



PREPARING FOR VIRTUAL HEARINGS

INTERNET ACCESS

- Reliable, stable access to the internet.
- If you do not have internet, you may be able to call into the hearing using a regular (landline) phone.

PHONE, CELL PHONE, TABLET, LAPTOP OR COMPUTER

- Access to the internet, and if possible, a video camera. (A per-minute data plan is not advisable, because of the length of time you may be logged in to the hearing.)
- If you do not have access to a cell phone or other device with internet, you can use a landline phone to call into the hearing.
- Make sure that your device is charged and you have a charger ready. You may have to wait for a long time for your case to be called and/or your hearing may last a long time.

VIRTUAL PLATFORM

- Before the day of the hearing, download the app or test the online version of the virtual platform the Court will use for your hearing. Your attorney or the Court will tell you in advance what system will be used. Most often, Zoom, Skype or Microsoft Office Teams are used. All are free.
- If possible, set up a free account with the system before the hearing and set up your name, phone number and an appropriate profile picture so you are easily

BEFORE THE HEARING DATE

- ▶ **Noise and Distractions:** Try to find a quiet spot, away from children or others not participating in the hearing.
 - If you can, coordinate childcare during the hearing.
 - Think about where to put any pets that may cause a distraction.
- ▶ **Lighting:** Make sure there is good lighting (bright) so you can be seen on camera. It is best to sit where the light is in front of your face or over your head, not behind you. For example, avoid sitting in front of a window, which can cause a shadow over your face.
- ▶ **Background:** Choose a spot with a nice and uncluttered background, such as a solid color or blank wall.
 - Avoid windows, plants, lamps, or other objects directly behind your head.
 - Avoid bathrooms and areas that are messy or not clean.
 - Do not use a virtual background.
- ▶ **Camera Placement:** If possible, place the camera at eye level. Look directly at it when speaking.

THE DAY OF THE HEARING

- ▶ Dress like you are in front of the Judge even though you may not be in a courtroom. It is best to dress professionally and conservatively – as if you were going to a job interview.
- ▶ Confirm childcare coverage.
- ▶ Review the “Before the Hearing Date” suggestions.
- ▶ Test for any technical problems at least 15 minutes before the hearing. If your device asks your permission for the virtual hearing platform to use the camera, audio and microphone, allow it to do so.
- ▶ If the program provides the option, test your microphone and speakers to make sure they are working properly.
- ▶ Make sure that your name is displayed, and if you are going to include a profile picture that it is appropriate.
- ▶ Set the platform to start the meeting with your camera off and your microphone muted.
- ▶ Make sure you know how to mute/unmute your microphone and turn your camera on and off.

THE HEARING

- ▶ Turn off any other devices that may make a lot of noise or cause a distraction.
- ▶ Ensure children, pets and others will not be a distraction.
- ▶ Make sure that you are in a quiet place, and are alone. Children should not be able to watch or listen to the hearing. If you have witnesses who are in the same location as you, you may be asked to separate them so that they cannot see or listen to the hearing until it is time for them to testify.
- ▶ If the hearing is confidential, you should not allow anyone else to watch or listen to the hearing unless the Court gives permission for them to do so.
- ▶ Avoid walking around, speaking to someone off camera, answering phone calls, chewing gum or eating during the hearing. You may drink water or ask for a break if you need to use the restroom.
- ▶ If other cases are being called, turn off your camera and mute your microphone.
- ▶ During your hearing, try to keep your microphone muted when you are not speaking.
- ▶ Speak only when asked or called on directly. Do not speak over the other party, witnesses, attorneys, or Judge.
- ▶ When you join the hearing, you may be placed in a “waiting room” or see a blank screen with a notice that someone will admit you soon. This is normal, and you are in the right place. The Court must grant each person permission to enter the virtual hearing room. If you become concerned that you have not connected properly, email your attorney immediately. (Remember that your attorney may not be able to answer a phone call because s/he is also connected for the hearing).