



Best Practices for Parties Participating in USCG Zoom Hearings

Below are important tips for parties participating in United States Coast Guard (USCG) virtual hearings held on the Zoom for Government application.

1. Prior to Hearing:

- a. Test Your Equipment – test your internet and Zoom connection prior to the pre-hearing conference or hearing. The USCG uses the Zoom for Government application, which functions the same as the standard Zoom application. To test your setup prior to the hearing, visit <https://zoom.us/test>. You can log into Zoom via your phone or computer; logging in via computer is recommended but not required. If you log in via a computer, you will be given the option to download the Zoom app or log in via the browser. When logging in, you can either set up a Zoom account or log in as a guest.
- b. Zoom Pre-Hearing Conference – prior to holding the actual hearing, the judge will hold a Zoom pre-hearing conference with all the parties. This pre-hearing conference will give the parties a chance to further test their equipment and get used to participating in a virtual hearing.
- c. Meeting ID & Password – the judge will issue a scheduling order that will provide the parties with the needed Zoom Meeting ID and password to log into all virtual pre-hearing conferences and the hearing. **Do not share the meeting ID and password with anyone**, unless you need to provide to a witness you called and who is scheduled to attend.
- d. Witnesses – the parties are responsible for providing their witnesses with the Zoom meeting ID and password, and for ensuring their witnesses understand how to log into and use Zoom. As with an in-person hearings, the parties will be responsible for ensuring their witnesses are on standby and ready to testify when needed. The Best Practice Guide for Parties Participating in Zoom Hearings can be found at <https://www.uscg.mil/Resources/Administrative-Law-Judges/Virtual-Hearings/> - parties should share this document with their witnesses.

- e. Exhibits – prior to the hearing, you are required to provide the judge and the other parties with copies of all exhibits you intend to introduce at the hearing. You are required to send **hard copies** of the exhibits to the judge's office. If you intend to have a witness testify to an exhibit, you must provide the witness with a copy of the exhibit prior to their testimony.
- f. Telephone Help Number – you will be provided with a telephone number to call if you have problems using the Zoom application. Typically, the point of contact to assist parties will be the judge's attorney advisor. Do not provide your witnesses this telephone number; if your witnesses have procedural questions about the virtual hearing process, they need to call you, as the party is responsible for ensuring their witnesses are able to connect into the hearing.
- g. Be Proactive – virtual hearings add extra complexity to administrative hearings and parties are encouraged to be proactive to make the process smoother. For example, parties should stipulate to facts that are not in dispute and reach stipulations on exhibits prior to the hearing. We expect parties to have many questions and, if you have procedural concerns or questions, bring these up to the judge's law clerk or during the pre-hearing conference. Parties need to be very communicative with their witnesses and help them navigate the virtual hearing process. These, and other proactive measures, are recommend in order to help make the virtual hearing process smoother.
- h. Your Surroundings – following the below suggestions will improve your video quality when participating in a Zoom hearing:
 - i. Wear a solid color, not a pattern.
 - ii. Check lighting – ideally, you want the main light source in the room facing you (strong light coming behind you can blind the camera).
 - iii. Choose a solid neutral wall behind you.
 - iv. Set yourself up in a private, quiet room.

2. During Hearing:

- a. Log into Zoom for Government – at least 15 minutes prior to scheduled hearing, go to <https://www.zoomgov.com/> and use the Meeting ID and password to log into the hearing. If you are using a phone, log in through your Zoom app or enter the above internet address into your phone web browser.
- b. Provide Actual Name – if you log into Zoom with an account, make sure your account lists your actual name (not a nickname). If you log into Zoom as a guest, then type in your actual name (not nickname) when prompted to enter name.
- c. Separate Computers – even if you and your witnesses are physically able to be in the same space, if possible, log into Zoom from separate computers. This way, both the party and witnesses faces are visible during the examination.
- d. Waiting Room – once you log into Zoom, you will be initially placed into a virtual “waiting room.” Once the judge is ready, you will be admitted into the hearing itself. At the beginning of the hearing, the parties will be admitted into the hearing from the waiting room. As witnesses "arrive," the witnesses will be admitted into the hearing when it is their time to testify. When the judge holds a recess during a hearing, parties and witnesses will be placed back into a waiting room or breakout session.
- e. Formal Proceeding – even though this is a virtual hearing, this is still a formal proceeding, and the following protocols must be followed:
 - i. Do not communicate with anyone else when a hearing is in progress. This means no texting or calling anyone from another device, and no talking to anyone in the same room unless they are part of the hearing.
 - ii. If there is another person in the room who can overhear the hearing in progress, you must inform the judge of this person.
 - iii. When speaking, look directly into the monitor.
 - iv. Pay attention and do not multi-task (i.e. – no searching the internet, no playing a game, etc.).
 - v. **Any recording of the hearing is absolutely prohibited.**