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Coronavirus (COVID-19): Tips for Phone and Video Hearings

❖ Read this only if you live in the state of Washington.

Courts across the state of Washington are holding hearings by phone or video conference (“**remote**” **hearings**). This is to address health and safety risks due to the pandemic. The experience is different from an in-person hearing. In a phone hearing, you cannot see how the judge or other party reacts to what you say. Even by video conference, it is still different.

For general tips on court hearings, and how to get ready for them, read [Getting Ready for a Hearing](#). It is available at WashingtonLawHelp.org.

How do I know if I have a remote hearing?

The court will notify you if your hearing is remote. They may contact you by U.S. mail, email, or phone. They will also notify the other parties in your case.

Getting ready for a phone or video hearing (as far in advance as possible)

- Make sure you know how you will join the hearing. Know if you call the court and how or if the court is calling you. If you aren’t sure, contact your court to ask. If you need specific technology but do not have it, tell the court ahead of time to find a solution.
- Submit your documents to the court. Even though this is a remote hearing, you may still need to give the court documents in advance, if you want to be able to discuss them at the hearing. If you need help with this, contact the court.
- Request an interpreter, if you need one. You have the right to interpreter services at no cost to you for your remote hearing. Each court has a way for you to ask for an interpreter. Contact your court before your hearing to ask for an interpreter.

- Request an accommodation for a disability that limits your ability to take part in the remote hearing. Each court has a way to ask for an accommodation. Contact your court before the hearing to make this request.
- Test everything ahead of time if you can.



Just before a phone or video hearing:

- Try to find somewhere quiet and private to be on the phone. If you have kids, make sure you are not near them.
- Join the hearing a few minutes early, if you can. This can be a time to test the audio and video.
- Gather your court papers, notes you prepared, and a paper and pen. See [Getting Ready for a Hearing](#).
- Check how to mute and unmute your phone line. This is important. During the hearing, you should mute the line when it is not your turn to talk, but you will want to quickly unmute when it is your turn. Sometimes you will have to mute and unmute many times during a hearing.



During a phone or video hearing:

- When you first join, listen to see what is happening. Some hearings will have multiple people on the line. Your case may not be the only case. The hearing host may be able to identify that you have joined the hearing. Other hearing hosts will ask everyone to identify themselves before the hearing starts.
- Direct all your statements and answers to the judge, not the other person. When it is your turn to talk, talk slowly and loudly so the Court can hear you clearly.
- On phone and video calls, it can be hard to know when it is your turn to talk. Try very hard not to interrupt anyone, even if the other person is saying something that you don't agree with or that is not true. Never interrupt the judge. But, you can ask the court if you have questions. Without interrupting anyone, say, "Your honor, may I say something."



If the hearing is a video hearing, here are some additional tips:

- Dress neatly. Wear solid colors, if you can.
- Place your computer's camera at or slightly above eye level. If using your phone, prop it up so you can look at it without holding it.
- Try not to have a messy background behind you. A blank wall is better.
- Sit so your shoulders and upper arms show on the screen, like a newscaster.
- If you can, make sure the lighting is on your face instead of behind you.
- Use a chair that supports good posture.
- Face the camera, not the computer screen.
- If you can, use headphones that have a microphone instead of your computer speaker and microphone. The sound quality may be better.

NJP gratefully acknowledges the work of Carol Sowers. We adapted some of her NITA FAQ to create some of these tips.

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