



Fresno Superior Court Remote Video Proceedings (RVP) Information

Q1: How has implementing this program improved the efficiency of the court's time?

Other courts may focus on RVP for its tremendous efficiency potential. For the Fresno Superior Court, however, the RVP program in traffic court is mainly about increasing access to justice and services for rural residents. Fresno County encompasses nearly 6,000 square miles. Approximately 351,000 residents (36 percent of the county population) live outside the Fresno-Clovis metro area where the traffic courthouse is located. Portions of the county are more than 70 miles away from the urban center. Beyond distance, RVP helps to mitigate economic challenges. More than one-quarter of all county residents lives at or below the poverty level. The cost and time of traveling to the City of Fresno for traffic hearings is a significant challenge for some persons. For residents without private transportation, rural public transit is even more time-consuming and costly. Similarly, driving to and from court to testify takes law enforcement officers in rural areas away from public safety duties and stretches their agencies' resources.

Q2: Has the remote video program cut down on court administration costs? If so, would you be able to quantify by how much?

The Fresno Superior Court has not quantified administrative savings from the RVP program and, thus, does not have any information to provide. On the subject of administrative costs, the court sends a judicial assistant to the remote host sites each week. In addition to interacting with court users and operating the RVP, this staff is able to help residents access other court information and assistance they may request. A Spanish interpreter also attends the hearings at the remote sites. Spanish is the second most prevalent language spoken in Fresno County and it is estimated that as much as 70 percent of rural county residents predominantly or exclusively speak Spanish. The court invests in having this personnel at the remote sites for the comfort and ease of residents.

Q3: Have any of the costs of the program been passed onto individuals going through the judicial process in any way? Or have they been wholly borne by the court itself?

There is no extra cost for residents to use RVP to resolve their traffic citations. The start-up cost of purchasing the RVP equipment was covered by the court. The court continues to bear the costs for replacing any needed RVP equipment, the onsite court staff noted above, occasional court IT staff costs for trouble shooting remotely, and the Court Call service. The rural cities of Coalinga and Mendota, the remote site hosts, partner to provide the facilities, Internet connection, and minor onsite staff assistance once a week at their locations.

Q4: What have been the advantages of implementing such a system in your court?

The RVP process allows rural residents to attend traffic court hearings in a cost-effective manner without the expense of operating brick and mortar courts in rural areas. More importantly, teleservices modernize court operations to align with the way business is conducted in the 21st century, thus expanding public trust and confidence in the court system. From the start of the Fresno Superior Court's RVP program in April 2013 through June 30, 2017, this process has allowed

856 persons to attend traffic hearings remotely. The system has also allowed 1,179 residents to ask court personnel at the remote locations questions about court documents, extensions, and payments on traffic matters as well as other types of cases.

The RVP program has also strengthened relationships with the host municipalities and rural law enforcement agencies. Lastly, RVP has opened the door to a number of teleservices that save court and community resources while serving residents more conveniently. These include videoconferencing for the court to access qualified interpreters in other parts of California when there are none available for less prevalent languages locally.

In 2016, the court partnered with several community organizations to provide domestic violence advocacy and legal services via commercial videoconferencing from the courthouse to two private, secure offices located in rural areas of the county. Advocates explain the court process and help litigants to complete forms for protective orders, divorce, visitation, custody, and support. The litigants authorize completed documents with an electronic signature pad at the remote sites. Advocates or organizational attorneys then print the forms at the courthouse and file them on behalf of the litigants. In a recently funded project, the Probation Department will build upon the success of the domestic violence program by offering victims' services via videoconferencing.

Q5: Have there been any disadvantages of implementing the remote video program?

None that the court has identified.

Q: How reliable is the technology you use for this system?

The technology has been very reliable with relatively few technical problems or disruptions. The majority of the issues have been related to Internet disruptions and user errors. In the four years of operation, two cameras have malfunctioned. They were easily and affordably replaced. Consistently, users rate RVP highly in voluntary exit surveys, indicating that the experience is comparable to being in the courtroom in Fresno without the cost and time of traveling there.

Q6: Would you recommend that other traffic courts that cover large jurisdictions around the country implement a similar system?

The Fresno Superior Court enthusiastically recommends RVP and other teleservices to any jurisdiction that wants to serve remote consumers better, faster, and cost effectively.

Q7: Do you have any other comments that would be useful for judges or court administrators who might be interested in such a system?

As noted previously, once the Fresno Superior Court started RVP for traffic court it opened the door to many possibilities for using remote technology. One of the most cost- and time-effective is video remote interpreting (VRI). Like the rest of California, and increasingly the nation, there are many languages spoken in Fresno County. Occasionally, there are no local certified interpreters available in a needed language. Finding and arranging for interpreters in other areas to travel to Fresno delays court proceedings and incurs travel/accommodation costs, which compound for longer trials. VRI offers courts immediate access to language resources not available in their local area and also provides the opportunity to start and perfect a videoconferencing process that can then be expanded for other matters.

The Fresno Superior Court is happy to provide more information and arrange for a demonstration of the system via videoconferencing for a realistic experience. Interested courts may contact Traffic Manager Noelia Pineda at npineda@fresno.courts.ca.gov or (559) 457-1680.