

ELECTRONIC HEARINGS WITH ZOOM

Zoom Information and YouTube Support

In order to facilitate court activities, the Office of Court Administration is providing Judges the ability to stream and host court proceedings via Zoom and YouTube. Under the Open Courts Provision of the Texas Constitution, it requires that all court's maintain public access.

Only State of Texas Judges are eligible for access to the OCA provided Zoom accounts. To request access or inquire about a previous request please contact: zoomhelp@txcourts.gov

New Zoom accounts are being activated on a rolling basis several times daily. OCA staff are working diligently to ensure that all Texas Judges gain access as soon as possible.

Information Webinar

Webinar Recording | Slides 

Initial Setup

In order for Judges to use Zoom, the initial setup must be completed.

- Zoom initial setup and use 
- YouTube Channel setup  / Watermark "DO NOT RECORD"
- Dropbox Setup
- Linking Zoom to stream on YouTube 

Getting Started with Zoom

The Office of Court Administration advises users new to Zoom to watch these videos before getting started with Zoom.

- Zoom 101 - Sign Up and Download Meeting Client
- Joining a Meeting
- Schedule a Meeting
- Schedule a Meeting in Outlook
- Meeting Controls
- Host and Cohost Controls
- Joining and Configuring Audio/Video
- Using Break-out Rooms
- Using Virtual Backgrounds | Judicial Virtual Background
- Simultaneous Interpretations for Meetings
- Using Dropbox to share files
- Best Practices for Self-Represented Litigants 

Tips for Successful Hearings

- Dress in a soft solid color (like a black robe for judges). If a tie is worn, use a solid tie rather than one with a pattern.
- When speaking, remember to look directly at the webcam, not at the screen.

- Check the lighting. Light from a window behind you might blind the camera, making you look dark. Light above you in the center of a room might also cast shadows. Ideally, position a lamp, or sit facing a window, where light is directly on your face. Also be aware that your monitor casts light that can make you look blue.
- Remind the participants to speak one at a time and to pause prior to speaking in case there is any audio/video lag.
- Encourage the participants to mute themselves or mute them yourself when not speaking in order to avoid any potential background noise.
- Only email the link to the hearing to those participating in the hearing, encourage the public to view the hearings on the court's YouTube channel. Consider using a password for the hearings.
- **Test your connection and setup with Zoom by testing your connection with a test meeting.**

Frequently Asked Questions

Account Setup

- How long does it take from the time we use the survey monkey for until our account is provisioned?
Approximately 1 business day – OCA staff are provisioning accounts as quickly as possible.
- **I already have a Zoom account with my personal email address. Will this new account be linked to it?**
We recommend that you create a separate “work” Zoom account with your work email address. If you already have a basic account with your work email, Zoom will ask you to merge with the upgraded account provided.
- **Who exactly is eligible for a host license?**
OCA has bought enough licenses where each Judge in Texas can be a host. This includes ALL levels of judges. If a judge prefers that the license for the court go to another email address or staff member email address, that can be done, but we are asking each judge to limit the number of licenses for each judge to one.
- **Is the meeting time unlimited instead of the 40-minute limit of the Basic free app?**
Yes, unlimited.
- **What’s the maximum number of participants I can host in a hearing?**
300 – OCA can increase that to 500 if needed, but we don’t anticipate most users needing that
- **Does each participant require a license? Or just the host?**
Only the host requires a license; the other participants can get a free Basic license to participate. The host can authorize other users to be “co-hosts” if needed. This can be helpful to have court staff assist the judge during the hearing.
- **Does OCA anticipate continuing these licenses after the pandemic is over?**
Yes.
- **If I still need help, where do I ask my questions?**
If you still have questions, email us at zoomhelp@txcourts.gov
- **What platforms does Zoom support?**
Windows, Mac, Android and iOS
- **Can each participant use a virtual backdrop?**
Yes

OCA recommends that you schedule proceedings similarly to the way you did in the physical courtroom. Having separate scheduled meetings for each hearing may become burdensome. Scheduling multiple proceedings under one scheduled meeting may be more beneficial.

- **Who is the best host for the meeting? Is the host the only one that can admit people and setup breakout rooms, and otherwise operate the Zoom hearing?**

We defer to you on this. Some judges may feel most comfortable being the host. Others may wish for a staff person to be the host. Some may wish to be co-hosts, permitting both the judge and court staff to have the features mentioned. Only the host or co-hosts can admit people, setup breakout rooms, and otherwise operate the Zoom hearing.

Breakout Rooms

- **Can there be multiple breakout rooms?**

Yes. There can be up to 50 breakout rooms. See our help on [Using Break-out Rooms](#).

- **While someone is in the breakout room, can they see/hear the proceedings in the main meeting?**

They cannot, and participants in the main room cannot see/hearing what is happening in the breakout room. The breakout room cannot be recorded nor streamed.

- **How can we capture signatures on documents through Zoom? This could be for magistration or for sending in court orders.**

Zoom has no built-in feature for collecting signatures on documents. Rather, you should consider other means to obtain signatures. There are several options, including gathering signed documents in advance of the hearing, having parties/attorneys email documents to the court in advance, or having parties upload documents to a cloud storage service like Dropbox. Instructions for setting up and using a Dropbox service are available above.

Court Operations

- **What exactly is defined as an “Essential Hearing”? Drug Courts? Motion to revoke with defendant in jail?**

Essential hearings are those hearings that are emergencies, time sensitive with deadlines that cannot be suspended, cases where there is a liberty interest, or injunctions. All other proceedings are non-essential. If you wish to inquire as to whether a certain proceeding is essential, email coronavirus@txcourts.gov or consult with your regional presiding judge for direction.

- **Are non-essential hearings prohibited in person? Or only if there are 10 or more participants?**

The Supreme Court/Court of Criminal Appeals order prohibits any non-essential in person hearing that is inconsistent with local, state, or federal directives as to group sizes. While Governor Abbott's executive order limits group sizes to no more than 10 (as of March 23), some jurisdictions have imposed smaller group sizes. OCA has issued guidance recommending no non-essential in person hearings regardless of size until at least May 1.

- **How do we swear in witnesses? Do they need a notary present?**

Most judges are asking participants to raise their hand and swearing them in as usual, without the need for a notary. The Supreme Court/Court of Criminal Appeals order suspends certain procedural statutes or rules, such as those restricting remote testimony.

- **Since we can record the proceedings with Zoom, do we need a court reporter in the Zoom hearing?**
Unless you receive approval from the Supreme Court to permit electronic recording, courts that must have a record must do so using a court reporter. In those situations, the court reporter's transcript is still the official record of the hearing.
- **How are exhibits shown through Zoom? How does a court reporter get a copy of them for the record?**
There is a file transfer feature in Zoom (in the chat portion). However, OCA recommends using a Dropbox or email to collect the documents/exhibits prior to the hearing for sharing among all participants.
- **If a defendant is given notice of a Zoom hearing and fails to show up, can a FTA be issued?**
*As an official proceeding of the court, a judge may follow the existing procedures for issuing a *capias* failure to appear. Please ensure that notice was provided and that there is no reasonable explanation for the defendant's failure to appear, such as a lack of technology.*
- **Can this be used with magistration?**
Yes.

YouTube

- **How do I setup a YouTube channel?**
See the [YouTube Channel setup instructions](#) 
- **If I already have a personal YouTube channel, can I use that one to stream?**
You may; however, OCA recommends that each court set up an official YouTube channel for the court.
- **Am I required to post my YouTube channel on the website or some other place in order for the public to see where they can access the courtroom?**
You must ensure that the public has reasonable notice of where to observe the proceedings.
- **Why not just give the public the link to the Zoom meeting I setup?**
If you give the public the link to the Zoom meeting you setup, they will be a participant in the hearing, which may prove difficult to manage. While that is a possibility, OCA recommends that you not do so.
- **Does streaming hearings to YouTube satisfy the open court provisions?**
Yes, as long as the court provides notice of the streaming and makes the proceeding public.
- **YouTube records the live stream to my channel. Do I have to keep it on there? Or can I delete it immediately?**
There is no requirement to keep the proceeding on YouTube after the completion of the hearing. It may be deleted immediately.
- **If I create a YouTube channel for the court, who owns the channel? The court? The county? The Judge?**
If the YouTube channel is set for the court, OCA recommends that the channel be owned by the court. If an individual judge sets one up that is linked to the judge, the judge may own the channel.
- **Can't people record the YouTube live stream with their phone?**
Just as in a physical courtroom, participants may record proceedings against the direction of the court. Judges should admonish participants and viewers that recording is not permitted and can be enforced with contempt.
- **Is YouTube the only option for streaming?**
Zoom also permits streaming via Facebook Live. OCA recommends YouTube, as YouTube does not require an account to view a livestream.

https://www.txcourts.gov/programs-services/electronic-hearings-with-zoom

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