



FAMILY COURT

WEBEX PROCEDURE AND GUIDELINES FOR REMOTE HEARINGS, TRIALS AND CONFERENCES

The Rhode Island Supreme Court and the Rhode Island Family Court have authorized the use of remote hearings, trials and conferences on the WebEx platform in certain cases in order to lessen the delays in processing cases during this difficult time occasioned by the COVID-19 pandemic. All remote proceedings other than "chambers conferences" or "bench conferences" will include a court clerk and a stenographer or recorder and will be recorded by stenographic or audio graphic recording. All public remote hearings and trials will be accessible to the public in real time, in accordance with administrative orders issued by the Rhode Island Supreme Court and by the Chief Judge of the Rhode Island Family Court. It is the intent of the Family Court that remote hearings and trials mirror, as closely as possible in-person hearings and trials conducted in a courtroom. Accordingly, the same decorum is expected of participants in remote proceedings as is expected in the courtroom. The following guidelines are designed to make remote proceedings as efficient as possible and to ensure that all participants can be heard and seen, where applicable.

1. In order to participate in a remote proceeding, the participant will need a computer or a mobile device with a microphone or, preferably, both a camera and a microphone. Headphones with a microphone are acceptable and may provide a better quality of audio, both for the participant and for those listening to the participant.
2. A participant may download the necessary software to participate in a WebEx hearing onto a desktop or laptop computer at www.webex.com or onto a mobile device from the appropriate app store. When a participant receives an invitation to participate in a WebEx hearing for the first time, after attempting to join the meeting, the computer will direct that the software be downloaded or run. There is no charge to use the WebEx software.
3. Successful participation in a WebEx hearing depends upon a strong internet connection. Without a strong internet connection, a participant's video and audio will be intermittent, making it impossible for other participants to reliably hear and see the participant, and making it impossible for the stenographer or recorder to create an accurate record of the proceeding. It is suggested that you close other windows on the computer or mobile device, and that as many other devices as possible be turned off as keeping them on may draw bandwidth from the connection.
4. All documents intended to be submitted as exhibits must be submitted at least two business days in advance, in accordance with the instructions provided in Family Court Administrative Order 2020-05.
5. Once the court clerk schedules a remote hearing, each participant will receive an invitation to join the hearing at the specified date and time. Please note that litigants who are represented by counsel will not receive an individual invitation. As with in-person hearings, it is the responsibility of the attorney to arrange for the virtual presence of the litigant-client at the remote hearing, if the litigant's presence is necessary. In order to join, the participant simply needs to press the join button, which will be activated prior to the scheduled start time. Please join the hearing several minutes prior to the scheduled start time in order to ensure that the audio and video is active and accessible to other participants.
6. Prior to joining a remote proceeding, the participant should locate a quiet, private place to participate. Background noise is amplified during these remote proceedings which makes it difficult or impossible for other participants, the court, and the stenographer or recorder to hear whomever is speaking. The participants should avoid rustling papers and turn off notifications on all devices. Children may not be present in the room, nor should

they be within hearing distance, of any remote proceeding, just as they are not allowed in the Family Court courtroom. **An exception to this rule is a juvenile hearing, at which the juvenile who is the subject of the hearing will be present.**

7. On the bottom left of each participant's screen is a microphone button. When that button is red, the participant's microphone is off. Clicking that button turns the microphone on. During a remote hearing, all participants will be muted and are asked to leave their microphone buttons off unless they are speaking or asked to speak by the court, or unless an attorney and a witness are engaged in questions and answers. This is necessary in order to ensure that only one person is speaking at a time and to insure the best audio for the court and for the stenographer or recorder. If necessary, the court will mute a participant's microphone. If a participant wishes to speak and is not being addressed by the court, the participant should raise its hand on the video screen, and the court will address that participant in turn.
8. Immediately to the right of the button is the video button. When the button is red, the participant's video is off. If participating by video, the participants must have their video on throughout the remote proceeding. All video participants must remain visible to other video participants throughout the remote proceeding. In other words, once the proceeding starts, a video participant should not leave the view of the camera without the court's permission.
9. **No video or audio recording of remote proceedings is allowed**, just as no recordings are allowed in the courtroom. A stenographic or audio graphic record is made of every remote hearing and trial. A participant may order a transcript of the hearing or trial directly from the stenographer or recorder, in the same way that a transcript of an in-person proceeding is ordered.
10. The third button from the right on the bottom of the screen allows a participant to chat privately with another participant. This button may be used during the remote proceeding to allow an attorney and client to chat privately when they are in different locations. **Caution should be exercised when using the chat feature as it defaults to "chat with everyone".**
11. At the top right of the screen are buttons that change the participant's view of other participants. Each participant may choose the view that is best suited to him or her. The participant's choice of view does not affect any other participant.
12. All required open public hearings will be streamed live via either YouTube or by telephonic access. Event streaming will be advertised on the Judiciary's website. This information can be found at <https://courts.ri.gov> within the Self-help Center under Public Access to Court Hearings.
13. Any questions or concerns regarding the procedure for remote hearings may be directed to the court clerk.

Important telephone numbers:

Murray Judicial Complex Newport County 45 Washington Square Newport, Rhode Island 02840-2913 *(401) 841-8340	Noel Judicial Complex Kent County 222 Quaker Lane Warwick, Rhode Island 02886-0107 *(401) 822-6725
McGrath Judicial Complex Washington County 4800 Tower Hill Road Wakefield, Rhode Island 02879-2239 *(401) 782-4111	Garrahy Judicial Complex Providence/Bristol County One Dorrance Plaza Providence, Rhode Island 02903-2719 *(401) 458-3200

*If an accommodation for a disability is necessary, please contact the Family Court Clerk's Office at the telephone number listed in the court location above. TTY users can contact the Family Court through Rhode Island Relay at 7-1-1 or 1-800-745-5555 (TTY) to voice number.