

**231<sup>ST</sup> DISTRICT AND ASSOCIATE COURT  
GUIDELINES FOR SCHEDULING HEARINGS  
ON OR AFTER JUNE 1, 2020**

The Office of Court Administration (OCA) has issued guidelines for Court proceedings set **on or after June 1, 2020**. They have stated that both essential and non-essential hearings should be held remotely *“unless litigants or other court participants are unable to successfully participate in a remote hearing for reasons beyond the court’s control.”* As such, the 231<sup>st</sup> District and Associate Court will continue to conduct hearings remotely if the parties and their necessary witnesses have the technology to do so. There are separate rules and procedures that will apply for the actual hearings, entitled **“231<sup>st</sup> Associate/District Court Rules for Remote Hearings”**, with which you should review and become familiar. Remote hearings will be the presumptive way hearings will be conducted until further guidance from OCA. These guidelines are specifically to assist Attorneys and their staff with the logistics of filing, setting and obtaining signatures during this time.

- **Live Hearings:** A certified written request must be made to the Court and shall include the reasons why the Declarant cannot successfully participate remotely before the Court will consider other options (*See 231<sup>st</sup> Associate/District Court Rules for Remote Hearings*). IF a live hearing is approved and MUST be done in person, then all participants must follow all protocols directed by Tarrant County and our Family District Judges required to enter the building. *\*Please note that upon written certified request, an in person hearing will not be automatically approved as the Court still must consider the health, safety and ability of all other participants.\**
- **Protective Orders:** These will still be set on Tuesdays in the Associate Court. You DO NOT have to walk these through in person if the sworn/supporting Affidavit is on file with the Application and the Ex Parte Order is e-filed in the proper editable format allowing for any changes/corrections and electronic signatures. If you e-file the Ex Parte Order along with your Application, please DO NOT have someone walk it through in person because this could result in having two different Orders signed with possibly different dates. Just do it one way or the other! Also, DO NOT, email the Court Coordinator the same documents you e-file. Our clerks send everything that is e-filed to our Coordinator, who then sends them to the respective Judge for signature. This will help decrease the incoming emails.
- **Enforcements:** Follow the same procedure as for Protective Orders above with these Orders to Appear/Show Cause.
- **Extraordinary Relief TRO’s:** Follow the same procedure as above, except that these will no longer be set on Tuesdays.
- **Emergency/Ex Parte Orders in Pending Cases:** Ex Parte Orders needing to be presented to the Court on a pending case can also be handled remotely. If the opposing side wants to be heard and objects, please notify the Court so that a conference can be set up with one of the Judges.

- Initial Settings:** We understand that cases in the Associate Court often involve issues with last-minute service; uncertainty if a Respondent will appear or default; self-represented litigants; and recently hired attorneys which often results in an initial in person appearance and automatic reset. These situations primarily occur with the above-mentioned Ex Parte and Show Cause Orders at the initial hearing date. Therefore, these initial settings will be set at 8:30 a.m. and will be an automatic reset for a specific date and time, UNLESS it is a default. Attorneys and/or the Petitioner/Movant can appear via Zoom if they contact the Court prior to so that an invite can be sent. The Court will call each case one by one and will schedule a hearing with all participants at that time. Please know that we will ensure that all social-distancing requirements and all health precautions are followed. For any participant appearing in person for this 8:30 a.m. appearance docket, please check in with the bailiff and then wait outside the Courtroom until your case is called.
- Temporary Orders:** Do not e-file or walk through plain/vanilla TRO's. Attach the current Standing Orders that are effective through December 31, 2020. Email your Notice of Hearing for Temporary Orders to the coordinator and request dates to get on the docket.
- Obtaining dates/times for all:** Please make sure you coordinate your dates for all settings with OUR Court Coordinator upon e-filing OR walking Ex Parte Orders through.
- E-filing:** Please continue to e-file *or* email Agreed and Conformed Orders for entry electronically to assist us with minimizing the population entering the Courthouse. *\*Remember, if you e-file, DO NOT also email the Coordinator who will get it from our clerks!*
- Prove-ups:** For any Final Order that requires a record, please contact the Court Coordinator who will schedule it. These will be done remotely and will have to be limited in numbers daily due to the volume of cases that need to be finalized. DO NOT show up in person with your client for a prove-up. *\*Please continue to e-file agreements for electronic signature (we will continue to electronically sign Agreed Final Orders so long as there is a waiver or service return on file and all signatures).*
- Pre-Trials:** Please follow the same procedure as for Prove-ups above. These will also be handled remotely and scheduled by the Coordinator.
- Trials & Special Sets:** All final trials and specially set hearings in either the District or Associate Court that were cancelled during the months of March, April and May as a result of COVID-19 will have prioritized settings. ***If you had a trial or special set hearing that was cancelled and has not otherwise been resolved, YOU must contact the Court Coordinator to request dates and get back on the docket.***
- Dismissal Docket:** If you received a dismissal notice for the months of March, April or May, please DO NOT file a Motion to Retain or other such motion as you will receive new notices in the future. NO cases will be dismissed at this time.
- Adoptions:** These will be done remotely and must be scheduled through the Court Coordinator.
- Writs:** Can be done in person at the initial filing and, if signed, will be set by the Court at that time.

Please understand that we are much more limited in time for hearings due to the current guidelines we must follow, so we will have to set strong time and witness limits. We understand you and your clients' need to have their case heard and that a lot of these hearings have been on hold for what seems like an eternity for these litigants. We are working hard to get cases back on the Court's docket and moving towards a resolution, while trying to find ways to handle them this "new" and different way. This is going to be a "trial and error" process, so these guidelines are subject to change as we learn what works and what does not. If you're unsure or unclear about something contained herein OR perhaps something that is not – just contact the Court and ask! Remember, we are all learning a new way of handling the judicial process, so please continue to be patient and understanding while we all adapt to this "new normal" together.