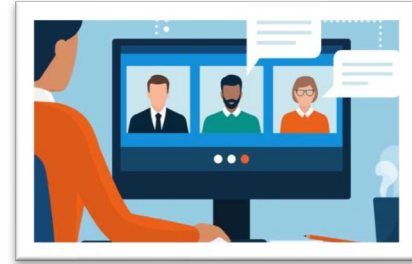
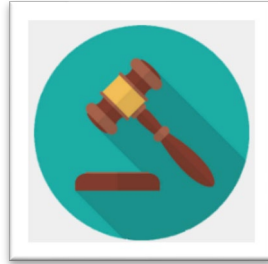
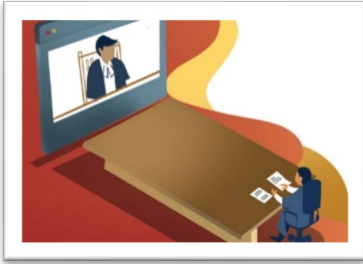




Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Virtual Fair Hearings: What Petitioners Should Know

Due to COVID-19, the Child and Family Services Agency (CFSA) has changed the way it conducts fair hearings in order to do so safely while protecting the health of the participants. The Office of Fair Hearings and Appeals (OFHA) now holds virtual hearings instead of in-person hearings.



1. How do virtual hearings work?

Instead of all parties meeting at the CFSA office, everyone will join the hearing from their home, office or other location by video using a web-based audio and video conferencing tool that allows each participant in the hearing to see and hear the other participants.

2. What equipment do I need to participate?

You need an email address and a computer with an internet connection and a web camera. You may also participate with a smartphone by downloading the video conferencing app from your phone's app store. A "practice session" will be offered so you can test it out before the actual hearing.

3. What if I don't have the required equipment?

While all hearings are being held virtually until further notice, if you don't have the technology to join by video but you want to have your hearing as soon as possible, CFSA may allow you and the Fair Hearing Coordinator to join the hearing in person while the other parties join by video conference. You may also wait to have the hearing until the public health emergency ends and the CFSA building is open again for business.

4. How will I know when to join the hearing?

The Coordinator will confirm the hearing date and time with you in advance. On the day of the hearing, the Coordinator will email you an invitation to join the meeting 15-30 minutes before it is scheduled to start. The email will contain a link that says: "Join the Meeting."

5. How will my witnesses participate in the hearing?

You are responsible for notifying your witnesses of the date and time of the hearing. Each witness must have an email address. When you receive the email invitation from the Coordinator, you can forward that email to your witnesses. Each witness will join the meeting separately at a specific time agreed upon by you, the Coordinator and the witness.

6. How will my exhibits become part of the record?

If you have exhibits (evidence, letters, photographs, etc.) to share, the Coordinator will let you know the date by which you must submit them before the hearing. The Hearing Examiner will decide if the exhibits that were submitted will be allowed to be presented during the hearing and become part of the record. Please note that if you have not submitted the exhibits by the deadline, the hearing may be continued (rescheduled).

7. How will my witness see the exhibits?

Each party should ensure that witnesses have a copy of the exhibits. Additionally, each person in the virtual hearing can share their computer screen with the other participants so all can see the documents that are being presented.

8. What if one of my witnesses does not have a computer or smartphone?

Each video conference invitation includes two options for joining the meeting, one for video and one for telephone. If you have a witness who can only participate by phone, notify the Coordinator before the hearing so a call-in number can be provided.

9. What happens if I have technical difficulties and I'm late to the hearing?

If you had a practice session and/or the video app has worked for you in the past, but on the day of the hearing, you are having trouble joining the hearing, you should let the Coordinator know right away. The hearing examiner may allow up to 15 minutes to resolve any glitches or may reschedule the hearing. Please note: it is your responsibility to test the virtual meeting app prior to the hearing. If you decline the practice session and your technology isn't working on the day of the hearing and you are unable to join, the hearing may be dismissed.

10. What happens if I miss the virtual hearing?

If you don't attend the virtual hearing, without good cause (a valid excuse), your hearing will be dismissed and will result in a decision against you. If you have a good reason for missing the hearing, you can request one continuance of your hearing. After one continuance, if you request a second continuance, without just cause, the petition may be dismissed, and you will automatically lose your case.

For any questions, contact the Coordinator, Tamara Rutland, at (202) 724-3748, tamara.rutland@dc.gov or cfsa.fairhearings@cfsa.dc.gov