

**PROTOCOL FOR VIDEOCONFERENCE HEARINGS  
BEFORE THE HONORABLE MARIA ELLENA CHAVEZ-RUARK**

**I. CONDUCT OF VIDEOCONFERENCE HEARINGS**

Chapter 13 hearings: All matters scheduled for hearing on a regular Chapter 13 docket day will be conducted using Zoom for Government videoconference technology (“ZoomGov”).

Other hearings: A hearing will be conducted using ZoomGov only if the hearing notice on the case docket states that the hearing will be conducted by videoconference or if the Court advises the parties in writing that the hearing will be conducted by videoconference.

**II. HEARING ACCESS**

Chapter 13 hearings: The Chapter 13 trustee will communicate the log-in information (ZoomGov meeting ID number and password) to parties.

Other hearings: Parties must register for a hearing no later than 48 hours prior to the hearing at [Meeting Registration - ZoomGov \(zoomgov.com\)](https://zoomgov.com). Although there is only one option (10:00 a.m.) to select for each day, that option applies to all hearings on that day regardless of the scheduled start time. After registering, a party will receive the ZoomGov meeting ID and password from ZoomGov by email. Registering at the link provided allows access to virtual hearings set by the Court but does not constitute the self-scheduling of a hearing or otherwise impact the Court’s official hearings schedule in any manner.

**III. OBLIGATION TO MEET AND CONFER PRIOR TO HEARING**

Chapter 13 hearings: Parties are expected to work cooperatively with the Chapter 13 trustee to resolve issues by the end of the day before the scheduled hearing. If a consensual resolution is reached, the Chapter 13 trustee will advise parties that they are excused from appearance at the hearing. If the parties are not advised by the Chapter 13 trustee that they are excused, they are expected to appear for the hearing.

Other hearings: Parties to a dispute or contested matter are expected to meet and confer in person, telephonically, or by videoconference prior to the hearing in an attempt to resolve the dispute or contested matter and identify and narrow any factual or legal issues. A hearing will remain on the Court’s calendar unless the Court grants a motion to continue, issues a notice that the hearing has been rescheduled, makes a notation on the docket via CM/ECF that the hearing is cancelled, and/or confirms by email or in an order that the hearing is cancelled.

**IV. PRE-HEARING PLANNING AND HEARING RECORD**

All parties are expected to test their capability to participate via ZoomGov videoconference software on their preferred device and verify that such device has clear audio and video connections and is fully charged prior to the hearing.

Parties are expected to connect to the videoconference at least 15 minutes prior to the start time of the hearing and appear with video capabilities.

Parties are reminded that a videoconference hearing is still an official Court hearing. Accordingly, parties are expected to wear appropriate attire, present themselves as they would if they were appearing in a physical courtroom, and participate from a quiet space with no interruptions or distractions for the duration of the hearing.

The Court will create an official recording of the videoconference hearing. No party (other than the Court) may record or otherwise capture the audio or video of the hearing in any manner.

## **V. PARTICIPATION IN HEARING**

After the Courtroom Deputy has called the case, she will ask each individual to enter his or her appearance by stating his or her full name, affiliation, and the names of any other individuals watching or listening to the hearing through that participant's connection.

All participants should do the following during the hearing:

- Ensure that their first and last names appear for their device on ZoomGov;
- Announce themselves after joining or rejoining if the hearing is in progress and, if necessary, request permission to leave or disconnect prior to the end of the hearing (as they would in the courtroom);
- Place their lines on mute before and during the hearing unless they are speaking or about to speak; and
- Keep their video on for the entire duration of the hearing.

The Court will dismiss parties from the videoconference when their hearing is completed.

## **VI. PRE-FILING OF WITNESS LIST, EXHIBIT LIST, AND EXHIBITS**

The Court generally anticipates that videoconference hearings will consist of status reports or oral argument by counsel and that evidentiary hearings will be held in person. However, if the Court does hold an evidentiary hearing by videoconference, the following will apply.

Prior to any hearing, parties are expected to discuss all witnesses and exhibits they propose to use at the hearing and, to the greatest extent possible, address any evidentiary objections, reach agreement on admissibility of exhibits, and compile a single electronic packet of agreed exhibits.

Unless otherwise set forth in a scheduling order, **at least three (3) business days prior to the scheduled hearing**, all parties shall:

1. File a witness list on the case docket;

2. File an exhibit list on the case docket, attach each exhibit to the list as a separate PDF, and label each exhibit with an exhibit number (include any affidavits and authenticated documentary evidence);
3. Serve the witness list, exhibit list, and exhibits by email on all counsel and unrepresented parties with an interest in the dispute(s) being heard; and
4. Ensure that any witness the party intends to call at the hearing has a copy of all exhibits filed by all parties in connection with the matter to be heard.

Any affidavits used to support or oppose a motion must be made on personal knowledge, set out facts that would be admissible in evidence, and show that the affiant is competent to testify on the matters stated.

A party need not include documents to be used solely for impeachment or rebuttal in its exhibit list and pre-filed exhibits. If an exhibit is not included in the pre-filed exhibits because it is being used solely for impeachment or rebuttal, prior to using the document at a videoconference hearing, the examining party must submit by email an electronic copy of the impeachment exhibit to all participating counsel, any unrepresented parties, and Judge Ruark's Courtroom Deputy ([Hearings\\_MCR@mdb.uscourts.gov](mailto:Hearings_MCR@mdb.uscourts.gov)), identified with the party's next exhibit number. The Court will require verification that all participating counsel and unrepresented parties have obtained the document before the examination may proceed. Parties are encouraged to send an impeachment or rebuttal document several minutes before the planned use, where feasible, to allow the hearing to proceed in a timely manner. After the conclusion of the hearing, a party using impeachment or rebuttal documents must file on the case docket via CM/ECF a supplemental exhibit list and attach all impeachment and rebuttal documents identified and/or admitted.

All exhibits must be clearly marked, preferably with an electronic header/footer. Exhibits offered jointly by the parties shall be marked "Joint Exhibit." Exhibits offered by only one party shall be marked "[Party]'s Exhibit X" (ex. "Debtor's Exhibit 1").

Any exhibit that is not pre-filed as set forth herein may be excluded from evidence.

## **VII. COMPLIANCE**

Video appearances by multiple participants are only possible when there is compliance with every procedural requirement. Sanctions may be imposed when there is any deviation from the required procedures or the Court determines that an individual's conduct makes video appearances inappropriate.

## **VIII. TECHNICAL ISSUES AND QUESTIONS**

Participants should email the Courtroom Deputy at [Hearings\\_MCR@mdb.uscourts.gov](mailto:Hearings_MCR@mdb.uscourts.gov) or call Chambers at (301) 344-3377 if they experience any technical issues during the hearing, including if they are disconnected or cannot enter the hearing, or if they have questions about this hearing protocol.