



253RD DISTRICT COURT

AMENDED TEMPORARY PROCEDURES FOR REMOTE HEARINGS

The Governor has declared a state of emergency and the Office of Court Administration (OCA) has suggested that all non-essential court proceedings should be suspended. Technology and state law allow options not previously available. As such, the 253rd District Court will continue to conduct essential hearings and non-essential hearings, if requested, and if the Court's schedule permits.

The following restrictions and limitations will apply but should be similar to what is required for an in-person hearing. Any requests for a courtroom hearing will be considered but likely postponed. The 253rd Courtroom is closed to the public at this time and hearings will be conducted via Zoom. If entrance to the courtroom is a necessity, please contact staff at the 253rd District Court. It is anticipated most parties will agree to a "virtual" hearing.

ESSENTIAL COURT MATTERS DEFINED

Essential proceedings include, but are not limited to:

- a. Criminal magistration, arraignment, bond proceedings, and plea proceedings, including rejection/acceptance of plea offers by the State;
- b. Temporary restraining orders / temporary injunctions;
- c. Family violence protective orders; and
- d. Any other matters that may be designated by the Court at its discretion.

DOCUMENTS / MOTIONS FOR REMOTE HEARINGS

1. All motions and responses and attachments must be e-Filed with the District Clerk in the normal course of business. Nothing will be considered by the Court unless it is e-Filed, as per the e-Filing rules currently in place. All filings **MUST** be done at least 48 hours prior to a scheduled remote hearing.

2. If you intend to “offer” any exhibits during the hearing, you need to email them to all parties and the Court Reporter (reporter.253rd@co.liberty.tx.us) **not later than 4:00 PM** the day before the hearing.

The subject of the email should be the full cause number and which party’s exhibits are attached. For example: “Cause No. 20DCV..... Plaintiff Exhibits” or “Cause No. 20DCV..... Defendant Exhibits”. The documents/exhibits **MUST** be in .pdf format. The Court cannot consider any exhibits not emailed to the Court Reporter in a timely manner. If you fail to follow this requirement, the Court Reporter will not maintain these documents in the record.

3. Notices for hearings should indicate that the hearing will be held remotely. When scheduling a remote hearing with the Court, please copy all attorneys or pro se litigants on the email to ensure availability for the remote hearing and to receive Zoom hearing information and instructions.
4. For remote hearings in criminal cases where the defendant is in jail, procedures may vary. Please contact the Court Reporter or Court Coordinator for scheduling.

PROCEDURES FOR LITIGANTS

The 253rd District Court will be using Zoom video conferencing.

1. Download Zoom at zoom.us It is a free download and you may also download the app directly to your cell phone.
2. When your remote hearing is ready to be scheduled, contact the Court Coordinator. The Court Coordinator will give you a hearing date and ensure that you have a copy of these procedures. The Court Coordinator information for Liberty and Chambers County is listed at the end of this document.
3. The Court Reporter or Court Coordinator will email you a Zoom Invite, which will contain a link to the remote hearing. As the Attorney of Record, you will be the one to share the remote hearing link information with your client(s) if his/her participation is required in the hearing.
4. Due to the importance of the official record, the Court Reporter will be the “host” of all remote hearings. Please contact the Court Reporter for any questions you may have about Zoom participation.

WHAT IS NEEDED FOR PARTICIPATION

1. You will need web access, preferably with a web cam. We recommend using a desktop or laptop computer, but it is also compatible with a tablet or cell phone. Be sure to download the Zoom app prior to participation.

2. Be sure to have a microphone. We recommend using a headset with a built-in microphone. If you are participating via telephone, it may be necessary to have earbuds or a microphone so that you can be heard clearly by participants and so that you can hear all proceedings clearly.

REMOTE HEARING REMINDERS

1. All remote hearings will have the same decorum, demeanor, and dress codes as in-person court appearances.
2. If you are viewing a proceeding, please **MUTE** your connection to prevent disruption to the proceedings.
3. Video or Audio Recording of the proceedings is **PROHIBITED** and is subject to contempt if violated.
4. The open courts provision of Texas law allows everyone access to court proceedings. The proceedings will be live streamed via YouTube or an alternative method.
5. Due to the recent “Zoom bombing” incidents where hackers gain access to a Zoom meeting and attempt to disrupt the video meeting by shouting profanity or racial slurs, or putting disturbing or offensive images in the video feed, the Court will **IMMEDIATELY END THE PROCEEDINGS**. If this happens during your scheduled hearing, please contact the Court Coordinator immediately to reschedule the disrupted hearing as soon as possible.

PUBLIC VIEWING OF PROCEEDINGS

1. The open courts provision of Texas law allows everyone access to court proceedings. There have been issues attempting to live stream via YouTube. To comply with the open courts provision, a list of cases to be heard on the next court date will be posted at the courthouse entrance and/or designated public posting location at the courthouse with the Zoom link to join and view each hearing. Contact the court coordinator to seek an invitation to join the Zoom hearing.

CONTACT INFORMATION FOR 253RD DISTRICT COURT

Court Reporter:	Jo Anne Horn Leger	reporter.253rd@co.liberty.tx.us
Court Coordinator (Chambers County):	Linda Leonard	lleonard@chamberstx.gov
Court Coordinator (Liberty County):	Annette Baldwin	annette.baldwin@co.liberty.tx.us
Bailiff:	Chad Elmore	chad.elmore@co.liberty.tx.us