

The following is a **Broadcast Email** to all OVS Funded Victim Assistance Programs:

Dear Colleague:

An issue was recently raised as to whether advocates for victims could participate in virtual court proceedings that they would have attended with the victim in person prior to COVID-19, and how to do this.

We have verified with the Office of Court Administration that advocates may participate remotely. According to Counsel's Office, the judge's secretary, clerk or other court staff who provide the Skype for Business or Microsoft Teams link and telephone information to the victims, can also provide this information to a victim advocate.

If an advocate does not know who to call for this information, they should consult the website and main phone number for the individual court or, if that fails, [nycourts.gov](http://nycourts.gov). The court system's COVID-19 hotline, 833-503-0447 will have the information of how to contact the court.

Advocates assisting victims in the remote order of protection program under Family Court Act 153-c(b) are automatically included. Under Family Court Act 838, a petitioner for an order of protection may have a "friend, relative, counselor or social worker" present – not to participate (unless they are a witness) but simply to listen as a supportive person.

On behalf of the New York State Office of Victim Services, thank you for your commitment to providing the highest quality services to innocent victims of crime in New York State.

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