

**Rules for Remote Hearings (by Zoom and Phone)**  
**County Court at Law #6**  
**Collin County, Texas**  
**JUDGE JAY BENDER**

**Court Staff**

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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 #6 will conduct 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 #6 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](http://www.zoom.us), or you can download the free app directly to your cell phone. The Court will email you a link and password the afternoon prior to the hearing.

You MUST have a reliable and stable internet connection in order to participate by Zoom. These proceedings are taken down word for word by an Official Court Reporter and the connection must be constant for the record to be clear. If you do not have access to a reliable and stable internet connection, we have a laptop set up in the courtroom that can be used by one party to attend a Zoom hearing.

- (1) **To appear on camera for the Remote Hearing:** You need (1) a computer with internet access and a camera, (2) a laptop with internet access and a camera, or (3) a smartphone with a camera.
- (2) **To schedule a Remote Hearing:**
  - a. You must email the court coordinator, Stephanie Ables, at [sables@collincountytx.gov](mailto:sables@collincountytx.gov) 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 emails of all parties and witnesses participating.
  - d. The Court will be the host of the hearing, and will email all those participating a link and password for the hearing and a phone number to call in.
- (3) **Using Exhibits at the Remote Hearing:**

- a. If you intend to offer any exhibits during the Remote Hearing, you must email them to all parties, the court coordinator Stephanie Ables, [sables@collincountytx.gov](mailto:sables@collincountytx.gov) and the court reporter Jennifer Corley, [jcorley@collincountytx.gov](mailto:jcorley@collincountytx.gov) by Noon the day before the hearing.
- b. The subject line of the email should say: Zoom Hearing Exhibits of (Plaintiff/Petitioner/State or Defendant/Respondent) – Cause No.
- c. The documents must be in PDF format and pre-marked (or saved) by Exhibit No. **Save each exhibit as a separate PDF and name each PDF.** For example: PEX1, PEX2, etc. The parties must still prove up any exhibits during the trial/hearing.
- d. Documents which have been e-filed and accepted into the Court’s file do not need to be re-sent to the Court’s email.
- e. All audio and video exhibits must be saved in mp4 format and saved as exhibits named accordingly.

### **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.
- (7) Witnesses are expected to join the Zoom meeting at the scheduled time of the hearing/trial. Witnesses will remain in the virtual waiting room until called to testify, just as witnesses would remain outside of the courtroom until they are called to the witness stand.

### **FOR THE PUBLIC**

THE OPEN COURTS PROVISIONS OF THE TEXAS LAW ALLOWS ALL TEXANS ACCESS TO COURT PROCEEDINGS. Remote hearings will be available to watch live in the courtroom, **County Court at Law 6, 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.

### **How to Use Zoom:**

If you are not familiar with Zoom, it is a video conferencing platform. You must install Zoom on a PC or there is a free app for Zoom that you can download on your smart phone. You will need to sign up, but the free “basic” plan will be sufficient for this meeting. Please make sure you have Zoom ready and tested BEFORE the time of your trial/hearing. You can find more information on Zoom’s website [www.zoom.com](http://www.zoom.com).

Once you click on the link provided in the Zoom invitation email to join the meeting, you will be prompted for the password which is located below the link. Be sure to select “connect to computer audio” rather than “telephone” (if you are using a PC) and “join with video.” You will then be placed into a “waiting room.” Judge Bender will accept you into the hearing once he confirms your identity. Your mic will be muted upon entering. This can be controlled at the bottom of your screen. At the top right of the screen, you can control your “view” of the participants- gallery, active speaker.

If you are attending the Zoom meeting using the Zoom app, a few minutes before the start time of the hearing, open the app, sign in and go to “Join Meeting”. Here is where you will enter the Meeting ID (found below). You will then be prompted for the password (directly below the Meeting ID). You will be asked to “Join with Video” and placed in a waiting room until your identity is confirmed and Judge Bender accepts you into the meeting. I believe the options to mute/unmute and to change your view (speaker/gallery) are at the bottom.

Keep in mind that the Court Reporter will be “present” for this hearing and will be taking down every word being spoken. Be sure to speak loudly, clearly and one person at a time.