if you would like additional information.