

**IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR
THE WESTERN DISTRICT OF PENNSYLVANIA**

**STANDING ORDER RE: PUBLIC ACCESS
TO ALL REMOTE COURT PROCEEDINGS**

Though not “absolute,” the public’s right to access judicial proceedings and records is “beyond dispute” and well-grounded in “historical experience and societal utility.” *Littlejohn v. Bic Corp.*, 851 F.2d 673, 678 (3d Cir. 1988). Indeed, as the Third Circuit has repeatedly emphasized, “the bright light cast upon the judicial process by public observation diminishes possibilities for injustice, incompetence, perjury, and fraud.” *Id.* Perhaps even more importantly, open and easy access to court proceedings also provides the public with a “more complete understanding of the judicial system and a better perception of its fairness.” *Id.*

In the modern era, however, preserving “public access” requires more than just allowing physical access to the courtroom. Increasingly, important judicial proceedings are conducted by video or telephone. The Court is mindful of these changes and determined to ensure that they do not diminish the transparency and openness of its proceedings. At the same time, the Court must be careful to maintain appropriate control over access to its Chambers’ telephone and video conference rooms. Thus, to balance these important concerns, it is **HEREBY ORDERED** the following practices shall govern public access to all remote proceedings:

1. A calendar of all scheduled court proceedings, including telephonic and video proceedings, is available to the public on the [Court’s website](#). Members of the public or press who wish to observe remote proceedings will be permitted to do so, and accommodated to the maximum extent practicable, except when such proceedings are ordered sealed or closed to the public by the Court as authorized by law.

2. Anyone interested in attending the Court's telephone or video proceedings may do so by emailing the Court's Courtroom Deputy, Alex Vahlsing, at alexander_vahlsing@pawd.uscourts.gov, at least three (3) hours prior to the scheduled hearing, to request access instructions.

3. Currently, all of the Court's video proceedings are conducted using the freely available "Zoom" app, which can be downloaded and installed on any smart phone, tablet, or computer device and used without registering an account. The Court will not modify the proceeding based on any technical problems encountered by a public observer. As such, the Court recommends that all public observers access Zoom with an internet speed of at least 3 mbps (though lower speeds and cellular access may work) and perform a Zoom test. For all public observers of video proceedings, the Court will disable their video and mute their microphones for the entirety of the proceeding. Only the Court, court staff, counsel, and testifying witnesses may speak, display video, or otherwise participate in remote proceedings.

4. Consistent with Local Rule 83.1, during all telephonic and video proceedings, all forms, means and manner of taking photographs, recording, broadcasting, and televising are prohibited.

5. Any questions about the Court's public-access policies may be directed to its Courtroom Deputy via the email address above.

DATED: May 5, 2020

/s/ J. Nicholas Ranjan
United States District Judge