



## Tips For Making A Virtual Hearing Record

The Federal Court Reporters of the Western District of Pennsylvania would like to offer some tips that will help to ensure an accurate record when using Zoom or otherwise.

**Audio:** Your iPad or laptop likely has a mic and speakers built in and while the noise cancellation technology is good, using a quality headset with a mic will ensure the best possible audio for all, especially the court reporter. When you can't hear because audio cuts out, the court reporter can't either. The flow is smoother if counsel or the judge asks the witness to repeat.

**Directional Mics:** When you are right in front of a directional mic, it is great; but if you turn your head, move back away from the mic, or are shuffling papers, it is very hard to understand what is being said.

**Names:** Participants should rename themselves when they join a Zoom meeting so that their first and last name and any other relevant identifying information appears on the screen. Example, rather than "John," "John Doe, AUSA" This can be done by clicking the "More" button next to one's name and then selecting "Rename."

**Witnesses:** If prospective witnesses will be testifying via cellphone, it is highly recommended for them to use earphones for enhanced audio and less background noise.

**Screen Presence:** It is extremely helpful for the court reporter to see the speaker's face. Position the camera so your face is in the center. Light in front vs. behind makes for a clearer picture. Also, occasionally look at the court reporter. If they look like they are struggling, slow down and/or ask the witness to repeat.

**Objections:** If you need to interrupt, which we strongly discourage, repeat the same words twice in a row as there is a small delay when you speak. Example, "Excuse me. Excuse me." "I object. I object."

**Check Your Internet Speeds:** Having a strong broadband connection is essential. Zoom claims a minimum of 1.5Mbps. However, the higher the speed the better, at least 3.5 Mbps for videoconferencing.

**Devices:** To prevent echoing, have only one device in the same room connected to the same Zoom invite.

**Use a Hardwired Connection:** The stronger the connection, the less likely you will freeze or drop. If you can, connect your computer to your router by an ethernet cable. If you're unable to run an ethernet cable, check your signal strength before joining.

**Use of Exhibits:** If you are planning to quote from exhibits, please send them to the court reporter to ensure a correct transcription.

**Speak Slowly and Articulately:** For an accurate record, it's important to focus on your speech and the speed with which you are speaking. Speak clearly into your mic and wait for others to finish before you continue. This problem is worse when people are reading into the record. Slow down.

**Refrain from Interrupting:** When multiple parties are talking over each other, a word or several words may be dropped. Try to wait until a speaker is finished before you respond.

**Zoom Invites:** Although freelance court reporters send out their own Zoom invites, for court chamber staff, please send out Zoom invites at least a day before the proceeding. The court reporter can then be set up and ready well in advance of the start of the proceeding.

**Spelling:** Many names sound alike such as White and Wyatt. Acronyms can be hard to understand, too. Was it CNN or C&N? Please spell all proper names. When quoting from a citation, state the whole citation and/or spell the case name.

**Cacophony of Sounds:** Rustling papers, clicking your pen, playing with the cellophane wrappers from the candy dish are all broadcast at voice levels.

**Mute:** If not speaking, mute device to avoid background noise. Also, when not muted, discourage private conversations while others are speaking.

**Breaks:** Zoom screen fatigue is a real thing. Regular breaks help the court reporter and the witness, too.