



COVID-19 Impacts and Responses Dispute Resolution Centers and their Services June 2020 Report

Summary

Resolution Washington conducted an internal COVID-19 Impact Survey¹ in May 2020 to gauge the impact and responses of our member Dispute Resolution Centers (DRCs) during the COVID-19 pandemic. Our DRCs report they are:

- Facilitating dispute resolution and hearing from the public about increasingly complex and challenging conflicts escalated by financial, housing, family, and health concerns, and other impacts of the coronavirus;
- Successfully providing remote services to communities and courts through online and telephone service delivery;
- Responding to greater service demands while shifting service delivery to virtual platforms and handling remote work for staff and volunteers while working, all with significantly reduced resources in already very lean organizations; and
- Working to meet accessibility needs around access to technology and information that present barriers to the most vulnerable Washington residents in meeting their critical needs.

DRC Responses to COVID-19

Washington's 21 nonprofit DRCs, which were established by RCW 7.75, have decades of experience **responding to the needs of our communities** with tailored dispute resolution, facilitation and education services.

In these unprecedented times, we are rising to the needs of our clients and neighbors by:

- **Responding effectively to emerging conflict, community by community;**
- **Continuing to provide access to justice and support accessibility of services;**
- **Serving people of color and vulnerable communities;**
- **Shifting mediation and myriad other services to remote platforms;**
- **Working with Courts to provide timely resolution of cases; and**
- **Responding to growing conflict prevention and resolution needs with creativity.**

DRC Service Requests and Service Delivery in COVID Times of Heightened Conflict

DRCs continue to answer the call from state and local agencies, Courts, communities and the public to help resolve challenging conflicts in families, neighborhoods, businesses, organizations and agencies while working remotely under the Stay Home Order. Parenting plan cases completed rose by 16.6% and neighbor/community related cases completed rose 8% as a percentage of the total DRC caseload between February and April, reflecting the challenges of co-parenting and negotiating safety behaviors under the Stay Home Order. Landlord tenant, foreclosure, and business cases each decreased as a percentage of the total cases closed during the eviction and foreclosure moratoria, temporary closure of businesses, and reduced operations of Courts. These areas are expected to emerge as peak areas of dispute resolution need moving forward this year; and in fact the demand for new landlord tenant dispute resolution services at the DRCs was already rising as of early May. Additionally, the **client calls have become more desperate and the needs more complex as the public health and economic crisis continues to unfold**, requiring additional staff and volunteer time per case.

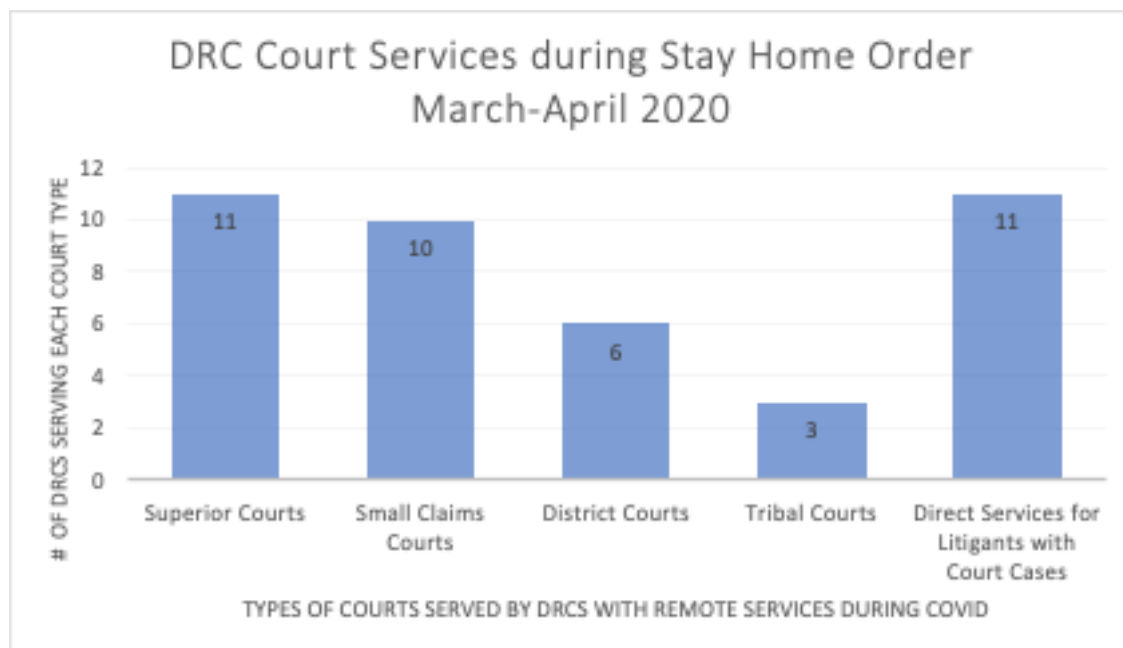
¹ All 21 of the Resolution Washington member DRCs completed the survey between May 7th and 21st, 2020.

Chart 1 summarizes the public service requests received by DRCs and the DRCs' service delivery methods during the Stay Home Order.

Chart 1 Public Service Requests and DRC Service Delivery during the COVID-19 Stay Home Order

Public Requests of DRCs		Remote Service Delivery	
% of Respondents	Top Service Request Areas	% of Respondents	Typically In-Person DRC Services Delivered Remotely (online or via phone) in April 2020
86%	Parenting plans (new or modifications)	95%	Mediation
62%	Tenant landlord issues	43%	Training
57%	Community issues	38%	Facilitation
43%	Workplace Issues	14%	Restorative Circles
38%	Other family issues	Other remote services include conflict coaching, information sharing in English and Spanish, homeless prevention navigation, and meetings	
33%	Parent teen issues		
Other topics include Business, Schools, Easement disputes, neighborhood distancing and court cases			
% of Respondents	Volume and Urgency of Service Requests	% of Respondents	DRC Remote Delivery Services Planned to be Offered (online or via phone)
62%	Increased call volume, in some cases after a temporary reduction early in the pandemic	100%	Mediation
38%	Increased service requests during Stay Home order	81%	Training
33%	Cases are more intense and complex due to COVID	71%	Facilitation
		33%	Restorative Circles (represents all DRCs providing circles)

Chart 2 displays the number of DRCs currently serving each type of Court by shifting in-person services to phone and online mediation while typical court services are limited due to COVID. 86% of DRCs statewide are actively working with local Courts to provide services to the public during the interruption of regular court services, facilitating dispute resolution and access to justice while reducing burden on the Courts.



Funding DRC Public Services

DRC Directors and Staff are committed to service and are creative in meeting the needs of Washington communities. They receive and seek funding to meet those community needs from a variety of sources.

- 13 of the 21 DRCs statewide are participating in the federal CARES Act Paycheck Protection Program to help them maintain staffing in order to continue serving Washington.
- 9 DRCs have applied for community and/or private foundation grants to support services since March.
- Resolution Washington, on behalf of all Washington DRCs, submitted a COVID-19 emergency response funding request to the Office of Financial Management on May 7th. The letter requests support in the amount of approximately \$1.9M for expansion of tenant landlord dispute resolution, increased capacity in information and referral support around client crises, service accessibility and equity, training development to increase capacity in foreclosure mediation for the year ahead, and technology to deliver remote services.

DRC funding before the pandemic was insufficient. The current mix of funding includes \$2 M/biennium via State proviso supporting a portion of core funding for 21 active service DRCs statewide, along with a mix of eroding Court filing fee revenue, locality funding, fees for service, foundation grants and individual giving contributions. DRCs continue to offer fee-based services on a sliding scale and many free services according to RCW 7.75. They are providing more fee reductions and waivers now in response to the financial challenges of the Washington residents they serve. Every aspect of past funding is challenged by these times, while need for services and the strain of shifting service delivery methods place more demands than ever on DRCs.

We continue to track data, build relationships with strategic partners, and seek outside funding in addition to updating the legislature and state agencies.

Conclusion

Washington's Dispute Resolution Centers have proactively tackled challenges of service delivery and are answering the public's need for dispute resolution support safely while under the Stay Home, Stay Healthy initiative. DRCs are responsive to community needs, working with community partners, local government agencies and the Courts to adapt services in order to fill gaps and meet increasing landlord tenant, family, workplace and community conflicts in this challenging time. The DRCs' already underfunded public services are severely strained both by the revenue impacts of the crisis and the pace of change needed to adapt and serve during these times. The DRCs continue to serve Washington State and its residents, and are working to answer the need for increased activities around emerging challenges such as evictions, foreclosures, domestic violence and information equity.