

**GENERAL ORDER REGARDING SETTING HEARINGS IN A VIRTUAL  
COURTROOM ENVIRONMENT:  
UNDER THE 2020 STATE OF DISASTER  
COVID-19 AND RELATED CORONAVIRUS**

In response to the Local State of Disaster that has been declared by the County Judge of Williamson County, as well as the declarations by the Governor of the State of Texas, and by the President of the United States, and in conformance with *various Emergency Orders Regarding the COVID-19 State of Disaster* issued by the Supreme Court of Texas and the Court of Criminal Appeals<sup>1</sup>.

Due to the exigent circumstances the court requires the hearing scheduled herein via VIRTUAL COURTROOM TECHNOLOGIES. There are two options.

**IT IS ORDERED THAT:**

**THE PARTY SCHEDULING THE HEARING IS REQUIRED TO SERVE NOTICE PURSUANT TO TEXAS RULES OF CIVIL PROCEDURE OF THE FORM OF VIRTUAL COURTROOM THAT WILL BE USED FOR THE HEARING. THE PARTY SCHEDULING THE VIRTUAL COURTROOM HEARING MUST INCLUDE INSTRUCTIONS SUFFICIENT FOR THE OPPOSING PARTY TO MAKE AN APPEARANCE.**

**(1) COURT CALL**

**CourtCall is a fee-based service** that allows licensed attorneys and self-represented litigants to participate telephonically from any location in the world. It is a browserbased video application that requires no special equipment or software downloads. **While there will be a fee for your participation, the fee is less than the time-cost of a drive to the courthouse.** Instructions are found at <https://CourtCall.com>

If you register for your hearing at CourtCall and subsequently reach an agreement before the virtual docket call, you may cancel your CourtCall appearance and you will be eligible for a refund.

If CourtCall is used, there are several ways the hearing can be conducted. Counsel may have their client and witnesses physically present in their office. Or, Counsel can call in from one location, the client can call in from another location and a witness could call in from a different location. All participants must have a computer with a webcam. Witness testimony will be taken with all participants being able to view the video feed. Attorneys will be able to admit documents by uploading the documents. Counsel must pre-mark exhibits. Once the exhibit is uploaded, each participant will be able to view the

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<sup>1</sup> Misc. Docket No. 20-9042 (Tex.) Misc. Docket No. 20-007 (Tex. Crim. App.), accessed at <https://www.txcourts.gov/media/1446056/209042.pdf>

exhibit. The Court will be able to sign documents via an e-signature. Ms. Alvarez will keep and file copies of exhibits per her normal procedure.

## **(2) MICROSOFT TEAMS**

Microsoft Teams is cloud-based team [collaboration](#) software that is part of the [Office 365 suite](#) of applications. The core capabilities in Microsoft Teams include business messaging, calling, video meetings and [file sharing](#).

To set a hearing, please contact the 425th District Court Administrator, Ms. Marlys Tidrick at [mtidrick@wilco.org](mailto:mtidrick@wilco.org). Ms. Tidrick will set the hearing by sending the parties an email calendar invitation through Microsoft Teams with a specific day and time for the hearing. On the day of the hearing, select “Join Microsoft Teams Meeting” in your meeting invitation to be taken to a page where you can choose to either join on the web or download the desktop application. If you already have the Teams application, the meeting will open there automatically. If you are unable to use the Teams application or Teams on the web, you can join the meeting by calling the phone number and conference ID in the meeting invitation, just dial the number to join.

There are several ways the hearing can be conducted. Counsel may have their client and witnesses physically present in their office. Counsel may also call in from one location, the client can call in from another location, and a witness can call in from a different location. To have visual capabilities, in addition to audio, you must have a computer, smartphone, or tablet with a webcam. The Court strongly recommends the parties and counsel appear using visual capabilities.

Witness testimony will be taken by the 425th District Court Reporter, Amanda Alvarez, recording the proceedings. For transcript requests, contact Ms. Alvarez at [Amanda.alvarez@wilco.org](mailto:Amanda.alvarez@wilco.org) or (512) 943-1178. Additionally, the Court may choose to conduct an audio-visual recording of the proceeding. Parties will be required to electronically provide the court reporter and opposing counsel/party their pre-marked exhibits no later than 24-hours prior to the hearing. Ms. Alvarez will keep and file copies of exhibits per her normal procedure. Following submission, the Court will sign orders electronically. Please be patient as we refine the process of conducting Virtual Courtroom Hearings.

If the parties fail to appear visually, the Court may determine it is more appropriate to reschedule the hearing for a date after the disaster declaration lifts.

IT IS THEREFORE ORDERED that the party scheduling the Virtual Courtroom Hearing serve notice of the hearing pursuant to the Texas Rules of Civil Procedure and the terms of this General Order.

IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that the party scheduling the Virtual Courtroom Hearing include instructions sufficient for the opposing counsel and party to make an appearance at the hearing.

IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that the party scheduling the Virtual Courtroom Hearing provide the 425th District Court Administrator with sufficient contact information for the attorneys and parties, so that the court administrator can calendar the hearing utilizing either CourtCall or Microsoft Teams.

Signed on March 30, 2020

SIGNED

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Hon. Betsy F. Lambeth  
425<sup>th</sup> District Court

<sup>1</sup> Misc. Docket No. 20-9042 (Tex.) Misc. Docket No. 20-007 (Tex. Crim. App.), accessed at <https://www.txcourts.gov/media/1446056/209042.pdf>