

## **Keep Michigan Courts on Zoom to Open Access to Justice**

**By Matthew Paletz, Esq.**

The Detroit City Council recently passed an ordinance giving low-income residents facing eviction proceedings free access to lawyers. As an attorney who represents landlords and is in the business of filing these eviction notices, we can debate the merit of taxpayer-funded representation; however, there should be no debate on access to justice.

I believe there's an even better way to ensure tenants' interests are represented and that is to make a permanent decision to continue Zoom appearances in Michigan courts. This way they're relieved from the burden of personal courtroom appearances. And after two years of pandemic-inspired remote proceedings, the Michigan Supreme Court is now contemplating doing just that.

Critics of Zoom in the courtroom say it waters down the institution. But the days of pomp and circumstance need to be reprioritized. That pales in comparison to the person trying to keep a roof over their head during these incredibly inflationary times.

In-person courtroom visits can cause a tenant to have to leave their job in the middle of the day, try and find a ride, travel unnecessary miles and wait for their turn in court, while they lose wages from their employer. At the end of the day, landlords want tenants to pay their rent. It's in all of our best interests to eliminate obstacles to doing that.

As one of the largest representatives of property owners in the Midwest, I realize that it's a bit odd that I'm trying to be the ambassador for these opportunities. But, it is in the mutual interest of my property-owning clients and their tenants to be in the best financial position to fulfill their rental obligations.

From a representation standpoint, it's much easier for public defenders to work with multiple clients each day by Zoom. State Court Administrator Tom Boyd told the Michigan House Judiciary Committee recently, "Going back isn't really an option." More importantly, it shouldn't be an option." When you have a situation where both landlord and tenant advocates agree, it's time to take notice.

The tech genie is out of the bottle. I firmly believe that the COVID era has taught us that the former necessity of in-person hearings is outdated. We should be looking forward and not looking to return to archaic legal courtroom procedures.