

## What Should I Expect During a Remote Court Hearing? (FAQ)

Because of COVID-19 many courtrooms are closed, and most court hearings are now remote. That means some or all of the people participate by video or by phone. Read below to know how to prepare a remote hearing. If you are unsure if your hearing is remote, check with the clerk of court to find out. Go to <https://courts.mt.gov/> and use the court locator to find out how to contact the court.

### How do I know if I have a remote hearing?



The court will notify you if your hearing is remote. They may contact you by U.S. mail, email, or phone. They will also notify the other parties in your case.

### What if I don't have Internet or a phone?

Contact the court as soon as possible. They may:

- Postpone the hearing until everyone can participate safely, or
- Help you find a way to participate, such as free hot spots, or access to a free phone or Internet.

### What if I cannot join at the scheduled hearing time?

You must have a good reason why you cannot be present at the scheduled time. And you must tell the court *before* the hearing. Go to <https://courts.mt.gov/>. It will explain how to contact the court.

### Will the court tell me how to join the remote hearing?

Yes. The court will send you instructions on how to join your remote hearing by video or by phone. Courts may use different apps and processes. Call your court to find out how your court does remote hearings. Each court in Montana may use a different technology.

## Before Your Remote Hearing



Make sure you have good Internet connection.



If using video technology, download the app that the court tells you to use for the hearing. Practice with the app so you feel comfortable.



Charge your computer or mobile device to 100%. If you are calling in by phone, make sure you have enough minutes for the full hearing.



Use earbuds or headphones, if you can. This frees up your hands, and improves sound quality.



Email the clerk of court any evidence, like documents or photos. Use <https://courts.mt.gov/> to find out how to send evidence.



Tell the court if you have witnesses. The court will tell them how to join the hearing.

### Get Your Space Ready!

- ✓ Find a quiet place where no one will interrupt you. Make sure the wall behind you looks the way you want it to look.
- ✓ Have all your papers ready, including a list of what you want to say to the judge.
- ✓ Know what time your hearing starts and how to log on or what number to call.

### Look Good!

- ✓ Set the camera at your eye level. If using your phone, prop it up so you can look at it without holding it.
- ✓ Look at the camera, not the screen, when you speak.
- ✓ Dress neatly. Wear soft solid colors.
- ✓ Sit in a well-lit room, not too dark, not too bright. No bright lights behind you.

### Sound Good!

- ✓ Pause before speaking in case there is any audio/video lag.
- ✓ Mute yourself when not speaking to improve sound quality.
- ✓ Say your name each time you speak.
- ✓ Talk slowly and do not interrupt.

### What should I expect during the hearing?

- 1) If you are joining by video, you might be put in a “waiting room” first. Then the judge will take you to a “hearing room”. Only the people in your case will be in your hearing room.
- 2) The judge will make sure you can hear and talk, and go over all the rules.
- 3) If you are joining by video, you will see a picture or name of each person in your hearing on your screen. When someone speaks, the video will indicate who is speaking.
- 4) Your hearing is live and will be recorded. Everyone there can hear what you say. It may even be open to the public.

The judge decides most cases at the end of the hearing.



**Important:** You may be connecting from home, but it is still a court hearing. Pay attention, and follow all rules

## How do I get more help?

Montana Legal Services Association (MLSA) provides free civil legal help to low-income people. Contact us to see if you qualify:

- Apply anytime online at [mtlsa.org](http://mtlsa.org);
- Call our Helpline at 1-800-666-6899 (Helpline hours are limited).

## What help can I find at MLSA?

- Legal advice and representation;
- Referrals to volunteer attorneys and other providers;
- Self-help clinics and materials.

[www.MontanaLawHelp.org](http://www.MontanaLawHelp.org)

Need legal information or forms? Visit [www.MontanaLawHelp.org](http://www.MontanaLawHelp.org).

Can't find what you want? Use LiveHelp. Click on the LiveHelp icon and get help finding the information you need.

[www.MTLSA.org](http://www.MTLSA.org)

Find copies of all our brochures online.  
They are all available for free download!



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This pamphlet is meant to give basic legal information, not legal advice about your problem. The law changes often and each case is different. We recommend you talk to an attorney about your legal problem.