

ADMINISTRATIVE ORDER 22-1229-2

LOCAL RULES OF	§	COUNTY COURT-AT-LAW II
	§	
ADMINISTRATION	§	WEBB COUNTY, TEXAS

**FIRST ORDER ON RULES GOVERNING
COURT HEARING PARTICIPATION BY VIDEO CONFERENCE
IN THE COUNTY COURT-AT-LAW II OF WEBB COUNTY, TEXAS**

1. **Application.** The following rules govern appearances and participation in court hearings by video conference in the County Court-at-Law II of Webb County, Texas.
2. **Purpose.** To provide parties, witnesses, attorneys and the public the greatest access to justice; to reduce costs to litigants; to accommodate witness testimony; to foster greater efficiency for lawyers; to safely provide timely access to justice; to avoid case backlogs and unnecessary delays; and in the interest of the safe and efficient administration of justice, Webb County Court-at-Law II hereby adopts these local rules.
3. **Authority.** Pursuant to Rule 3a, TEXAS RULES OF CIVIL PROCEDURE, Webb County Court-at-Law II hereby adopts these local rules allowing, but not mandating, court hearing participation by video conference.
4. **Remote Participation.** Subject to constitutional limitations and review for abuse of discretion, Webb County Court-at-Law II may allow any person—including but not limited to a party, attorney, witness, court reporter, court recorder, court coordinator, interpreter, district clerk, county clerk, or other Webb County employee providing judicial support to the court—involved in any hearing or other proceeding of any kind to participate remotely by video conference.
 - a. To participate by video conference, lawyers, parties, and witnesses must appear on-camera while the case is called and heard. Appearances solely by audio means are disallowed.
 - b. Counsel, whose clients or witnesses appear by video conference, shall provide adequate instructions on video conference technological requirements prior to the commencement of the hearing. Failure to prepare clients and witnesses prior to the hearing may waive their appearances.
 - c. No person shall operate a motor vehicle while a case is called and heard.

5. **Sworn Testimony.** Webb County Court-at-Law II may consider as evidence sworn testimony given remotely, outside the courtroom, by video conference.
 - a. Witnesses appearing by video conference must be connected to audio and video. Witnesses must be on camera. Testimony solely by audio means is disallowed.
 - b. Witnesses shall disclose, under oath, on the record, and prior to testifying, who, if anyone, is in the room with them or in their general presence.
 - c. Witnesses shall not communicate with any person, including by text message, during their testimony. Failure to adhere to this rule may waive the witness's testimony.
6. **Online Evidence Sharing.** All exhibits—including but not limited to documents, photographs, audio recordings, maps, and deeds—shall be uploaded to Thomson Reuters Case Center prior to the commencement of the court proceeding.
 - a. During their hearing, counsel shall request court staff to prompt a document on Case Center by referencing the document number assigned by Case Center or the “bates-stamped” number on Case Center.
7. **Hybrid Court Hearing Policy.** Unless otherwise directed by the Court in writing, attorneys, parties, and witnesses may participate in court hearings or other court proceedings either by video conference on Zoom or in person at the Webb County Court-at-Law II courtroom.
 - a. All persons opting to participate by video conference on Zoom must first register on Z-connect.
 - b. Persons participating by video conference should log-in to the court session at least 10 minutes before the court setting to be admitted before the court session begins. Otherwise, participants will be admitted into the video conference when their case is called not when the general court session begins and other cases are called.
 - c. Members of the public and non-participating court attendees are not permitted into the video conference session (i.e. the electronic well of the court) but may view court proceedings live, consistent with the open courts mandate of the Texas Constitution, either in-person at the Webb County Court-at-Law II courtroom or on YouTube.
 - d. The Court shall call cases in the order of appearance of counsel, first those appearing in person and then those appearing virtually as measured by their log-in time, unless unusual circumstances require otherwise.

8. **Jury Trials.** Unless consented to by all parties in writing and filed with the court, jury trials shall be held in-person.
9. **Recordings.** All persons attending or viewing court proceedings are ordered not to record any portion of the court proceedings. Only the court reporter and/or court recorder can record court proceedings and provide the official record. Any violation of this order is subject to contempt hearings.
10. **Other Provisions.** Subject to further orders by the Texas Supreme Court and/or the Texas Court of Criminal Appeals, all other statutes and rules governing the procedures for civil and criminal court appearances and participation remain unchanged.

ADOPTED and **SIGNED** on December 29, 2022 and **EFFECTIVE** January 1, 2023.



JUDGE VICTOR VILLARREAL
Webb County Court-at-Law II