

231ST DISTRICT COURT
TARRANT COUNTY

****AMENDED RULES FOR REMOTE HEARINGS AS OF 10/1/2020****

The Office of Court Administration (OCA) has suggested that all court proceedings, both essential and non-essential, should be held remotely “*unless litigants or other court participants are unable to successfully participate in a remote hearing for reasons beyond the court’s control.*” As such, the 231st District Court will continue to conduct hearings remotely if the parties and their necessary witnesses have the technology to do so.

The following rules and procedures will apply but should be similar to what is required for an in-person hearing. A request for an in-person courtroom hearing will be considered by the Court **IF** a participant provides a written certification to the Court indicating that the participant or other necessary witnesses are unable to successfully participate in a remote hearing. The written certification must include the reasons why they are unable to participate remotely. The Court will consider said request along with the health and safety of **ALL** other participants. **IF** an in-person hearing is approved, the attorneys and pro se litigants will be notified and shall follow all protocols to ensure everyone’s health and safety. The Court will amend these guidelines as the OCA amends theirs.

PROCEDURES FOR ZOOM ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPANTS

The 231st District Court will be using Zoom video conferencing. It is free to download at zoom.us or you can download the app directly to your cell phone. The Court Reporter will email you a link to the hearing. Your computer must have internet access, a video camera, and a microphone. A headset with microphone attached is preferred but not mandatory. **IF YOU CAN ONLY PARTICIPATE VIA TELEPHONE, YOU MUST COORDINATE IT THE DAY BEFORE WITH THE COURT REPORTER.** *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.

For the Zoom invitation, the Court Reporter will be sending the Zoom link using the email addresses that are listed in JIMS. **Please ensure that your email address is updated in JIMS.** The Court Reporter will send a Zoom invitation to the attorneys of record / self-represented litigants. It is your responsibility to forward the Zoom invitation to your clients or witnesses. The Court Reporter, Shelley Mayo will be the “host” of all hearings because of the importance of the record.

PROCEDURES FOR EXHIBITS & WITNESS LISTS

If you intend to offer any exhibits during the hearing, you need to email/exchange them to all attorneys or self-represented parties, **by 5:00 p.m. THREE (3) business days prior to your hearing date.** **Exhibits MUST be marked and saved by participant’s 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 may result in your hearing being cancelled and rescheduled.

You must provide your Witness List, Exhibit List, and pre-marked exhibits to the Court Reporter, Shelley Mayo (sbmayo@tarrantcounty.com) by noon **THE BUSINESS DAY BEFORE the hearing date.** Please include a

list of exhibits you will stipulate to in that email. You can add your Witness List to the same page as your Exhibit List. This is simply to assist the Court and Court Reporter with their names and correct spelling. The subject of the email should be the full cause number and "Petitioner's Exhibits" or whatever is appropriate. **The documents must be in .pdf format. If the exhibit is an audio or video recording, these must be saved onto a thumb drive in .mp4 format and provided to the Court Reporter no later than three (3) business days before the hearing. If the exhibits are over 50 pages, you must print them out and deliver those to the court reporter no later than noon THE BUSINESS DAY BEFORE the hearing date.** The Court cannot consider any exhibits not emailed/delivered to the Court Reporter in accordance with the above guidelines. If you fail to follow this requirement, the Court Reporter will not maintain these documents in the record.

Please DO NOT email exhibits to the court coordinator. Those emails will be DELETED immediately.

**Please understand that these specific guidelines regarding the exchanging of exhibits with each other and providing them to the Court Reporter is extremely important and helpful with streamlining the hearings. Failure to follow them could result in your hearing being cancelled and rescheduled.*

Finally, although the OCA has allowed us to start hearing "non-essential" cases, the Court will still have to 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 can be heard and considered until the current guidelines we've been given are amended.

****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 231ST DISTRICT COURT PROCEEDINGS BY VISITING OUR LIVESTREAM AT https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCEO_AIT0StgO2rY6O-Ko8Gw.

THE PUBLIC MAY VIEW OR LISTEN TO PROCEEDINGS BUT **VIDEO OR AUDIO RECORDING IS PROHIBITED.**