

Office of the District Judges
Travis County Courthouse
P.O. Box 1748
Austin, Texas 78767
512/854-9300

Memorandum

To: All Travis County Attorneys and Guardians ad litem

From: Travis County Civil District and County Court-at-Law Judges

Date: August 10, 2020

Re: Virtual Jury Trials in Travis County Civil Cases

Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Travis County Civil District and County Court-at-Law Judges have been working hard to administer justice while also taking steps to comply with state and local regulations designed to protect the health and safety of court staff, parties, attorneys, jurors, and members of the public. Accepting that we are unable to plan for in-person jury trials anytime soon and consistent with the Supreme Court of Texas' Twenty-Second Emergency Order Regarding the COVID-19 State of Disaster, we have now developed a plan to resume the hearing of civil jury matters through virtual courtrooms via Zoom. **The Travis County Civil District and County Court-at-Law Judges currently plan to start hearing virtual jury trials on October 12, 2020.** Virtual jury trials will accommodate jury settings on the weeks designated as "jury weeks" by the Court Administrator. Judges anticipate that up to two civil jury trials will be heard each jury week from October 12 through the end of the 2020 calendar year. Each jury week, the first priority will be given to the hearing of jury trials in civil child protection lawsuits filed by the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) that are subject to statutory trial deadlines. If either or both of the virtual juries scheduled for a given jury week are not needed for DFPS lawsuits, those virtual jury pools will be then made available for the hearing of other civil jury matters set and announced that week.

We understand you most likely have questions and concerns about virtual jury trials. Please know that the Travis County Civil District and County Court-at-Law Judges have been busy working on plans and procedures to adapt the jury trial courtroom to the Zoom virtual platform. For now, we feel confident in our ability to start virtual jury trials on October 12, 2020 and remain committed to addressing unanticipated legal, administrative, and technical challenges as they arise. Having said that, we have also become accustomed to changing course and adapting our plans and procedures throughout this pandemic. If we determine that we must modify the plans described above, such as to comply with directives of the Supreme Court of Texas, the Office of Court Administration, or due to other unanticipated factors, we will provide an updated public announcement, including on the Austin Bar Association Website.

For now, if you have not done so already, we encourage you to refer to the **Pilot Program** on virtual jury trials developed by the Office of Court Administration and the Austin Bar Association's Jury Trial Task Force, which is expected to broadcast virtual pilot jury trials in the coming weeks. If you missed the recent CLE on this pilot program, we understand you can still access the following presentations and resource materials online:

"Travis County Civil Courts Pilot Jury Trial Program - Keeping the Wheels of Justice in Motion During a Pandemic."

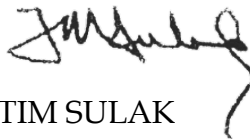
Available at: <https://vimeo.com/439015492/d86887015b>

"Nuts & Bolts of Handling a Remote Jury Trial in Travis County Civil Courts."

Available at: <https://vimeo.com/442140606/0d250b32d3>

We will provide further updates as available. We sincerely appreciate your patience as we move forward with a firm commitment to public service and the rule of law during these unprecedented times.

Sincerely,



TIM SULAK
Local Administrative Judge
Travis County, Texas