

INFORMATION ON ZOOM HEARINGS IN CIVIL CASES

A lawsuit has been filed against you in Justice Court, Precinct 2 or you have filed a lawsuit in Justice Court, Precinct 2. If a court hearing is held in your case, you will be sent a hearing notice telling you the date and time that a judge will hear your case. In some cases, like evictions, the hearing notice is attached to the packet of information that is served on you by a sheriff, constable, or process server, so always check to see if a hearing notice was included in that information.

NOTE: Due to the coronavirus pandemic, court hearings could be held online through a video conferencing software application called Zoom, rather than at the courthouse.

If you are unable to participate in a Zoom hearing for reasons listed in number 4 below, please contact the Court at (254) 739-2518 immediately. Your failure to attend a hearing, Zoom or otherwise, can result in a judgment against you or the dismissal of your case if you are the one who filed it.

VIDEO AND/OR AUDIO RECORDINGS ARE STRICTLY PROHIBITED UNLESS PERMISSIONS EXPRESSLY AND SPECIFICALLY HAVE BEEN GRANTED BY THE COURT.

1. How to Use Zoom for the Court Hearing and What to Expect:

- a. **Items Needed:** To use Zoom's video function, you need to have a computer, tablet, or cell phone that has a video camera, a microphone/speaker, and reliable access to the internet. **If you do not have these items, please contact the Court at (254) 739-2518.**
- b. **Download Zoom:** Download Zoom on your computer or smartphone at <https://zoom.us/>. You do not need to set up a Zoom account to use Zoom for the hearing. Another way to download Zoom is to click on the Zoom link provided by the court. It is best to download Zoom at least a day before the hearing in case you have any difficulty.
- c. **Join the Court Hearing:**
 - i. Go to <https://zoom.us/join> (or open up Zoom on your device or computer) and enter the Meeting ID to the Zoom link listed in your hearing notice, then click the "Join" button;
 - ii. Enter your name as it appears on the hearing notice; and
 - iii. If a meeting password was provided to you, enter the meeting password.
 - iv. Choose either "Call using Internet Audio" to use the speakers in your computer or "Dial In" if you would prefer to use your phone to speak and listen to the hearing;
 - v. When you first join, you may be placed in a 'waiting room' until the judge starts the hearing. You cannot see or hear the proceedings from the waiting room. The judge and/or the court coordinator can see you are in the waiting room and will allow you into the hearing when it's time for you to participate. **Please DO NOT leave the Zoom meeting until your docket has been called and you have been dismissed by the Judge.**
 - vi. The judge will make sure you can hear and talk and go over all the rules.
 - vii. You will see each person and their name on the call.
 - viii. Be aware that background noise can cause problems. It is best to mute yourself when you are not speaking.
 - ix. Your hearing is live and may be recorded. Everyone there can hear what you say, and the hearing may be open to the public. If recorded, it should be deleted after the hearing.
 - x. The judge will decide most cases at the end of the hearing or will tell you when a decision will be made.
- d. **What Happens if You Do Not Show Up at a Trial:**
 - i. If the person who files the lawsuit (the Plaintiff) does not show up, the case may be dismissed.
 - ii. If the person who was sued (the Defendant) does not show up, the court is likely to issue a "default judgment," which means that everything the Plaintiff says is assumed to be true and the Defendant will lose the case.
 - iii. If you have a good reason that you cannot be at the hearing on the date and time that it is set, you should contact the court and the opposing party and ask for the hearing to be set on another day and time.

2. Evidence:

- a. Evidence is information in a case that proves something or explains why you disagree with what the other party is telling the court, and it can include testimony from witnesses or the parties as well as documents, pictures, or video.

- b. If you have any evidence in the form of documents or pictures to help you prove your case, those must be emailed or mailed to opposing parties (or their lawyers) using the contact information and faxed to the court at (254) 739-0939 **no later than noon on the business day before your hearing**. If you do not send them in time, the court may not allow your evidence to be considered at the hearing.
 - c. How to email your evidence:
 - i. Scan the evidence or take a photograph of it with your cell phone/camera. Some free apps on phones such as CamScanner, Scanbot, or Adobe Scan can also help you scan documents so you can send them by e-mail. Check to make sure the documents can be easily read or seen.
 - ii. Create an email to the opposing parties (or their lawyers) and list the full Cause Number of your case (the unique number that is given to your case and is listed at the top of the petition that was attached to the citation you received), and “[Your Name]’s Exhibits” in the subject line.
 - iii. Upload or attach your evidence to the e-mail.
 - iv. Make sure to put your name and the name of all the parties in the email and that you will be using the attached documents as evidence in your hearing.
 - v. Send your email, and if possible, save a copy to prove that you sent it. You can find emails that you send in the “sent” folder of your email.
 - d. If you have evidence such as video, contact the Court at (254) 375-2518 for information on how to submit that evidence.
 - e. If you do not have the technology or ability to email your evidence, contact the Court at (254)375-2518 for information on how to submit your evidence in another way.
3. Witnesses:
- a. If you have any witnesses to help you prove your case, they **must** appear at the Zoom hearing.
 - b. Unless they are calling in by phone to the Zoom number, it is your responsibility to make sure all witnesses have:
 - i. Access to the internet and a separate computer, tablet, and laptop with a video camera and speaker or, if everyone is sharing the same set up, everyone must be able to be clearly seen and heard.
 - ii. The correct Zoom link and meeting information.
 - iii. Access to any evidence you or the opposing party has
 - iv. A valid form of identification to verify their identity over the video feed.
4. **If you have any questions or have any of the following circumstances, please contact the Court immediately at (254) 739-2518:**
- a. If you do not have the technology or ability to participate by Zoom (see information attached to the citation for details).
 - b. If you have a disability that might prevent you from attending Zoom Court.
 - c. If you are requesting an interpreter for yourself or a witness and, if so, for which language(s).
 - d. If you have evidence to help prove your side of the facts but are not able to send it to the judge and opposing party in the way we’ve asked for it to be sent (see Evidence section above).
 - e. If you are asking the court to delay the hearing for a good reason.
5. Other Helpful Resources, Forms, and Information
- a. **2019-2020 State Bar Referral Directory**. It is always best to have a lawyer represent you. If you cannot afford a lawyer, you may want to contact legal aid and pro bono organizations in your area for help. The Legal Access Division of the State Bar of Texas publishes a list of local and statewide legal aid and pro bono providers as well as lawyer referral services in their Referral Directory at <https://www.texasbar.com/Content/NavigationMenu/LawyersGivingBack/LegalAccessDivision/ReferralDirectory.pdf>.
 - b. **Texas Law Help**. <https://texaslawhelp.org/> is a website that provides free legal information and resources, including a LiveChat feature for low-income people. It is hosted by the Texas Legal Services Center, a nonprofit legal aid organization.
 - c. **The Texas Justice Court Training Center** has useful information packets and forms for justice court cases at <https://www.tjctc.org/SRL.html>.
 - d. **Tips for Self-Represented Litigants in Zoom Hearings:** The Texas Access to Justice Commission developed some tips for people who are representing themselves in an online court hearing which can be found at <https://www.txcourts.gov/media/1447320/texasatj-tips-for-self-represented-litigants-on-zoom-hearings-and-court-processes-procedures.pdf>.