



CRIMINAL DEPARTMENT BEST PRACTICES FOR VIRTUAL COURT HEARINGS

JUDICIAL BRANCH OF ARIZONA – MARICOPA COUNTY

The court holds “virtual hearings” using an Interactive Audiovisual System (IAS) (also known as “videoconference software”) such as GoToMeeting or Microsoft Teams. Participants in virtual hearings may include Judicial Officers, Attorneys, Parties, Victims, Testifying Witnesses, and others who may speak at the hearing. Participants do not include family, friends, or others who are just observing. Observers can listen to the virtual hearing using a separate dial-in telephone line, found at www.superiorcourt.maricopa.gov/calendar/today.

Participants join virtual hearings using their own equipment (also called a “device”) such as a computer, tablet, smart phone, or telephone. Participants can join a virtual hearing either by a web browser, app, or dial-in telephone number. Participants who join by videoconference using a web browser or an app will be able to see, hear, and speak with each other. Participants who join by dial-in number will be able to hear and speak. The court prefers (and sometimes requires) that Participants join by videoconference with webcams turned on.

Before the hearing, the court will email an “invitation” to the attorneys (or to you directly, if you are a defendant representing yourself). The invitation will tell you how to join the virtual hearing using your own device. Please do not send the invitation to non-Participants.

The following tips will help you have a successful virtual hearing.



Make sure your equipment works

- ▶ Before the hearing, test out your equipment (computer, tablet, or phone):
 - A device with a camera, microphone, and speakers is preferred, but you may also participate by calling the dial-in number on a telephone.
 - Make sure the device is plugged in or fully charged before the hearing begins.
 - To improve the sound, use a headset or headphones with a built-in microphone.
 - If your device does not have a microphone or if you have a poor internet connection, you can use one device for the videoconference and use a separate telephone to dial in for audio. If you do this, you need to mute the audio on your video device and listen through the telephone or there will be an echo.
 - There will be an echo if two or more people are in the same room on separate devices with the sound turned on. To prevent this echo, please either (1) have each person use a headset or headphones, (2) mute (silence) the audio on the separate devices and share a speakerphone or a conference phone for the audio; or (3) go to separate rooms.
- ▶ For clearer picture and sound, use a wired internet connection or a choose a place with a strong Wi-Fi connection. Cellular connections work, but they can drain your device’s battery and may not be good for long hearings.
- ▶ Have a back-up plan. If you can, have a second device available with the app installed in case your first device stops working.

- ▶ Review the hearing “invitation” to see what IAS software is being used and how to join the hearing (e.g., click a link, enter a meeting ID number, etc.).
 - If possible, before the hearing download the app to your device.
 - Open the web browser or app and go to “Device Settings” to test the camera, microphone, and speakers.
 - Log in to the virtual hearing about 5-10 minutes before it starts—especially if you have not used the IAS software before.
 - Keep the invitation handy. If you have problems, the invitation tells you how to dial in to the app by telephone and how to contact the judicial assistant.



Choose the right location

- ▶ Make sure that you are in a quiet place, with no background noise or other distractions (like television noise, barking dogs, people talking, etc.).
- ▶ Do not drive a motor vehicle during a virtual hearing.



During the virtual hearing

- ▶ Remember a virtual hearing is a court appearance:
 - Behave as you would in court. Pay attention to what is going on, even if you are not speaking or being spoken to.
 - Do not do things not related to the hearing, like check texts/email, talk with other people, take other phone calls, etc.
 - Wait your turn to speak. Pause before you speak to avoid talking over other people. Speak at a normal volume.
- ▶ Say your name before you speak. The court must record all hearings and needs to keep track of who is speaking.
- ▶ Mute yourself on your device when you are not speaking.
- ▶ When appearing on webcam:
 - Wear what you would wear to court. Dress neatly. Remove any hat. If safe to do so, remove any mask so that you can be seen and heard.
 - Choose the right background. A solid color wall is best. It can be hard to see the face of a person with a window or other light source in the background.
 - Have good lighting. Facing a window or lamp will help light your face.
 - Put the camera at your eye level or a little above you. Your face should be in the middle of the screen, not at the bottom.
 - When speaking, look at the camera and not your screen.
 - Do not turn off your webcam and/or walk away from your device during the hearing. Let the judge or your lawyer know if you need a break.
 - If you have trouble hearing or seeing somebody, raise your hand so the judge knows there is a problem.
- ▶ Call or email the judicial assistant if you have trouble joining the virtual hearing or get disconnected and cannot rejoin.