

Family Law Virtual Town Hall with Judge Gregory Syren  
Wednesday, June 17, 2020

ACFLA and ACBA co-sponsored this Town Hall event. Yishai Boyarin, Vice Chair of ACBA facilitated the Town Hall with Judge Gregory Syren and Charlotte Marin, Director of Alameda County Superior Court Family Division; and Donna Gibbs, Past President and current Board Member of ACFLA, moderated the Chat.

Yishai Boyarin thanks Judge Syren for his time and for keeping the Bar up-to-date. Yishai introduces Charlotte Marin, Director of the Family Law Division, who oversees Family and General Civil Law, Family Court Services (FCS) Self-Help and Court Clerks. Charlotte Marin's contact info: (510) 690-2805, [cmarin@alameda.courts.ca.gov](mailto:cmarin@alameda.courts.ca.gov)

Judge Gregory Syren, Supervising Judge Family Law, gives updates as follows:

1. The last Emergency Orders that designated court holidays for the court closure was not extended and therefore, eliminated. All filings are available to include appeals, but not sure if unlawful detainers are included in allowable filings.
2. Commencing 6/1/20 the FL Bench Officers increased from 1 session per week to 3 sessions per week and it is going pretty well, although there has been some technical difficulties. One Bench Officer was getting dropped from hearings, but that Bench Officer got a new computer and the technical issues are being addressed. Bench Officers have discretion as to how to schedule their sessions- some are doing one session for long causes, others doing RFOs for all three sessions. Some Bench Officers are scheduling Status Conferences and getting back to case management. Judge Syren is doing Status Conferences, Commissioner Nikki Clark is doing Status Conferences one session and Judge Whitman is trying to establish a time to do Status Conferences.
3. Family Court Services is available for day-of-court mediation. If your case needs day-of-court mediation it is best practice to notify Courtroom Clerk and Bench Officer right away prior to Bench Officer doing calendar call, because may not have enough time if you wait until your case is called.
4. Often asked questions: 1) When are remote hearings going to expand? Judge Syren doesn't know, but expects Judge DeSautels to authorize more remote hearings. However, bandwidth, which was anticipated to be the underlying problem to having more hearings is not the issue to limiting the number of hearings, but rather staffing shortages prevent the court from having more hearings. 2) When will Hayward Hall of Justice open to the public? Judge Syren had a meeting with all the Alameda County Superior Court Judges and Executive Administrative Staff and this issue was discussed. The building will not open until Alameda County Health Director provides parameters and there are assurances in place to keep both the public and staff safe. Jury trials will start at the end of June 2020 so Court is anticipating that people will be entering the building. Safety measures such as maintaining social distancing and taking temperatures will need to be managed.

## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Q: How far out are RFOs being scheduled?

A: Six to seven weeks out.

Q: What happens if parties get future referral to FCS while at hearing?

A: The Courtroom Clerk will forward referral to FCS with parties' names, phone numbers and emails.

Q: There were some problems with FAX Filing mailing emergency orders/ex partes/OST instead of faxing back. Can this issue be addressed?

A: The return of the filings by mail were made in error and the issue has been addressed. Once the FAX Filing team receives the FAX, they send it on to another team who reviews, which then, in turn sends it to Judicial Officer for review. If there are any further problems not receiving filings in a timely manner, please contact Charlotte Marin directly (510) 690-2805 or [cmarin@alameda.courts.ca.gov](mailto:cmarin@alameda.courts.ca.gov)

Q: There have been some problems picking up documents after filing via drop box. The Sheriff says the documents are not ready and directs people to call Clerk's office. Can something be done?

A: Charlotte is uncertain why documents are not ready and may be due to volume of documents being processed since filing has been opened up. Charlotte will rectify this problem. It is best to call the Clerk's Office (510) 267-6923 before trying to pick up documents.

Q: What is the best way to contact Family Court Services?

A: FCS regular phone, (510) 690-2500, should be working and is being manned by three clerical staff. FCS can also be contacted by email: [familycourtservices@alameda.courts.ca.gov](mailto:familycourtservices@alameda.courts.ca.gov). Judge Syren is meeting with Saundra Greene tomorrow, Thursday, June 18, 2020 and he will follow up with her.

Q: Is FCS day-of-court available for first RFO filed? And if so, should they contact Courtroom Clerk to notify that day-of-court is needed?

A: Yes, and probably a good idea to contact Courtroom Clerk prior to hearing to let Department know that day-of-court mediation needed. However, if possible, it is preferred that FCS mediation be scheduled prior to a court hearing. Day-of-court mediation is typically used where there are no prior child custody and visitation orders or there is some kind of emergency that warrants same-day mediation. FCS offered day-of-court mediation as a courtesy to try to catch up on missed mediation sessions in March, April and May 2020.

Q: What is the best way to deliver Judgments?

A: Charlotte Marin prefers Judgments be submitted to court by mail or drop box; not by Fax Filing. The turnaround time for processing Judgments is currently four weeks. Judge Syren says the Judgment Team is in place and reviewing Judgments. Commissioner Bishay still conducts

Judgment Clinics on Fridays if your Judgment has been rejected. If corrections have been made, those Judgments should be sent directly to Commissioner Bishay.

Q: What happens if you are not able to get into a hearing through the BlueJeans link?

A: If you are unable to get into hearing through the BlueJeans link, try the meeting ID which is the department's phone number.

The meeting ID = the Department phone number

Dept 502 = (510) 690-9712

Dept 503 = (510) 690-2713

Dept 504 = (510) 690-2714

Dept 507 = (510) 690-2716

Dept 508 = (510) 690-2717

Dept 509 = (510) 690-2718

Dept 510 = (510) 690-2719

Dept 513 = (510) 690-2722

Dept 515 = (510) 690-2724

Dept 516 = (510) 690-2725

Dept 522 = (510) 690-2731

The majority of Bench Officers prefer no passcodes. The procedure to try to get into a hearing if the BlueJeans link does not work is to use just meeting ID. If that doesn't work, email the department, DO NOT CALL!!! The Courtroom Clerks are working remotely and are not available to answer the phone in the courtroom.

Q: What can FL Bar do to make remote hearings run smoothly?

A: Pay attention to the rules of conduct attached to BlueJeans invite and listen when the Judge asks you to stop talking. The court needs to come up with a more uniform rule with regard to submitting Exhibits.

Q: Is there a process for correcting if the wrong attorney is contacted by the court?

A: Charlotte Marin spoke with the management team about the clerks need to look at the Register of Actions to find the current attorney of record in cases. Judge Syren suggests that if you are the attorney of record and know a hearing is approaching and haven't received an invite, contact Department and request invite. Attorney can also use meeting ID to make appearance.

Q: Can we receive certified copies of documents such as Judgments or QDROs?

A: Yes, Court Clerks are certifying and processing documents.

Q: Is BlueJeans invitation bilingual?

A: BlueJeans invitations are now available in Spanish.

Q: What is the contact info for interpreter's office and financial office for people who are dropped from a financial hearing?

A: Interpreter's Office: (510) 891-6006  
Financial Hearing Officers: (510) 891-6286.

Q: How are simultaneous interpreter cases going?

A: It's hit or miss. Some interpreters don't know about the phone bridge which allows interpreter to do simultaneous interpretation while everyone else muted. Judge Rodriguez seems to have had some success in using the phone bridge. It is a work in progress.

Q: There has been some problems with DVTROs not being processed within 24 hours. What can be done?

A: DVTROs should be processed within 24 hours. Typical filing times for regular pleadings through FAX Filing are processed within two days and are guaranteed to be processed within three days if submitted by 3:00pm. The FAX Filing team should be catching DVTROs as a priority. Judge Syren wants this issue to be flagged and addressed right away.

Q: Do you need to file an Application and Order for Continuance of Hearing if you are double set?

A: Right now, calling the Courtroom Clerk is allowed to continue cases and it is not required to file an Application and Order for Continuance. Just a reminder that emails are not checked everyday. There is a guarantee in Department 516 that emails will be checked two days prior to your hearing. It should be noted that some attorneys have successfully appeared in more than one matter in different departments on the same day and time-just need to check in and let Bench Officer know.

Q: Are Bench Officers giving lawyers different check in times?

A: Some Bench Officers tell attorneys their case will be called later. It depends on how the Bench Officer manages his or her calendar. Judge Syren will often tell lawyers he will call their case later. Judge Fujioka does this as well.

Q: Is the court processing checks? What happens if checks are returned uncashed?

A: Charlotte says that checks are being processed, including checks that say, "amount not to exceed \$\_\_\_\_" The only reason a check is returned is if the amount exceeded whatever amount is noted. If a check has been rejected, please contact Charlotte Marin.

Q: How are DCSS hearings being conducted?

A: Same way as other FL matters though BlueJeans app.

Q: Is there a mechanism to reserve court dates or is it required?

A: No, the requirement to reserve a court hearing is an Emergency Rule that applies to Civil cases. There is no need for reservation and attorneys should just indicate what dates they are not available to set a hearing.

Q: For cases that had temp orders and an OST, but had to be continued due to the court closure, is there a new Emergency Rule to reset those cases sooner?

A: There is no Emergency Rule to reset. There are 4,000 cases that had to be reset from March to May 2020. If you believe you have a case that should have priority, email the Department and point out that case was originally set as OST or file an RFO.

#### OTHER ANNOUNCEMENTS & NEWS

1. Judge Syren wants to know if anyone has felt detriment due to the current BlueJean platform? Feedback should be directed to ACFLA Representatives: Dan Preddy: [danp@gkfremontlaw.com](mailto:danp@gkfremontlaw.com) or Donna Gibbs: [donna@bgdfamilylaw.com](mailto:donna@bgdfamilylaw.com) or ACBA Representatives: Laura Owen: [laura@bgdfamilylaw.com](mailto:laura@bgdfamilylaw.com) or Yishai Boyarin: [yboyarin@fordfamilylaw.com](mailto:yboyarin@fordfamilylaw.com)
2. Judge Rodriguez, Department 502, is presenting a Brown Bag on “Putting on your BlueJeans – Remote Hearings” on June 23, 2020 from 12:15pm to 1:15pm via BlueJeans.
3. If anyone wants to submit questions for the upcoming Town Hall on Wednesday, 7/8/20 at 12pm, please email one of the above ACFLA or ACBA Representatives.

For COVID-19 latest news, remember to check the Alameda County Superior Court website [www.alameda.courts.ca.gov](http://www.alameda.courts.ca.gov).

NEXT TOWN HALL SCHEDULED WEDNESDAY, JULY 8<sup>TH</sup> AT 12:00PM.