

## **394TH DISTRICT COURT VIRTUAL HEARING “ZOOM” PROTOCOLS**

YOUR CASE HAS BEEN SET FOR A HEARING BEFORE THE 394<sup>TH</sup> DISTRICT COURT, VIA THE ZOOM MEETING APP. Failure to appear may result in sanctions being imposed, including your claims being denied, claims against you being granted, monetary sanctions or fines being assessed, and even the granting of a final default judgment or dismissal.

First, visit [zoom.us](https://zoom.us) and create an account. You must sign up using your real name. Download and install the free Zoom client on your computer or tablet from [zoom.us](https://zoom.us) by hovering over the Resources tab, and selecting “Download Zoom Client,” or on your smart phone by installing Zoom from the App Store. Because the Zoom app works on all modern smart phones, tablets and computers, each participant is expected to appear by video, rather than merely by voice, except as a last resort. If you cannot connect by Zoom, you may join the Zoom hearing by calling the phone number contained in the Order Setting Hearing. However, you will not be permitted to *testify* unless you appear on camera in Zoom.

Instructions for Participating in the Zoom Virtual Courtroom:

1. Join the virtual courtroom a few minutes before the scheduled time by clicking the link in the e-vite or clicking “Join a Meeting” in Zoom and entering the meeting code. If it asks you whether to open in the browser or open the Zoom app, always instruct it to open in the Zoom app. When you enter, select “Join by Computer Audio,” even if you are connecting via smart phone.
2. Upon entering the room, your video will automatically be on and your audio muted, until the hearing begins. If you are having trouble connecting, call 432-837-5831 and the court coordinator will assist you.
3. Parties and witnesses should dress in business attire or "smart casual" (which is best described as what someone would wear to a first date for dinner with their parents).
4. When you first connect, you will be placed in a virtual waiting room until your case is called. There may be other cases set at the same time as yours. Do not disconnect or exit the waiting room while you are waiting. When your case is reached, the Court will bring you and the other participants in your hearing from the waiting room into the virtual courtroom.
5. Hearings are on the record through the use of the digital court recording system, and are open to the public for viewing at the following web address: <https://www.youtube.com/c/394thDistrictCourtofTexasLiveStream>. Recording of the hearing or live stream is prohibited.
6. During the hearing, you may "slip notes" to your lawyer, using the private chat feature. To do so, hit the "Chat" button at the bottom of the Zoom screen, and at the bottom of the Chat window, pull-down the recipient arrow and select your lawyer's name. Be careful – chat messages sent to “Everyone” will be visible to all meeting participants, including the Court. Do not send private messages to the Court, the other party, or any witness. You are strongly encouraged to practice with this feature prior to joining the hearing.
7. While you are testifying, do not communicate with anyone else by any means. Do not refer to or look at any documents or items while testifying unless directed to do so by the Court. This includes web searches and written documentation. Your hands should be empty.

8. Only counsel of record, litigants and their spouses (where specifically permitted by the rules), testifying experts, and witnesses will be permitted to enter this hearing. Witnesses will remain in the waiting room until it is their turn to testify. Witnesses who are not on camera to be placed under oath will not be permitted to testify.
9. The Rule as to Witnesses is invoked in every hearing in the virtual courtroom. Do not communicate with witnesses by any means while the hearing is underway, or allow or encourage them to watch the live stream during the hearing. Witnesses who watch the live stream or violate the Rule will not be permitted to testify.
10. You may, upon request, speak privately with your attorney during a hearing. If your request is granted by the Court, you will be moved into a confidential breakout room to confer with your lawyer for a few moments.
11. All exhibits and plea papers must be submitted to the court coordinator prior to the hearing, at [394th.jud.dist.court@gmail.com](mailto:394th.jud.dist.court@gmail.com). The only formats that will be accepted are PDF for documents, JPG and PNG for images, and MP4 for videos. No DOC formats or executable files will be accepted. If you have voluminous exhibits, please contact the court coordinator for a unique Dropbox link to upload your files. Rebuttal exhibits not anticipated and submitted prior to the hearing may be submitted during the hearing through the Chat/File feature in Zoom or via e-mail to the court coordinator.
12. All exhibits should be named in this format: beginning with the first letter of the County, followed by the cause number, the exhibit number, and a short description, e.g. "B6023 P3 Plea Papers" for Brewster County, or "H2541 D4 Verizon Cell Records" for Hudspeth County.

Additional instructions and admonishments may be given to you by the Court during the hearing.

Violation of these protocols may constitute contempt of court and result in a fine of up to \$500 and a jail term of up to 180 days.