

Hon. George Barnstone
County Civil Court at Law No.1



Hon. LaShawn A. Williams
County Civil Court at Law No.3

Hon. Jim F. Kovach
County Civil Court at Law No.2

Hon. Lesley Briones
County Civil Court at Law No. 4

HARRIS COUNTY CIVIL COURTS AT LAW
INSTRUCTIONS FOR VIDEO HEARINGS & TRIALS

● **Required Equipment**

- a telephone; or
- a smartphone with a camera; or
- a computer with a camera and microphone which has access to internet service.

● **Software**

- All Harris County Civil Courts at Law use Zoom video conferencing. Please download the Zoom Client App. well in advance of the hearing:
 - The free app for smartphones is available at the Apple App Store for iPhones and Google Play for Androids.
 - The free software for your computer is available at Zoom.us. Click on the “Resources” tab at the top right and select “Download Zoom Client.”

● **Setting Your Video Hearing**

- As stated in the [Harris County Civil Courts at Law March 20, 2020 First Emergency Order](#), motions will be set on each Court’s Submission Docket. Yet, parties may request to be moved from the Submission Docket and set for a preferential oral hearing by filing a Motion Requesting Oral Hearing and Proposed Order with the new date left blank. Such Motion must include: (i) an explanation of the need for a preferential setting and whether the matter is essential or non-essential; (ii) the number of expected attendees participating in the hearing; and (iii) the availability of attendees to attend remotely (non-essential and essential matters) vs. those who may need to appear in person (essential matters only). Please contact the Court with any questions.
- Once the Motion is granted and the matter is set, the Trial Coordinator will send the attorneys an email with instructions on how to join the video hearing.
 - **NOTE:** Attorneys are responsible for sending the link and information to their clients and witnesses if they will need to join the hearing from a location separate from the attorney. Attorneys are also responsible for sending the link and information to *pro se* litigants and confirming that they have instructions on how to access Zoom.
- On the day of the hearing, click the link at least 5-10 minutes before your hearing to test your system, and to ensure that everything is in working order.
- It is strongly recommended that attorneys and witnesses giving testimony appear by video.

- Please confirm you are in a private location free from outside noise and interference.
- **What to Expect when You Sign on to Zoom for Your Hearing**
 - The recording of any proceeding by anyone other than the Court Reporter is strictly prohibited by law. The Court Reporter’s record is the only official record of the proceedings. Please refer to the [Harris County Civil Courts at Law Order Regarding Recording Video Hearings and Trials](#).
 - Courtroom Decorum – We will continue to observe appropriate courtroom decorum, demeanor, and dress codes. Remote hearings are official court hearings and open to the public via the Court’s YouTube Channel or another selected live streaming site. For additional information, please visit each Court’s website.
 - You will be placed in a “Waiting Room” until your case is called. In the “Waiting Room,” you may send chat messages to the Trial Coordinator or Clerk. When your case is called, the Coordinator or Clerk will open your video conference with the Judge.
 - You will not be able to observe the proceedings while you are in the Zoom “Waiting Room;” however, you will be able to monitor the live proceedings on the Court’s YouTube Channel or other selected streaming site.
 - All exhibits must be sent via email to the Trial Coordinator and the Court Reporter at least 24 hours prior to the hearing.
 - A request for the record must be emailed to the Court Reporter at least 24 hours prior to the hearing. And, as stated above, exhibits should be shared with the Court Reporter at least 24 hours prior to the hearing.
 - Documents can be shared with participants during the hearing via the “Chat” tab in Zoom. Use the “To:” drop-down selection to choose to whom to send your document and click the “File” button to upload your document. Zoom can upload documents directly from your computer, Dropbox, Google Drive, and One Drive. Additional set up may be required. See <https://zoom.us/integrations> for more. The Courts request all parties to exchange exhibits prior to the hearing. Moreover, as mentioned above, Parties should email exhibits to the Trial Coordinator and Court Reporter at least 24 hours before the hearing.
 - Interpreters may appear by audio only through Zoom. They should have computer access to view documents that need translating.
 - If it is necessary during the proceedings for the parties to seek a recess, break or confer, the Judge may place the parties in a “Break Out” room in Zoom upon request.
- **For Contested Hearings and Trials**
 - Texas Supreme Court Emergency Orders expressly prohibit jury trials until further notice.
 - As stated above, any digital documents offered into evidence should be shared with all parties prior to the hearing. To the extent possible, parties should agree on what is admissible prior to the hearing.
 - For bench trials, the Court may require a pre-trial hearing.

- Parties may invoke the Rule to exclude non-party witnesses. The Judge can move remote witnesses to a virtual meeting room where they will be unable to view the proceedings. However, because each proceeding will be broadcast live on YouTube (or another live streaming site), the witnesses will be instructed not to view the proceedings subject to contempt of court.
- Discovery – Depositions may be taken remotely, pursuant to Texas Supreme Court Emergency Orders.
- Mediation – Many mediators are equipped with Zoom or other remote video services. Parties should continue to actively mediate their cases during this emergency period.
- Zoom offers main “rooms” for opening statements and private meeting rooms for private discussions.

For any questions regarding these instructions, please contact the Harris County Civil Courts at Law Trial Coordinators or Clerks.

Signed on April 6, 2020.



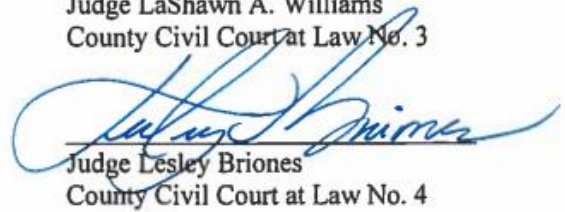
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