

## 231<sup>ST</sup> ASSOCIATE COURT

### TARRANT COUNTY

#### **\*\*AMENDED RULES FOR REMOTE HEARINGS as of 10/1/2020\*\***

As you are aware, The Supreme Court of Texas issued a Twenty-Sixth Emergency Order and the Office of Court Administration has reissued guidelines for Court proceedings set **on or after October 1, 2020**. As such, the 231<sup>st</sup> Associate Court will continue to conduct non-essential hearings remotely if the parties and their necessary witnesses have the technology to do so. The following rules and procedures will apply for remote hearings.

*Essential hearings that are impossible or impracticable to conduct remotely will be held in person as scheduled by the Court to ensure compliance with the Courthouse Operating Plan and the health and safety of all participants. If there are health concerns with any participant of an essential hearing, you must notify the Court immediately. Cases considered to be "essential" are contempt actions, protective orders, writs, CPS removals, and extraordinary relief temporary restraining orders. Please see our Courts' amended guidelines regarding essential cases.*

#### **PROCEDURES FOR ZOOM ATTENDANCE & PARTICIPATION:**

The 231<sup>st</sup> Associate Court will be using Zoom video conferencing. It is free to download at [zoom.us](https://zoom.us) or you can download the app directly to your cell phone. You will receive an email invitation that will include a link to the hearing. **The Zoom invitation will be sent using the email addresses listed in JIMS**, so you must ensure your information is current and correct. Zoom invitations will be sent to the attorneys of record or self-represented litigants only. It is your responsibility to send it to your client and witnesses. Your device must have internet access, a working video camera, and a working microphone. If you will need an interpreter, you must notify the Court immediately. **IF YOU CAN ONLY PARTICIPATE VIA TELEPHONE, YOU MUST COORDINATE IT THE DAY BEFORE WITH THE COURT COORDINATOR.**

You must **dress appropriately and avoid any unnecessary noise** that can disrupt the proceeding – as you would in the actual Courtroom. Failure to do so may result in your hearing being reset. You must also ensure that your full name is entered appropriately so the Court can identify the parties, attorneys and witnesses.

#### **PROCEDURES FOR EXHIBIT AND WITNESS LISTS:**

If you intend to offer exhibits during the hearing, please exchange them with the attorney or self-represented party **prior to your hearing date** to assist the Court with streamlining the hearing. **Exhibits MUST be marked and saved by participants title and numbered (i.e. P1, R1) and be accompanied by an Exhibit List.** *Exhibits unmarked or saved in different unorganized files with different names will result in your hearing being cancelled and rescheduled.*

Additionally, all Exhibit Lists and pre-marked exhibits **must** be provided to the Court by 5:00 p.m. **THE DAY BEFORE the hearing.** The 231<sup>st</sup> Associate Court email address for exhibits is [231ac@tarrantcounty.com](mailto:231ac@tarrantcounty.com). Be prepared to instruct the Court on which exhibits you will stipulate to before the hearing begins to save

time. Failure to do so with an extensive number of exhibits could result in a reset due to a lack of allotted time. If your hearing will need a record on a Tuesday setting, please copy Ms. Dobson on the email to the Court when you send your exhibits. The email for Ms. Dobson is [hbdobson@tarrantcounty.com](mailto:hbdobson@tarrantcounty.com). The subject of these emails should be the full cause number and “Petitioner’s Exhibits” or whatever is appropriate. The documents must be in .pdf format. The Court cannot consider any exhibits not emailed to the Court or Court reporter in accordance with the above guidelines. If you fail to follow this requirement in a proceeding with a record, the court reporter will not maintain these documents in the record.

**Please *DO NOT* send exhibits for hearings in the Associate Court to the District Court exhibit address, the District Court Reporter, or our Court Coordinator – ONLY the two addresses herein. They will be deleted.** Additionally, if your contested setting is reset for any reason, please follow the above protocol and resend your exhibit list and exhibits the day before the new hearing date.

#### **MISCELLANEOUS:**

Any responses or replies e-filed with the Clerk less than 48 hours before the hearing should also be emailed in .pdf format to the Court at the above email address, or they may not be considered. Cases for the judge’s reference need not be e-filed with the Clerk but should be emailed to the Judge prior to the hearing to allow consideration. *\*Make sure when emailing the Court, you copy all attorneys/parties on the email.*

Finally, although the OCA has allowed us to start hearing “non-essential” cases, the Court still must prioritize the cases that were previously deemed “essential” and that require records. For ALL cases, the Court will have to consider strict time limits and numbers of witnesses per party. We must do this to ensure more cases are heard until the current guidelines we’ve been given are amended or they expire.

***\*We appreciate your patience and understanding with this process and assure you that we are doing everything we can to help resolve more cases and accommodate all participants while protecting everyone’s health and safety.\****

#### **FOR THE PUBLIC:**

THE OPEN COURTS PROVISION OF TEXAS LAW ALLOWS ALL TEXANS ACCESS TO COURT PROCEEDINGS. AS SUCH, ANYONE MAY CONNECT TO THE 231<sup>ST</sup> DISTRICT COURT PROCEEDINGS BY VISITING OUR LIVESTREAM AT [https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCEO\\_AIT0StgO2rY6O-Ko8Gw](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCEO_AIT0StgO2rY6O-Ko8Gw). THE PUBLIC MAY VIEW OR LISTEN TO PROCEEDINGS BUT **VIDEO OR AUDIO RECORDING IS PROHIBITED.**