

The 18th Judicial Circuit Court

FAQs for Attorneys using Zoom to Attend Court Proceedings

May 4, 2020

In this rapidly changing environment, we expect these guidelines to change and evolve as we all work together to ensure that the important work of the court continues even under the most challenging of circumstances.

Q: Do I need to download the Zoom application?

A: While you are not required to download the app, the Zoom Client Application is free, and you will be able to access more features when you join meetings using the application. As a participant in court proceedings hosted by the Court, you will not be subject to the 40-minute time limit. When signing up, please use your real name so that you can be correctly identified while waiting to join the court proceeding.

Q: Where do I get the Zoom link or meeting code for court?

A: Be sure to follow the most recent Administrative Order and Division updates for the current procedure for setting up an appearance in court via Zoom. Make sure that you have submitted your email address to the judge or the judge's secretary so that a link, meeting code and phone number can be sent to you via email.

Q: What should I do to prepare for attending court using Zoom?

A: Becoming familiar with Zoom by using it with friends, family and colleagues will help the process work more smoothly for everyone. Practice using the mute feature, turning your video on and off and switching between gallery and speaker view. Also, check your microphone and speaker and ask others how you sound. A computer headset will greatly reduce the chance for feedback and improve your voice quality. If that is not available, headphones or ear buds may also improve the sound quality. Also, turn off the sound on all equipment including your desk phone, cell phone and computer notifications or alerts.

Q: Can I connect to the internet with Wi-Fi when using Zoom?

A: Although you can connect via Wi-Fi, when possible you should connect to the Internet with a physical cable connection. This will give you much greater speed and service improving the quality of your court appearance.

Q: Does it matter where I am when appearing in court via Zoom?

A: Yes, you should be alone in a quiet room with an appropriate background. Avoid distracting backgrounds or interruptions. The light should be facing you from behind the camera so that all participants, including the judge and court reporter, can clearly see your face and mouth. If there is too much light behind you, the judge, court reporter and other participants will be unable to clearly see your face and mouth and may only see a silhouette.

Q: How do I prepare clients and witnesses?

A: When people appear in court using Zoom, they may mistakenly believe that it is a more casual setting for court because they are appearing online. **It is important to make sure that everyone understands that this is a formal court proceeding and that the same level of decorum is expected as if physically present in the courtroom. Remind clients that appearing in court using Zoom videoconferencing is an extension of the Court and they are participating in an official court proceeding. The same rules regarding dress codes, demeanor, language, and respect for the staff apply.**

It would be helpful if you have your clients or any witnesses practice appearing on Zoom in the location that they will be using for their court appearance. They should be alone in a room with the television off, their phone silenced using appropriate lighting and background. If they are appearing from your office, they should be in a separate room on a separate computer to avoid sound feedback issues. Again, they need to wear appropriate attire as if they were appearing in person in court.

Q: What happens when I hit the link for a court proceeding?

A: The link will connect you to the Waiting Room for the court. While in a Waiting Room, a person is unable to see or hear anyone else involved in the proceedings. The judge will see your name on the list of participants waiting to join the hearing. When your case is called, the judge will admit those participants that he or she can identify as associated with that case. It is important that your name appears in a way that the judge can easily identify you and your role in the case. You can change the way your name appears for each appearance. Judges will also have the ability to change participants' names during meetings

Q: Is there a record of the court proceeding?

A: The official record of the proceeding will be taken the same way it would be if the proceeding were held in person in the assigned courtroom. There may be a court reporter joining the proceeding via Zoom or the Court will rely on CourtSmart technology.

You will note that there is a slight delay when speaking on Zoom. Please wait for each person to finish speaking before you start speaking. It is important to pause when speaking to avoid overlap. The Court Reporter may interrupt from time to time to clarify who is speaking. When you speak, please make sure that you speak slowly and clearly.

Q: When should I use the mute feature?

A: If you are not speaking, mute yourself so that your microphone does not pick up background noise or unwanted audio feedback. When you want to speak, unmute yourself and identify yourself by stating your last name. If you decide not to mute yourself, remember that whatever you say will become part of the court record.

Q: Is there a way to speak to my client confidentially during the court proceeding?

A: Yes. If you need to speak with your client confidentially, just advise the judge that you need to do so. The judge can move participants to separate Breakout Rooms for privacy when appropriate. Conversations in a Breakout Room will not be recorded, and the other participants cannot hear what is said in the Breakout Room. The judge will ask participants to hit “return to main session” to exit the Breakout Room. **Do not use “leave meeting”.**