

Forever in Blue Jeans

By Presiding Judge Bryce Duckworth

(For a bit of nostalgia, listening to “Forever in Blue Jeans” by Neil Diamond is recommended while reading.)

In November 2019, the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges released an independent and comprehensive assessment of the Family Division of the Eighth Judicial District. The assessment found that the Eighth Judicial District Court is operating a coordinated Family Division Model that places it “in a league of its own,” and documented “a parade of strengths that other jurisdictions could benefit from emulating.” Nevertheless, a number of challenges exist and we recognize that improvements to the Family Division are ongoing and necessary. Little did we know, 2020 would accelerate a number of those changes and improvements to our efficiencies—*albeit by necessity*.

On March 13, 2020, Administrative Order 20-01 was issued, directing that “all currently scheduled non-essential District Court hearings are ordered to be conducted by video or telephonic means; decided on the papers; or rescheduled unless otherwise directed by a District Court Judge.” Since March 13, 16 Administrative Orders have followed, providing additional guidance and direction. A library of these Administrative Orders can be found at <http://www.clarkcountycourts.us/general/court-rules-and-administrative-orders/>.

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused necessary changes to court operations and protocols. These changes have included a paperless model that has been advertised for more than a decade and has finally come to nearly complete fruition. (For some time, we have labeled ourselves as a “paperless” court. “Papers” nevertheless made their way to the court by way of courtesy copies, orders/decrees to sign and a seem-



Judge Duckworth was elected to the bench in 2008. He currently serves as the Presiding Judge in the Family Division of the Eighth Judicial District Court.

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ingly endless mountain of exhibits.) Today, pleadings, papers, exhibits, orders, and decrees are transmitted, signed, and filed electronically—truly not just “talking the talk,” but “walking the walk.” Each department now has an email inbox dedicated to receive all proposed orders/decrees. A listing of each department’s inbox address is attached to Administrative Order 20-17. The efficiencies of the Eighth Judicial District Court have increased dramatically thanks in large part to the vision and guidance of Chief Judge Linda Bell and an amazing court administration (with a well-deserved “shout-out” to Assistant Court Administrator/IT Director, Mike Doan).

During this time of stress and turmoil, the adjudication of cases has continued. *In lieu of* personal appearances in court, however, appearances through “BlueJeans” have become both routine and commonplace (*and much preferred over telephonic appearances*). BlueJeans is a videoconferencing platform that offers tools that can be utilized in law and motion calendars, trials/evidentiary hearings, and mediation. These tools

include “side-bar” and whiteboard functions. This videoconference platform has been around for some time and has been utilized by several Family Division departments prior to March 2020. For assistance in navigating BlueJeans, I recommend <http://www.clarkcountycourts.us/virtual/>.

Courts throughout the country have grappled with how to conduct virtual hearings effectively and efficiently. Some jurisdictions have utilized Zoom, while others have relied on YouTube and even Facebook as videoconferencing platforms. In the Eighth Judicial District, we have embraced the BlueJeans platform (*okay, we have dragged some along kicking and screaming*) and continue to explore and implement its features. Videoconferencing is here to stay and, notwithstanding occasional “technical” challenges along the way, I’ve determined that *“I’d much rather be forever in blue jeans.”* ☐

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