

Rules for Remote Hearings
County Court at Law 4
Collin County, Texas
JUDGE DAVID RIPPEL

The Governor of Texas has issued a disaster proclamation as a result of COVID-19, and the Office of Court Administration (OCA) has provided Zoom accounts for Texas Judges to conduct hearings remotely. Collin County Court at Law 4 will conduct essential hearings remotely, and certain essential hearings (as defined by the Texas Supreme Court and pursuant to CDC guidelines) by appointment at the Courthouse if a remote hearing is not possible.

PROCEDURES FOR LITIGANTS

County Court at Law 4 will be using Zoom conferencing for Remote Hearings. Zoom is **free** to download, and you and your witnesses will need to download Zoom at www.zoom.us, or you can download the app directly to your cell phone. The Court will email you a link and password to the hearing, and will also provide a phone number if a self-represented litigant or witness does not have internet access.

- (1) **To appear on camera for the Remote Hearing:** You need (A) a computer with a camera, speaker, and internet access, (B) a laptop with a camera, speaker, and internet access, or (C) a smartphone with a camera.
- (2) **To participate by phone for a Remote Hearing:** If you can only participate via telephone, you must contact the Court two days before the scheduled hearing no later than 12:00 P.M.
- (3) **To schedule a Remote Hearing:**
 - A. You must email the Court Administrator, Darla Wright, at djwright@co.collin.tx.us (972.548.3840) by NOON three business days before the hearing.
 - B. The Subject Line of the email should say: Zoom Hearing Request – [Insert Cause No. of Case]
 - C. The request should copy opposing counsel (or self-represented parties), and **include names and email addresses of all parties and witnesses participating.**
 - D. If any parties or witnesses are participating only by telephone, you must include a phone number for them. The Court must approve an appearance by telephone.
 - E. The Court will be the host of the hearing. The Court will email all those participating a link and password for the hearing or a phone number to call in.

(4) **Using Exhibits at the Remote Hearing:**

Presentation of Exhibits For Use At Video Hearings – If you plan to introduce exhibits at the hearing, the documents must be emailed to the Court Reporter, Denise Condran, at dcondran@co.collin.tx.us (972.548.3847) and to opposing parties at least 48 hours prior to the video hearing. You should include a “received” receipt request on emails to ensure you are

able to demonstrate to the Court that it was sent and received. Documents must be in PDF format and must be pre-marked with Exhibit Stickers, or clearly identified by party and number. Example: Plaintiff Exhibit #1; Defendant's Exhibit #2, Movant's Exhibit #3, etc. Please do not use alphabetical designations. Each exhibit should be saved as a separate file.

Attorneys may use Dropbox to share exhibits with opposing counsel. If you have video(s) or large-capacity exhibits, please use this File Request link (<https://www.dropbox.com/request/tJYTqfLcoyvQkVPONm7y>) to upload your exhibits directly to the court reporter without size limitations. If you would like to use this link to upload all your exhibits, you may do so, but a confirmation email should be sent to the above-referenced email as notification that you've uploaded exhibits.

If a document has not been provided 48 hours prior to the hearing, the Court reserves the right to exclude it from evidence and not consider it for any purpose.

PROCEDURES FOR WITNESSES

- (1) Witnesses should appear by video conferencing.
- (2) If a witness does not have the capability for video conferencing and can only call in on the phone, then the witness cannot testify regarding any exhibits.
- (3) The attorney calling the witness is responsible for ensuring the witness has a separate video and audio feed.
- (4) Attorneys should not attempt to "share" a connection with a witness.
- (5) All witnesses should be prepared to present a valid form of identification to verify their identity to the Court over the video feed.
- (6) It is the responsibility of the attorney offering the witness to ensure that the witness has the link to the proceedings and that all exhibits are available to the witness, including those of opposing parties.

FOR THE PUBLIC

THE OPEN COURTS PROVISIONS OF THE TEXAS LAW ALLOWS ALL TEXANS ACCESS TO COURT PROCEEDINGS. Remote hearings will be live streamed via the Court's YouTube Channel, **County Court at Law 4, Collin County, Texas**. VIDEO OR AUDIO RECORDING IS PROHIBITED. The public may view the proceeding while it is happening, but is prohibited from recording the proceeding. Anyone who records the proceedings, other than the official court reporter, may be held in contempt of Court.

Vulnerable Populations: Individuals who are over age 65 and individuals with serious underlying health conditions, such as high blood pressure, chronic lung disease, diabetes, obesity, asthma, and those whose immune systems are compromised are considered to be vulnerable populations. If you are a vulnerable person, live with a vulnerable person, or are the primary caregiver of a vulnerable person, you will be afforded an opportunity to appear remotely. You must contact the Court at least a week prior to your hearing or trial so accommodations can be made.