PUBLIC SERVICE AND TRUST COMMISSION

Committee on Alternatives to Court Appearances

Technology Subcommittee

Meeting Minutes
February 11, 2009

Those in attendance:

Mr. Scott Rosengrant, Chair	Mr. Ronald Macchio
Family Support Magistrate John Colella	Atty. Mark Ostrowski
Mr. Lucio Deluca	Ms. Celia Seifert
Atty. Eric Groody	Hon. David Tobin
Mr. David Iaccarino	Mr. Carl VonHassel

Not Present:

Hon. Patrick Carroll III	Atty. Norman Roberts II

The Technology Subcommittee on Alternatives to Court Appearances met on February 11, 2009 at 99 East River Drive, East Hartford, on the 7th Floor, Conference Room 707 at 1:00 pm.

The meeting was called to order by Scott Rosengrant at 1:08 pm. The minutes of the January 14th, 2009 meeting were unanimously approved pending discussed revisions.

Scott Rosengrant provided subcommittee members a technology overview from the New Jersey (NJ) video conferencing (VC) trip. He indicated that NJ courtrooms are not particularly high-tech. They use the standard Integrated Services Digital Network (ISDN) lines, older television monitors and audio systems that were not particularly clear. The ISDN line requires a dedicated jack for VC and NJ pay $110 a month per jack plus a charge per minute. With Internet Protocol (IP) a computer can be connected in any data jack.

Similar to Connecticut infrastructure, The Essex County Jail is equipped with IP connections and converts the ISDN connection from the courthouse to IP through the use of a bridge. Unlike Connecticut's jails, New Jersey has a centralized facility where all arrested individuals are brought and processed through. Having defendants and inmates in one location helped to aid in the use of VC. The Essex County Jail has 12 VC booths for communicating with their attorneys and at the other end the courthouse has 8 VC booths for communications. The jail has a dedicated VC room with dedicated staff for arraignments. The room is carpeted with acoustical tiles with flags and the state seal in the background. The sound quality at the jail VC room was better than in the VC rooms in the DOC locations. The monitor the defendants looked at to see the courtroom and judge was small and not clear at all.

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The meeting then moved on a practical session to display the various technologies giving the committee members an up-close look and chance to demo the equipment. The demonstrations started with Rick Bolduc, Technical System Analyst for JIS. Rick gave the subcommittee a demonstration of the Genesys system. It was described as a teleconferencing solution with document sharing capabilities. The moderator of the session can upload a document or create a document on the screen and everyone in the meeting can collaborate in editing it. While Genesys also provides video capabilities, the quality is low and not appropriate for courtroom use. Genesys is best used as a teleconferencing option for an alternative to a court appearance and administrative uses.   CSSD presently uses the system for teleconferencing and recommends the system only be used with a limited number of participants (up to 5) as they will begin to talk over each other. The Genesys system can be used for status conferences with the moderator having the capability to remove or refuse participants. The system has a "chat" capability where a participant can send a text message to a single participant or all participants if they are logged in to a computer connected to the conference. Participants who do not have access to a computer can still call in on a phone (cell or land line) and be part of the teleconference.

Scott Rosengrant, and Carl VonHassel provided subcommittee members with an interactive demonstration of the various VC equipment available. Stations were set up around the room and included a Sony PCS system on a cart with a standard television, a Polycom V700 portable VC device, a laptop with a motion sensor USB camera, a wireless laptop with a built in camera as well as a laptop with a standard USB webcam connected to the conference room SmartBoard. All the laptops were running the Polycom PVX software.

Several video "calls" were made within the room showing how each device can connect to any other device over the existing IP network. The subcommittee used the Sony PCS and television system and called the Waterbury courtroom and interacted with the clerical staff there. The overall impression was positive with excellent video and audio capabilities. This connection was at the lower bandwidth of 384kbps. The system can go all the way to high-definition. In addition, a call was made from the wireless laptop in another room to the laptop on the SmartBoard showing how the wireless laptop was able to be carried from room to room while maintaining the video conference with the subcommittee in the conference room. The call used the IP network and wireless technology which resulted in a clear picture and audio.

It was also demonstrated how these devices can be managed from any PC. Carl showed this to the subcommittee by controlling one of our systems remotely and making a call to one of the DOC sites. He also gave a brief description of how a VC bridge device would make it possible for any of our systems to initiate a multiple participant VC.

Some of the costs associated with the VC equipment shown were as follows:

> Courtroom Setup (high-end unit) $18-25,000
> Sony PCS Unit (mid-range unit) $5500
> Portable Polycom V700 Units $3500 (incl. travel case)
> Laptops with integrated webcam $1500
> Logitech Motion Sensor Quick Cam $39
> Polycom PVX software $275
> Bridge Hardware (would enable all systems to make multiple participant calls) $20,000

The subcommittee discussed the Scope document and wireless technology. Previously, the subcommittee voted that wireless technology was outside of the scope of the subcommittee's charge. After watching the wireless VC connection from the laptop with integrated camera, the subcommittee decided to include wireless technology as being inside the scope and worth investigating. CSSD uses wireless technology at 2 courthouse locations within the lock-up to get information from defendants. Scott and Carl pointed out that the old wireless technology, "A/B/G," is less reliable than the new "N" wireless capability. "N" wireless capabilities actually work better when there are obstructions as the signal uses them to bounce off of to create a better connection. At the next meeting, the subcommittee will review the rest of the scope document, discuss any feedback, and begin the process of drafting the subcommittee's recommendations to the full committee.

The meeting adjourned at 3:21 p.m. The next scheduled meeting of the Technology Subcommittee is on Wednesday March 11th at 1:30 p.m. at 99 East River Drive, East Hartford, on the 7th Floor, Room 707.