

MEDINA COUNTY COURT AT LAW ZOOM PLATFORM PROTOCOL

All hearings in the Medina County Court at Law will for the foreseeable future take place in the virtual courtroom of Zoom Cloud Meeting.

Please visit zoom.us and create an account, using your work e-mail address. You must use your real name when setting up your Zoom account. You should also download and install the app on your computer, tablet and smart phone. When you attempt to host or join a meeting from the Zoom webpage, it will ask you whether to open the Zoom app. Instruct it to open in the Zoom app and allow it to install the program. It is crucial that you install the program/app rather than relying on the web browser. The full program allows for confidential, private breakout rooms, which are not available on the plug-in version. This feature enables you to confer with your client in a completely confidential setting, which means you and your client do not need to be in the same physical location during the hearing.

Dress codes:

Dress code for attorneys, parties and witnesses is unchanged from in-person proceedings. While we may be sitting at home or in our offices, we are still participating in the justice system, and must instill confidence in the witnesses, litigants, and viewing public.

Participating in the Zoom Virtual Courtroom:

Attorneys and self-represented litigants shall attempt to confer prior to the Zoom hearing regarding all pending issues and any documents or exhibits that may be offered into evidence.

1. For each scheduled court setting, you will receive an e-vite, containing links for joining by Zoom or via telephone. You will join the virtual courtroom by clicking the link in the e-vite at the scheduled time. Only the attorneys and self-represented litigants will receive e-vites from the court. It is incumbent upon the attorneys and self-represented litigants to forward the setting details to your witnesses and clients and inform them of the setting.
2. When you join the "meeting," you will appear in a virtual waiting room with all other parties, attorneys and witnesses. There may be several cases set on the docket at that time. When your case is called, the court will bring the attorneys and clients into the virtual courtroom, in turn. For that reason, everyone must use their real names in setting up their Zoom accounts.
3. Because the Zoom app works on all modern smart phones, tablets and computers, each attorney is expected to appear by video, rather than merely by voice. Attorneys must show good cause for failure to appear by video.
4. When you enter the virtual courtroom, your video will automatically be on and your audio muted, until the hearing begins.

5. Only counsel of record, clients, clients' spouses (where specifically permitted by the rules), testifying experts, and witnesses (while testifying) will be permitted in this hearing. Think of the Zoom hearing as the well of the courtroom, and the livestream as the audience sitting area. Only someone who would be permitted to pass the bar and enter the well may join the Zoom hearing. Everyone else must watch the livestream.

6. The court's standing rules prohibiting video and audio recording in the courtroom remain in effect. You are prohibited from recording these proceedings in any way. **Any violation of these rules are subject to contempt proceedings.**

7. The Rule as to witnesses is invoked in every hearing in the Virtual Courtroom, and is hereby invoked in this hearing. Do not allow or encourage witnesses to watch the Livestream during the hearing, or assist them in any way in violating the Rule. It is incumbent upon the attorneys and self-represented litigants to inform your witnesses of the Rule.

8. Witnesses will be called as in any case, and the court will bring them in one at a time from the waiting room.

9. Exhibits must be submitted to the Court Coordinator prior to the hearing, via email at shanna.curriel@medinacountytexas.org. If you have voluminous evidence or documentation, you should contact the coordinator for a Dropbox link. The only formats that will be accepted are PDF for documents, JPG or PNG for images, and MP4 for videos. No DOC formats or executables will be accepted. Contact the Court Coordinator for more information.

10. All exhibits should be named in the following format: the cause number with a short description. These pre-marked exhibits shall be transmitted to the Court Coordinator and copied to opposing counsel no later than 12:00 PM the day before the hearing and confirm with the opposing side that those exhibits were received. Evidence not anticipated or submitted prior to the hearing may be submitted during the hearing through the Chat/Files feature in Zoom, if permitted.

Although it may sound complicated, I believe we will find that our comfort level grows quickly with each use.

These instructions may change and develop as we learn more about the system each day. Thank you for your flexibility and willingness to adapt to this new reality during this time of crisis.



Judge Mark Cashion