



# Video arraignments now in use

By **LORI PILGER**  
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In a second-floor courtroom Friday, courtgoers craned their necks to see a newly mounted video screen on the wall in the jury box.

One at a time, defendants made their first appearances, looking life-size and crystal clear, from a room four miles away deep inside Lancaster County's new Adult Correctional Center.

For those in the know, Courtroom 22 this week became the new jail courtroom. The old one, Courtroom 10, was a small room connected to the old jail and home to dozens of first appearances each week.

Rather than drive inmates from the new jail on West O Street to the courthouse, defendants appear in court on a 32-inch TV screen.

"Make sure you show up on your court date," County Judge Jim Foster told one man, charged Friday with felony

child abuse after he set his percentage bond at \$5,000.

The man in jail scrubs said he will, thanked the judge and was escorted away by a corrections officer with a list of names of others yet to appear.

A woman entered the small, cinder-block-walled room in the jail soon after on a shoplifting charge and told the judge she just wanted to plead guilty.

"May I say something?" she asked.

Please do, Foster said, then listened to her tearful explanation for why she did what she did and gave her 10 days in jail.

"For the first week, I think it's gone pretty well," said Deputy County Public Defender Elizabeth Elliott, who has been point person for the office in getting defense attorneys up to speed on the changes.

Any new policy or procedure takes some adjusting, she said, and going in, there definitely were concerns.

From a defense attorney's perspective, she said, there is a concern that losing the human touch could unintentionally lead to downplaying the seriousness of what's going on in the courtroom. And attorneys also never know how a hearing is going to go. Sometimes things take unanticipated, complicated turns.

"Thankfully, right now we are just doing kind of simple hearings," Elliott said. "Just so we can get used to the system, used to the new procedures."

The prospect of saving money that otherwise would be spent driving prisoners to the courthouse from the new jail, plus the safety concerns that would go with it, led judges to consider the court appearances by video.

So far, there's just one courtroom with a direct camera link to the jail, but more are expected to follow.

On Wednesday, four district court judges who

usually preside over the third floor at the Hall of Justice headed to the second-floor courtroom.

Judge John Colborn took a seat at the bench for 8:30 a.m. arraignments.

The others, judges Karen Flowers, Steven Burns and Andrew Jacobsen, sat in the rows usually filled with defendants' families and the public.

"That worked pretty smooth," Burns said as they got up to walk into a back room where a video phone allows attorneys to talk privately with clients who have questions.

District Court Administrator Jennifer Borgerding Kulwicki said long-range plans call for adding cameras to at least one district courtroom, as long as things go well.

"There are a lot of details that need to be worked out yet," she said.

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