



**CHIEF DISTRICT COURT JUDGE FOR NEW ZEALAND  
TE KAIWHAKAWĀ MATUA O TE KŌTI-Ā-ROHE O AOTEAROA  
Judge Heemi Taumaunu**

11 February 2022

**ALL LEADERS OF THE PROFESSION**

Tēnā koutou

**REMOTE COURTS TRIAL**

As many of you may be aware, over the last two weeks, I have invited over 20 District Court Judges in over 10 locations around the country to participate in a Remote Courts trial. As a central feature of the trial, the presiding judge has conducted the proceedings from another location using remote technology. All other participants in the proceedings have appeared in-person inside the courtroom. The remote courts trial has intentionally operated in court locations to plan and build resilience where Omicron is present in the local community.

By way of background, the remote courts trial represents a joint initiative with the Ministry of Justice, and is intended to assist our bench and local registries to prepare for a “worst case scenario” based on what Ministry of Health modellers are telling us will be a significant ‘bell curve’ of Omicron cases within the next few weeks. Through this process we aim to increase our ability to conduct priority proceedings remotely if we are forced to do so. We believe there is a small window of opportunity to test and understand the challenges of operating remotely, and to make any necessary changes before the full impact of Omicron hits. So far, the trial has provided us with a valuable opportunity to learn important lessons bearing in mind that the District Court currently operates a paper-based filing system.

You may be interested to know that last week, judges presided remotely over a range of criminal proceedings including list courts, family violence lists, sentencing lists and case review hearings. As a result of lessons learned so far, the remote court trial is unlikely to generally include criminal Judge Alone Trials and Youth Court lists. The trial has also included a range of proceedings conducted in the Family Court and in the civil jurisdiction where the judges have also presided from another location using remote technology.

Although it is intended to continue the trial next week with a similar number of District Court Judges in similar locations, the trial has not yet extended to include all participants (including counsel) using remote technology from locations outside the courtroom. Although this may occur at a later date, you will appreciate that it has been important to adopt a gradual approach to the trial.

I understand that members of the profession and other stakeholders may be interested in the trial and the reasons why it is being conducted. Accordingly, please feel free to distribute this letter to members of your organisation as you see fit.

Ngā mihi



Heemi Taumaunu  
Chief District Court Judge

cc     Andrew Kibblewhite, Secretary of Justice  
       Carl Crafar, Chief Operating Officer Ministry of Justice  
       Jacquelyn Shannon, Group Manager Courts & Tribunals Ministry of Justice  
       Donella Gawith, Group Manager Service Design (Acting) Ministry of Justice