

Virtual Hearing Policy
United States Bankruptcy Court
District of Maryland
May 12, 2021

The United States Bankruptcy Court for the District of Maryland has conducted hearings during the COVID-19 pandemic on the ZoomGov platform. In addition to providing a necessary platform during this challenging time, the platform has proven to be an economical and efficient method for hearing and resolving appropriate proceedings. The Court has considered to what extent it should continue to conduct proceedings using the ZoomGov platform, or similar virtual platform, once the challenges brought about by the pandemic abate.

In May 2020, this Court, along with the United States District Court for the District of Maryland, adopted a four-phased recovery procedure for emerging from the pandemic. The Court entered Phase 3 of the recovery plan as of March 1, 2021. In Phase 3, most hearings continue to be held on the ZoomGov platform unless the presiding judge determines to hold the hearing in person. Any party may request to have a matter held in person through the presiding Judge's courtroom deputy or chambers.

All limitations on court proceedings will be lifted in Phase 4. The Court cannot predict when Phase 4 will begin.

In determining whether or to what extent the Court should hold hearings virtually in Phase 4, the Court consulted with the Consumer Bankruptcy Section of the Maryland State Bar Association, the Bankruptcy Bar Association of Maryland, the United States Trustee for Region Four, and others.

Ultimately, the decision whether to hold any hearing in person, by ZoomGov or similar platform, or by telephone, is up to the presiding judge. The policy stated here does not reduce the discretion of each judge to manage her or his docket as appropriate under the circumstances.

Nevertheless, the Court has determined that various proceedings can be efficiently and economically resolved over the ZoomGov platform, comply with applicable rules and practice, and are otherwise well suited for virtual disposition. The court anticipates that the following matters will continue to be held in Phase 4 by use of a virtual platform:

- Chapter 13 dockets
- Reaffirmation hearings
- Motions to extend and impose the automatic stay under 11 U.S.C. §§362(c)(3) and (c)(4), respectively
- Pre-trial conferences in adversary proceedings
- Status and scheduling conferences

In addition, Judges may continue to set other matters for hearing on a virtual platform, either as a preliminary or final matter.