

Children are excused by the court from attending hearings and should not be made to appear in person except with the court's prior approval. Attorneys and guardians ad litem for children, including CASA advocates, are strongly encourage to communicate in person, by telephone or electronically with the child(ren) prior to the scheduled hearing in cooperation with the TDFPS as may be needed due to the current situation.

Every participant in a hearing diagnosed with COVID-19, who has flu like symptoms, a fever, or who are coughing or sneezing, shall contact the court before appearing in-person. Attorneys & TDFPS representatives and supervisors should warn their clients, witnesses or others having symptoms to alert the court in advance before appearing. To the extent possible, accommodations can be made to participate or appear as provided below.

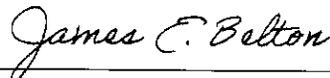
In order to avoid exposure to the threat of COVID-19 while at the same time protecting the constitutional rights of all litigants and continuing to pursue safe, stable and prompt permanency for children, the parties, attorneys, witnesses, the public and others involved in any hearing, will be permitted to participate or attend remotely, such as by teleconferencing or videoconferencing, or other means, subject to the court dates, facilities, security, court reporters, interpreters, other support staff and resources made available to this Court. To this extend, these procedures may be supplemented and updated as the circumstances develop and permit.

The court will consider sworn statements, sworn testimony and documentary evidence as permitted by the Supreme Court of Texas Emergency Orders.

At this time, the Court is still considering how to best handle suspension or modification of deadlines and time limits for hearings and cases provided in Chapters 262 and 263 of the Texas Family Code, including extension of dismissal dates. In the meantime, the same shall be determined by this Court on a case by case basis.

These procedures are subject to change as required or warranted by any additional orders, updates, written guidelines and directives issued in connection with COVID-19 matters and until normal Court operations can resume.

Signed March 23, 2020



James E. Belton,
Associate Judge