FAMILY LAW ZOOM HEARINGS – FAQ'S
IMPORTANT INSTRUCTIONS FOR VIRTUAL HEARINGS

Due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and for the safety of all parties, all priority family law proceedings may be conducted remotely until further notice.[1] Priority matters will be held by videoconference/phone during the COVID-19 crisis, using **Zoom**, and live streamed on the Fresno Superior Court's YouTube page.

Although you may choose to appear in person at the courthouse, we strongly encourage you to participate remotely:

- Only the parties, attorneys and any witnesses will be able to enter the courthouse. You may arrange for witnesses to attend by Zoom. Other parties who would like to watch the proceedings can still do so on the live feed.
- Judges and staff will appear remotely; other parties may appear remotely, even if you appear in person.
- Appearing by Zoom **is free to all parties** and you can appear **by video or by phone**. Any recording of the hearing is prohibited.

HOW DO I ATTEND MY HEARING REMOTELY BY VIDEO OR PHONE?

To appear at your hearing remotely by Zoom video or phone *you must do the following:*

To access Zoom on a tablet or mobile device:
Download Zoom app (this is a free service)
Select: Join
Enter meeting ID found on your **NOTICE OF CALENDAR SETTING**
Select: Join
Enter Password found on your **NOTICE OF CALENDAR SETTING**

To access Zoom by phone:
Under "**Dial by Your Location"** select the phone number closest to your city
Enter meeting ID found on your **NOTICE OF CALENDAR SETTING**
Hit # to bypass participant ID number

[1] Pursuant to Fresno County Superior Court Amended Emergency Family Law Rule 5.13E priority matters are readiness, return readiness, law and motion and restraining order hearings, and effective commencing June 29, 2020, all child support related hearings in Departments 301 and 302, excluding contempt proceedings.

FAQ'S[2]

1. Can I still go to court if the courthouse has closed due to COVID-19?

The family law court is hearing cases by Zoom. The Chief Justice of California has authorized courts to do this in her March 23, 2020 and March 30, 2020 orders.

Although you may choose to appear in person at the courthouse, we strongly encourage you to participate remotely:

- Only the parties, attorneys and any witnesses will be able to enter the courthouse. You may arrange for witnesses to attend by Zoom. Other parties who would like to watch the proceedings can still do so on the live feed.
- Judges and staff will appear remotely; other parties may appear remotely, even if you appear in person.
- Appearing by Zoom **is free to all parties** and you can appear **by video or by phone**.

If you do not want to participate via phone or video on Zoom, attend your court date as scheduled. **Even when you plan to attend in person, you must serve the other party with the Notice of Calendar Setting provided to you at filing so that the other party may appear remotely if they wish to.** If you need additional information, contact the Family Law Zoom Coordinator at (559) 457-1702 or email at famlawzoomcoordinator@fresno.courts.ca.gov.

2. Is the virtual courtroom more casual than a regular courtroom?

Consider the videoconference to be a courtroom. Dress neatly. Do not wear printed t-shirts, tank tops, or hats. Dress like you are going to a job interview. If at all possible, a caregiver should help keep your child occupied. This is particularly important for cases that involve the parent-child relationship. It is not considered in the best interest of a child to be exposed to courtroom conflict between parents.

[2] Adapted from the self-help information provided at: https://texaslawhelp.org/article/virtual-court

3. How do you know if you have court by Zoom?

If you have a court date, you will receive a Notice of Calendar Setting via mail to participate either by phone or video conference. The Notice will have Zoom information included. Do not try to start your own Zoom session. Wait for the Court to send you an invite; family court judges have access to professional versions of Zoom that let them control the proceeding (for example, controlling who can talk and when) almost as if it were really in a courthouse. If after reviewing your Notice of Calendar Setting you still require guidance, you may contact the Family Law Zoom Coordinator at (559) 457-1702 or email at famlawzoomcoordinator@fresno.courts.ca.gov to receive the invitation to your Zoom hearing.

4. I want to show the judge some evidence. How do I do that?

Documents should always be filed before the hearing. **If you do not file your documents before the hearing your matter may be continued and/or the information may not be considered. **

5. Recording of the hearing is prohibited. What does that mean?

Any recording of a court proceeding held by video or teleconference, including “screen-shots” or other visual copying or audio recording of a hearing, is absolutely prohibited. Violation of these prohibitions may result in sanctions, including removal of court-issued media credentials, restricted entry to future hearings, denial of entry to future hearings, or any other sanctions deemed necessary by the Court.

6. What are some other Zoom tips?

You should **practice using Zoom before** court, if at all possible. You may also benefit from watching court hearings beforehand.
Some other tips:

- Wear a solid color (like a black robe for judges), not a pattern.
- When speaking, look directly at the camera, not at the screen.
- Position the camera at your eye level or slightly above eye level.
- Be mindful of what is behind you, choose a solid neutral wall if you can.
- Check the lighting.
  - Light from a window behind you might blind the camera, making you look dark.
  - Light above you in the center of a room might cast shadows.
  - Ideally, put a lamp, or sit facing a window, where light is directly on your face.
  - Also be aware that your screen may cast light that can make you look blue.
- Speak one at a time and pause prior to speaking in case there is any audio/video lag.
- Participants are encouraged to mute themselves when not speaking in order to avoid any potential background noise.
- Do not put your phone on hold if you are participating by phone.
- **Test your connection and setup with Zoom by testing your connection with a test meeting.**

7. I am having a hard time with internet access now.

There may some resources available during the COVID-19 crisis. Please see: https://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/he/hn/availableinternetplans.asp.

You can appear by Zoom by participating on video, but if you do not have access to the internet, you may appear by phone **by simply calling in to the phone number that will be provided to you in the Notice of Calendar Setting.**

How do I use ZOOM?

Preparing to Participate in a Zoom Video Conference[3]

If you will be a **participant** in a Zoom video conference with the Court (attorney, witness, case party, etc.), preparing properly will ensure all involved will have a good experience using this system.

If you wish to observe the Zoom video conference with the Court (non-participants such as the press, public, schools, etc.), please go to the Fresno Superior Court's YouTube page where you can observe the live proceedings as they occur. Observers will be able to see and/or hear the Court proceeding in the same manner as the participants, and will have a similar experience to sitting in the courtroom gallery. Please note that some proceedings may provide phone-only connectivity via Zoom or other means.

For security and enforcement of court standards, the Court may disable Zoom interactions (such as chat, screen share, whiteboard, Q&A, raise hand, react, etc.).

The Court will not provide any type of support on Zoom for participants. Please contact the Zoom Help Center, your local IT support, or other online guidance.

Zoom Account and Software

1. Participants: If you do not already have a Zoom account, set one up at https://zoom.us. A paid Zoom account is not necessary for any interaction with the Court.
2. Log into https://zoom.us/profile and set your name, phone and email. Including a photo will help identify you when connecting.
3. Install the latest Zoom Client for Meetings at https://zoom.us/download. Although Zoom can be used in a browser only, it is very limited. The full Zoom client is required for best functionality and best experience with the system.
4. Always keep your software up to date! The Zoom Client automatically updates itself upon launching the software, but you can also update it manually.

[3] CREDIT: https://www.cand.uscourts.gov/zoom/

Settings

Zoom has a lot of settings, and as Zoom updates their system they may change aspects. Below are a few settings recommended by the Court to improve your video conference.

- General: Ask me to confirm when I leave a meeting: ON (Helps prevent unintended departures)
- Video: Enable HD: OFF (Helps prevent poor video performance, and usually looks just as good as HD)
- Video: Always display participant names on their video: ON
- Video: Always show video preview dialog when joining a video meeting: ON (Final check before your video displays to others)

Learning

The Court will only be using the audio and video functionality of Zoom. Other functions like text chat, screen sharing, etc., may not be used, and will likely be disabled for your session, so you only need to learn the basics of using Zoom for audio and video. Learn how to select the correct source for both, and how to mute/unmute your audio, and Start/Stop your video:

1. Video: https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/sections/200521865-Video
2. Audio: https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/sections/200319096-Audio
3. Learn how to easy mute/unmute with Push to talk: https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/360000510003-Push-to-Talk
4. Hot Keys and Keyboard Shortcuts to start/stop video, mute, etc.: https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/205683899-Hot-Keys-and-Keyboard-Shortcuts-for-Zoom

Recommendations

1. Avoid using a mobile device if possible. Although tablets (iPads) and smartphones can be used, they are very limited, and the performance is inferior.
2. Avoid using battery power only (laptops, etc.). Plug into a good power source while in a Zoom meeting
3. Unless you've confirmed the quality is sufficient, avoid using an open microphone and speakers (such as are built-into laptops, or a webcam

mic). Using a good quality headset (headphones with mic) will often help ensure you can be heard, and can hear others with maximum quality.

4. Avoid noisy and echoing locations. Use of a headset will improve audio quality when this is unavoidable.
5. Avoid distracting real or virtual backgrounds.
6. Avoid bad camera positioning (if possible).
7. Avoid using WiFi if possible. Connection via a hard-wire Ethernet cable will always be faster and more reliable than WiFi.

Before Every Court Session using Zoom

1. Connect your device to power.
2. Make sure your internet connection is good: https://www.pcworld.com/article/2048594/how-to-test-your-home-internet-speed.html
3. Test your video.
4. Test your audio.
5. Run a quick test to connect with another Zoom user, or use the Zoom test: https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/115002262083-Joining-a-test-meeting

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION & RESOURCES

Fresno Superior Court notices related to COVID-19:
http://www.fresno.courts.ca.gov/