



451<sup>st</sup> District Court  
Kendall County, Texas  
Judge Kirsten B. Cohoon

## **451<sup>st</sup> DISTRICT COURT ZOOM PLATFORM PROTOCOL**

First, let me express my sincere hopes that this message finds each of you safe and healthy. Due to the risks of the COVID-19 outbreak and the mandates associated with the public health disaster declarations docket calls, trials, and hearings can no longer be held in county courthouses. Last week, the Supreme Court suspended the requirement that hearings take place in the county of venue, freeing courts to hold hearings remotely. Additionally, the Office of Court Administration facilitated the implementation of Zoom Cloud Meeting program/app, which is incredibly effective at hosting court hearings. You will be required to use this app for court hearings in most state courts until the restrictions on public gatherings are lifted.

**All hearings in the 451st District Court will for the foreseeable future take place in the virtual courtroom of Zoom Cloud Meeting.**

Please visit [zoom.us](https://zoom.us) and create an account, using your work e-mail address. You should also download and install the app on your computer, tablet and smart phone. If you cannot figure out how to do it, just remember this -- 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.* (No paid license is required at this time, although full functionality costs only \$15 per month.) *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.* Your clients can call-in to the meeting using any telephone. However, only those who are visible on camera will be permitted to testify, unless they call-in on the telephone and are in the physical presence of a notary public who can verify their identity and properly swear them in. I will clarify:

**At this time, parties who call in via telephone and not Zoom and are not in the presence of a notary public can participate, but cannot testify under oath. Witnesses who are not participating via Zoom will not be permitted to testify.**

In addition, Zoom allows for real-time Spanish-English interpretation. You must notify the coordinator in advance of the hearing if you will need an interpreter for any party or witness.

**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:**

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 parties will receive e-vites from the court. It is incumbent upon you 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. Witnesses will be called as in any case, and the court will bring them in one at a time from the waiting room. Remember, only people on video will be permitted to testify unless they are in the physical presence of a notary public that can swear them in.
6. Exhibits must be submitted to the Court Coordinator prior to the hearing, either through Dropbox or via email at [mateo.santos@co.kendall.tx.us](mailto:mateo.santos@co.kendall.tx.us). 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 for images, and MP4 for videos. No DOC formats or executables will be accepted. Contact the Court Coordinator for more information.
7. All exhibits should be named in the following format: the cause number with a short description. Evidence not anticipated or submitted prior to the hearing may be submitted during the hearing through the Chat/File feature in Zoom.

Although it may sound complicated, I believe you will find that your 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.



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