

Handout for Clients to Prepare for Zoom Hearings

Video hearings by Zoom can be stressful, but you can still make a good impression on the judge and win your case if you prepare for it with your lawyer.

Preparing for the Zoom Hearing:

- Do a test with your lawyer on Zoom to make sure it works and that you can hear, see, be heard, and be seen.
- If you use your phone you may need to download the Zoom App.
- Remember that the judge is going to see, hear, and judge you.
- Set up in the most private place you have. Other people are not allowed to be there or to listen in without the judge's permission.
- If you do not have a place where you can be alone, tell your lawyer. Your lawyer can try to help you find one.
- Set up in a quiet place. You must be able to hear and be heard. Use headphones if you have them, especially if there are children present.
- Test your Internet connection, your video, and your sound.
- Put your phone, tablet, or laptop on something stable so that it doesn't wobble.
- Set the camera at the same height as your eyes.
- Check the light in the room. It is better to have more light in front of you so there are no shadows. Make sure the light doesn't shine directly in your face.
- If you use a phone, prop up the phone so that you don't have to hold it.
- Make sure you have enough minutes or data. If you don't, tell your lawyer so you can figure out what to do.
- Check out what people can see behind you. Move anything you do not want them to see or hang a clean sheet behind you. Check this in your test with your lawyer.
- Practice muting and unmuting your microphone.
- Go over what to expect at the hearing with your lawyer.
- Make a plan for how you can ask for a break if you need one.
- Make a plan for how to ask to speak to your lawyer alone.
- Practice looking at the camera while talking.
- Practice speaking clearly so that everyone can hear you – not too loudly, and not too quietly.

- Get as comfortable with the Zoom “platform” as you can, so that you can be as calm and natural as possible at the hearing.

On the day of the hearing, before the hearing starts:

- Make sure your device is charged. Just in case, have a charger handy and plug your device in.
- Re-check your background and only show what you want to be seen.
- Re-check your lighting and make sure your device is sitting at the same height as your eyes.
- Dress for court. Wear the nicest shirt/blouse you have (preferably one with sleeves). Wear nice pants/skirt/dress. If you move away from the camera, the judge and other people on the call *will* see what you are wearing below.
- Turn off ringers to any other devices you have. If using a phone, use the “do not disturb” button so that you do not get calls.
- If you are on Wi-Fi, make sure that no one else on Wi-Fi is watching videos, playing games, or streaming music. (This may hurt your connection to the hearing.)
- Make sure that no one is listening to loud music or watching television near you.
- Try to get rid of distractions (barking dogs, loud children) during the hearing. If you can’t, tell your lawyer (who will explain this to the judge).
- Make sure you and your lawyer can reach each other during the hearing to talk about what is happening.

During the hearing:

- Unless you are testifying, “mute” yourself when you are not speaking.
- All the same rules apply that apply in a regular courtroom.
- Remember: the judge is going to see, hear, and judge you.
- Listen carefully, especially to questions the lawyers ask you and to anything the judge says.
- Speak only if someone asks you a question. Listen and answer the question they asked. Stop as soon as you have answered the question; don’t “ramble.” If you are a “nervous talker,” tell your lawyer ahead of time.

- **If you do not understand a question or instruction, say, “I do not understand.” If you do not know the answer, say, “I do not know the answer.” Do not guess.**
- **Always wait for a speaker to finish before speaking. Do not interrupt or talk over the speaker.**
- **When speaking, look directly at the camera (or phone) as much as you can. This will make it seem like you are looking at them and not staring off to the side.**
- **Speak clearly so everyone can hear you, just as you practiced – not too loudly, not too quietly.**
- **While you are answering questions, you cannot use notes.**
- **The judge will see your expressions and gestures. Try not to look angry, annoyed, or frustrated. Try to look calm but interested.**
- **Sit down for the entire hearing unless your lawyer arranged something else.**
- **When you are not testifying, you may take notes if you want to.**
- **Do not record the hearing or post any part of it anywhere.**
- **If you need a break, ask for one.**
- **If you need to speak to your lawyer alone, ask for time to speak with them.**
- **If there is an interpreter, pause to give them time to translate what you said.**
- **Do not smoke or eat during the hearing. (If you need to eat during the hearing for health reasons, tell your attorney before the hearing or in a private discussion.)**
- **When the hearing is over, call your lawyer and discuss it. Make sure you understand exactly what happened and when the next hearing will take place.**