

# **GUIDELINES FOR USE OF VIDEO OR TELEPHONE CONFERENCING FOR HEARINGS**

## **(PRACTICE DIRECTIONS PARAGRAPH 161)**

1. These Guidelines shall apply to all hearings conducted by video or telephone conferencing and may be updated where necessary.
2. Where any hearing is to be conducted by video or telephone conferencing, counsel / parties will typically be notified via Registrar's Notice prior to the hearing. The Registrar's Notice will state the manner in which the hearing is to be convened. Please refer to the relevant portion of these Guidelines for details on the applicable mode of use of video or telephone conferencing as mandated for your specific hearing.
3. Where no notification of video or telephone conferencing is received, counsel / parties are required to attend the hearing physically in Court at the address listed in the Registrar's Notice.
4. All counsel / parties attending any hearing conducted by video or telephone conferencing must ensure that they utilise equipment meeting the required technical specifications for compliance with all Guidelines.
5. Details on the application of video or telephone conferencing to different types of hearings in the Family Justice Courts are set out in the Registrar's Circular No. 1 of 2020, Schedule 1. To view the Circular, click [here](https://www.familyjusticcourts.gov.sg/docs/default-source/legislation/registrar-circulars/rc_2020_1_inforonmeasuresrelatingtocovid19.pdf) ([https://www.familyjusticcourts.gov.sg/docs/default-source/legislation/registrar-circulars/rc\\_2020\\_1\\_inforonmeasuresrelatingtocovid19.pdf](https://www.familyjusticcourts.gov.sg/docs/default-source/legislation/registrar-circulars/rc_2020_1_inforonmeasuresrelatingtocovid19.pdf)).

## **GUIDELINES AND PROCEDURES FOR HEARINGS BY ‘ZOOM’ VIDEO CONFERENCING APPLICATION**

1. At the time of issue, the Family Justice Courts will utilise the Zoom application for all hearings that are conducted by video conferencing.
2. Zoom is a free and accessible application for all end-users and is available for free download onto desktop, notebook computers and mobile devices from the Google Play Store (for Android devices), from App Store (for iOS devices) and via the website link for devices running Windows. You do not need to pay to use Zoom to attend a hearing. You also do not need to sign up for a Zoom account to attend a hearing hosted on Zoom, although you may do so if you wish.
3. For better audio and visual experience, it is recommended that a desktop or notebook computer be used for the hearing. Zoom can also be used on a suitable mobile device, e.g. a smartphone or tablet.
4. Generally, for desktops/laptops, the system requirements are:
  - a. An Internet connection (broadband wired or wireless (3G or 4G/LTE));
  - b. Speakers and a microphone (built-in, USB plug-in or Bluetooth); and
  - c. A webcam (built-in or USB plug-in) or a HD cam or HD camcorder with video capture card.

The detailed system requirements for specific equipment, operating systems, browsers, bandwidth and others can be found at via the ‘Zoom Help Center’ found at <https://support.zoom.us> and <https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/201362023-System-Requirements-for-PC-Mac-and-Linux> ).

### Starting the hearing

5. Prior to the hearing, please follow the procedures set out below:
  - a. Download the Zoom app from <https://zoom.us/download> or from the Google Play Store or App Store onto your computer/device;
  - b. At the appointed time, please make an internet video call via Zoom to the FJC's virtual address through the Zoom Personal Link Name listed in the Registrar's Notice informing you of the hearing);
  - c. When prompted to enter your display name, please ensure that your display name reflects the Case Number & your Law Firm in this order. For example, “D123/20XX ABC Law”.
  - d. If you are a litigant in person, please ensure that your display name reflects the Case Number & your full name (as per NRIC) in this order. For example, “D123/20XX full name”.
  - e. The information in your display name should be sufficient for the Judge or Registrar to identify your matter and the counsel / party conducting the hearing;

- f. You will be directed to a virtual waiting room.
- g. When the Judge or Registrar is ready to deal with your matter, he / she will admit you to the virtual hearing which will serve to formally commence the hearing. Please ensure that you are on standby at least 15 minutes prior to the scheduled hearing and can join the hearing without delay when admitted by the Court to the virtual hearing. Please connect audio and video and click 'Join'. If prompted, click "Join Audio by Computer" to connect your computer's speakers and microphone to the Zoom Meeting. You should also click on "Join with Video" if prompted.
- h. If the video quality is sub-optimal, the Court may direct parties to disable the 'video chat function'.
- i. Counsel / parties should not rely on the inbuilt microphone and speakers of their devices. They should make use of a headset with microphone capabilities. This will reduce background noise and enhance vocal projection during the Zoom hearing.
- j. In the event that there is more than one counsel in attendance for each matter, the assisting counsel should join the hearing using a separate Zoom account with his /her speakers and microphone muted.
- k. For the avoidance of doubt, any other counsel, staff members, or parties should not participate or be privy to the audio or video content of the hearing without permission from the Judge / Registrar.

#### During the Hearing

6. In the event that the audio / video quality is not desirable, the Judge or Registrar will determine if the hearing should be conducted by telephone conferencing or may require counsel / parties to attend personally in Court. Please ensure that your contact details in the eLitigation case file are updated before the hearing. The contact details in the case file will be used to conduct hearings by telephone conferencing, if necessary. Please refer to the Guidelines on Telephone Conferencing if this situation arises.
7. Where counsel / parties anticipate the need to tender documents to Court for the hearing, such documents shall be filed through eLitigation at least 3 working days before the date of the hearing. If there are time constraints, counsel / parties are to use the "Share" function within the Zoom application to present documents during the hearing or email the documents to an email address to be provided; and electronically file the documents in eLitigation within 1 working day after the conclusion of the hearing.
8. Counsel / parties are to observe proper Court decorum during the Zoom hearing in accordance with any other Court proceedings, specifically but not limited to the following:-
  - a. Counsel are to be dressed in standard court attire, litigants in person are to be appropriately dressed for Court.

- b. While there is no need to stand and bow before the Court, Counsel / parties are to address the Court as if physically in Court, and should not depart from or exit the hearing without the leave of Court.
9. In addition, the following rules of conduct apply to the hearing:-
- a. Counsel / parties must introduce themselves and their opposing counsel at the commencement of each hearing;
  - b. The identities of all other parties present at the hearing are to be disclosed to the Judge or Registrar at the start of the hearing and permission is to be obtained for their attendance at the hearing;
  - c. Counsel / parties are to ensure that the Zoom hearing proceeds uninterrupted in a private room within their office/home.
  - d. Counsel / parties are not to attend physically in Court in person if a hearing is to be conducted via video conferencing. In the event that counsel / parties attend Court personally, they will be directed to attend the hearing through the prescribed technology facilities and will be required to remove his or her queue number at the Registry.
  - e. Counsel / parties must have all the relevant information and documents at hand during the hearing. This includes clients' instructions and counsel / parties' diaries to take suitable dates.
10. The recording of Zoom hearings in video, audio and / or any other form is strictly prohibited and will be considered contempt of Court with consequences of fine and/or imprisonment;
11. The appointed time of the Zoom hearing is an estimate and counsel / parties are required to standby in the virtual waiting room at least 15 minutes prior to the appointed time. Should you not hear from us within 1 hour of your scheduled hearing, please contact the Family Justice Court's Registry at 6435 5398.
12. To familiarise yourself with how to join a meeting, you may join a test meeting at: <https://zoom.us/test>. For more information on using Zoom to joining a meeting, please go to: <https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/201362193-How-Do-I-Join-A-Meeting>. Zoom also hosts free and interactive live training webinars daily on joining a meeting, which can be accessed at <https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/360029527911>.
13. You are also strongly encouraged to watch the Family Justice Court's training video available [here](http://go.gov.sg/fjczoomtrainingvideo) (<http://go.gov.sg/fjczoomtrainingvideo>), as well as to review the information pamphlets available [here](https://www.familyjusticecourts.gov.sg/docs/default-source/resources/reports-and-publications/brochures/technical-guide-to-video-conferencing.pdf) (<https://www.familyjusticecourts.gov.sg/docs/default-source/resources/reports-and-publications/brochures/technical-guide-to-video-conferencing.pdf>).

## **GUIDELINES AND PROCEDURES FOR HEARINGS BY TELEPHONE CONFERENCING**

1. To facilitate hearings conducted by telephone conferencing, all counsel / parties are to ensure that their direct contact details (i.e. direct landline number or mobile number) of the lawyer in attendance / party are accurate and updated. The general office number of the law firm should not be used.
2. Counsel / parties should update their contact details in the eLitigation case file (under the “Party” tab) within 3 working days of the Registrar’s Notice stating that the hearing is to be conducted via telephone conferencing. Counsel / parties without eLitigation accounts should update their working contact numbers by contacting the Registry within 3 working days of the date of Registrar’s Notice.
3. Counsel / parties are to ensure that the phone line in use is one that can accept all calls (including incoming calls from a private number). For avoidance of doubt, any ‘call-blocking’ function for unknown numbers should be disabled prior to the call. The audio quality of the telephonic equipment should be adequate. Counsel / parties must seek the Court’s permission before proceeding to activate their speakerphone function.
4. If there are multiple lawyers from the law firm listed in e-Litigation as representing the party, the law firm must inform the Registry, within 3 working days of the date of Registrar’s Notice, of the specific lawyer having conduct of the matter by telephone conferencing.
5. The Judge or Registrar conducting the hearing will lead the flow of proceedings and counsel / parties should not speak out of turn or speak over each other.
6. Generally, counsel / parties should not mention on behalf of the other party or opposing counsel. Where circumstances require counsel to mention on behalf of the other party or opposing counsel, the Court is to be informed of this arrangement through a “Other Hearing Related Request” in eLitigation, filed at least 3 working days before the scheduled date of the hearing.
7. Where counsel / parties anticipate the need to tender documents to Court for the hearing, such documents shall be filed electronically in the eLitigation system at least 3 working days before the date of the hearing. If there are time constraints, counsel / parties are to email the documents to an email address to be provided.
8. Counsel / parties are to observe proper Court decorum during the hearing conducted by telephone conferencing, in accordance with any other Court proceedings, specifically but not limited to:
  - a. The identities of all other parties present at the hearing are to be disclosed to the Judge or Registrar at the start of the hearing and permission to be obtained for their attendance at the hearing.

- b. Counsel / parties are to ensure that the entire duration of the call is to take place in a private room or enclosed area without audio access to other members of the public.
9. In addition, the following rules of conduct apply to the hearing:-
  - a. Counsel / parties are not to attend Court in person if a hearing is to be conducted by telephone conferencing. In the event that counsel / parties attend Court personally, they will be directed to attend the hearing through the prescribed technology facilities and is required to remove his or her queue number at the Registry.
  - b. Counsel / parties must introduce themselves and their opposing counsel at the commencement of each hearing;
  - c. Counsel / parties must have all the relevant information and documents at hand during the hearing. This includes clients' instructions and counsel / parties' diaries to take suitable dates.
  - d. Counsel / parties should not be engaging in other personal matters or other work during the hearing.
10. The recording of hearings conducted by telephone conferencing in video, audio and / or any other form is strictly prohibited and will be considered contempt of Court with consequences of fine and/or imprisonment.
11. The appointed time for the hearing conducted by telephone conferencing is an estimate. Counsel / parties are required to standby at least 15 minutes before the scheduled hearing time and join the call without delay upon being contacted by the Court. If counsel / parties cannot be contacted, the Court will proceed with the hearing and may give directions and/or orders in their absence.
12. Should you not hear from us within 1 hour of your scheduled hearing, or require any assistance with hearings conducted by telephone conferencing, please contact the Registry at 6435 5398.