



Honorable Thomas N. Stuckey
Associate Judge, Child Protection Courts

Guadalupe Co. Justice Center
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Coordinator: Bertha Jacobs
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March 27, 2020

Re: Procedures for Remote Hearings

To: Attorneys, DFPS, and CASA

On March 16, 2020, this Court distributed the Child Protection Court Plan of Action, with a date range of March 16, 2020 to April 1, 2020. Subsequent to this Plan of Action, the Supreme Court of Texas/Court of Criminal Appeals issued further amended emergency orders, available at <https://www.txcourts.gov/supreme/administrative-orders/>.

However, to address the urgent needs of the children and parents in our counties, and to comply with the Supreme Court's orders, the Court has now started to conduct remote hearings using the Zoom Conferencing Application ("Zoom"). You should expect all hearings in your cases to be held remotely using Zoom beginning April 2, 2020. Any request for a courtroom hearing for an essential hearing will be considered, but likely denied. Because this process is new to everyone and has the potential to create issues, all parties should prepare ahead of time to allow these procedures to run efficiently.

The Court will send a separate order in each case setting the hearings to be conducted remotely. It is free to download Zoom at zoom.us to a computer, tablet, or smart phone. Please familiarize yourself with Zoom on a basic level. Your device must have internet access, a video camera, and a microphone. Also, you may participate by "telephone only" by dialing the appropriate call-in number and entering the meeting I.D.

The parameters below pertaining to evidentiary matters have been made into a Standing Order of the Court for all remote hearings conducted. You will receive a copy via email.

Contested hearings and trials will be recorded by court reporter as usual. When possible, all statutory hearings will also be recorded by court reporter. However, if a reporter is not available for any statutory hearings, the Court shall electronically record the hearing. Certain additional procedures are required to ensure the transcripts are clear and legally sufficient:

1. Please be patient – everyone is new to this process and we expect delays.
2. Every party shall identify themselves or their client each time they speak after another party.
3. Parties shall speak clearly, avoid interruption (excluding objections), and pause before responding to ensure the previous speaker is finished speaking.
4. Only necessary parties of record shall participate unless a witness is called to testify.
5. Any participant by telephone shall avoid using speakerphone and shall speak directly into their phone mouthpiece to reduce unnecessary noise or interference.
6. The Court’s Standing Order for Remote Hearings in an Effort to Contain the Spread of COVID-19 and to Protect All Parties shall be strictly enforced. Please review it before your first hearing.

Please also review these rules and the Standing Order with your clients, volunteers, and staff.

The Open Courts provision of Texas Law allows all Texans access to court proceedings. So be advised that all remote hearings and trials shall be available to the public via a Live Stream on YouTube. Information on how to access these hearings will be available through the Texas Office of Court Administration website located at <https://www.txcourts.gov/oca/>.

The Court understands that the situation concerning COVID-19 is difficult in many aspects. We are all concerned about the well-being of our children and families in our counties. The Court is also concerned about each of you, and encourages all attorneys, parties, staff, and volunteers to get back to work in a safe and compliant manner. We hope to avoid any further backlog. We appreciate your cooperation during this challenging time.

Thank you for your assistance.

Sincerely,



Thomas Stuckey
Associate Judge