

## Navigating Remote Court Hearings

- Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, D.C. Superior Court is currently holding all hearings remotely. Instead of going to the courthouse and having your case heard in a courtroom, the judge in your case will schedule a specific date and time to hear your case by telephone.
- It is important to know that you are required to attend remote hearings the same as in person hearings. If you cannot call at the time and date of your remote hearing, immediately notify the judge hearing your case. You can find your judge's number at: <https://www.dccourts.gov/superior-court/judges>. If you need to request a continuance, you can contact the Family Court Central Call Center at (202) 879-1212 and request to speak to the Family Court Self-Help Center. You can access information about the *pro se* forms at <https://www.probono.net/dccourts/>.
- You should receive a call, email, or mailed notice of your hearing date. If you believe you have a scheduled hearing, but you have not heard from the court, call the Family Court Central Call Center at (202) 879-1212 to obtain updated information.

### **Before your hearing:**

- You should confirm the call-in information ahead of time. Make sure you receive the date, time, phone number, and access code.
- *Communication is key.* Make sure you provide the judge hearing your case with your most up-to-date phone number and email address. You can find your judge's number at: <https://www.dccourts.gov/superior-court/judges>.
- *Language Access* - If you have a special request, such as the need for an interpreter, immediately contact the judge hearing your case so you can be assisted during your hearing. For more information, go to <https://www.dccourts.gov/services/information-and-resources/interpreting-services#office-of-court> or call the Office of Court Interpreting Services at (202) 879-4828.
- *Evidence*– if you have evidence you want to share at the hearing or witnesses you would like to call, email or call the judge's clerk prior to the hearing to discuss how he/she wants you to proceed.

### **Day of the hearing:**

- *Plan ahead* – find a quiet and confidential place for your remote hearing. Turn off any background noise such as phones, television, music, etc. Do not join the hearing from a moving vehicle, at a noisy park, while eating, while walking, or while doing another activity. Do not talk to others in the room, online, by text, or on another phone during your hearing.
  - *If you need to speak with your lawyer, plan ahead to have another form of communication (e.g., texting on another device) so you can privately communicate during the hearing.*

- It is a good idea to come up with guidelines in advance for those around you during the hearing. It is always best to be alone during your hearing, but if family or roommates need to be around, tell them they must be quiet. Make sure you feel comfortable speaking about your case openly.
- If you have children in the home, it is important to plan ahead. If possible, you should plan for children to be in another room during your hearing. If you are discussing a custody matter involving the same children, it is not ideal to have the children listening to conflict between the parties.
- Make sure your phone is charged before the call.
- Call into the hearing at least five (5) minutes before the scheduled time. You will want to make sure that the call-in number works and that you are able to enter the hearing. If you cannot access the hearing, you will need to contact the clerk of the judge hearing your case to confirm the call-in information.
- Use headphones if you can. This will improve your ability to hear others and the court's ability to understand you.
- Place your phone on mute unless you are speaking.
- Speak slowly and clearly into the phone. Make sure you state your name clearly for the other callers and the record. State your name each time you are speaking. Do not speak too fast or people may not be able to understand you. Remember, you must answer questions out loud versus nodding or shaking your head in response.
- The judge may begin the hearing with specific ground rules or guidance. Pay attention and try to follow the judge's instructions, if possible.
- Refer to the judge as "Your Honor." Do not speak directly to the other party or their attorney during the hearing.
- Do not interrupt the judge, or the other party, when he/she is speaking. This will be confusing for everyone on the call since the judge cannot see you. Wait until someone is done speaking before you speak.
- Have any documents ready that you need to refer to for dates, facts, etc. For example, have nearby any relevant filings in your case, your case number, and any documents you may rely on to prove your position (school records, medical records, bank statements, etc.). The judge may not allow you time to find documents during your hearing. Offer to send any relevant documents to the court and all parties after the hearing if needed.
- Make sure you have the phone number for the judge hearing your matter in case the call drops. Sometimes technology does not work properly. If you cannot get back into the hearing, call the judge's chambers as soon as possible.
- If you need a break, ask the judge for a quick break (it is best to try to avoid this unless necessary).
- Have a pen and paper (or computer) to take notes.