

United States District Court
Southern District of Texas
ENTERED

June 30, 2021

Nathan Ochsner, Clerk of Court

By Deputy Clerk



UNITED STATES BANKRUPTCY COURT
SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF TEXAS
ALL DIVISIONS

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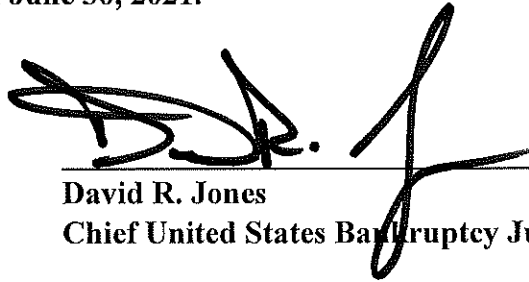
GENERAL ORDER 2021-5

POST-COVID REOPENING PLAN

ORDER

1. Pursuant to the unanimous vote of the judges, the Court adopts the attached Post-COVID Reopening Plan (the "Plan"). The Plan is subject to periodic change as circumstances warrant. The current version of the Plan will be found on the Court's website.

SIGNED at Houston, Texas on June 30, 2021.



David R. Jones
Chief United States Bankruptcy Judge

**UNITED STATES BANKRUPTCY COURT
FOR THE SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF TEXAS
ALL DIVISIONS**

POST-COVID REOPENING PLAN

1. Purpose of Plan.

This Post-COVID Reopening Plan is issued to provide guidance regarding hearings before the Bankruptcy Court following the anticipated resumption of in-person hearings on September 7, 2021. The Court intends to ensure due process while minimizing attendance costs -and maximizing each judge's flexibility to address the specific needs of individual cases.

2. Technology Improvements.

Audio will continue to be broadcast on the Court's telephone dial-in facility. Video will be broadcast utilizing the GoToMeeting platform. Existing dial-in numbers and GoToMeeting rooms will remain unchanged. The attached **Exhibit A** contains connection information for each judge.

Each courtroom will be equipped with additional video cameras focused on the bench, the podium and the witness stand.

3. Conduct of Hearings.

All parties in interest are encouraged to participate by remote connection for routine hearings. Subject to the balance of this paragraph and unless an in-person appearance is ordered, parties-in-interest may choose to attend any hearing in-person or remotely. Absent exigent circumstances, persons who participate remotely must connect by both video and audio connection.

A. Chapter 13 Panel Hearings.

- (1) For hearings that are typically heard on a chapter 13 panel, the chapter 13 trustees and their attorneys and staff will participate only by remote connection.
- (2) Subject to paragraph 3(A)(1), in-person attendance is permitted by any party-in-interest. The Court may continue a hearing for cause shown, on the oral motion of the chapter 13 trustee or any other party-in-interest, to allow all parties to be present for an in-person hearing.
- (3) Each judge intends to schedule in-person hearings at a time that is separate from chapter 13 panel hearings, and to give parties and witnesses a reasonable opportunity to schedule and prepare for the in-person hearings.

B. Hearings in Contested Matters and Adversary Proceedings.

- (1) Unless otherwise ordered, parties, counsel and witnesses may attend any hearing either by remote means or by in-person attendance.
- (2) Counsel to contesting parties may stipulate to remote attendance only using the form of stipulation attached as **Exhibit B**. If a stipulation is filed, the Court will enforce the stipulation against the signatories to the stipulation.
- (3) The Court may require in-person attendance at a hearing. The Court anticipates that this requirement will ordinarily apply in matters that will require extended testimony or argument.

C. Hearings in Complex Bankruptcy Cases and their Related Adversary Proceedings.

The Procedures for Complex Bankruptcy Cases will govern the conduct of hearings in cases that are designated as complex cases, and in any related adversary proceedings.

D. Hybrid Hearings.

The Court anticipates that some hearings will simultaneously have both in-person and remote participants.

All in-person presentations of documents must be made through the GoToMeeting platform. In-person attendees must bring their own devices with wi-fi capability to present documents.

4. Exhibits.

If a party-in-interest intends to introduce documents into evidence at a remote or at an in-person hearing, the documents must be filed on CM/ECF. A witness and exhibit list should be filed as a document, with each exhibit being filed as a separate attachment to the witness and exhibit list. For example, if there are three exhibits, and the next CM/ECF document sequence is 101, the witness and exhibit list will be ECF document 101, exhibit 1 will be ECF document 101-1, exhibit 2 will be ECF document 101-2, and exhibit 3 will be ECF document 101-3.

5. Variance from Guidelines.

Each judge may vary the application of these guidelines in an individual case, as determined in the judge's discretion.

EXHIBIT A

Judge	Dial-in Number for Audio	Conference Code for Audio	GoToMeeting meeting code
Judge Isgur	832-917-1510	954554	JudgeIsgur
Judge Jones	832-917-1510	205691	JudgeJones
Judge Lopez	832-917-1510	590153	JudgeLopez
Judge Norman	832-917-1510	174086	JudgeNorman
Judge Rodriguez	832-917-1510	999276	JudgeRodriguez

EXHIBIT B

**UNITED STATES BANKRUPTCY COURT
FOR THE SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF TEXAS
_____ DIVISION**

[FULL CASE HEADING]

STIPULATION FOR REMOTE HEARING PARTICIPATION

This Stipulation is made pursuant to paragraph 3(B)(2) of the Southern District of Texas Post-COVID Reopening Plan.

1. The parties to this Stipulation are:

Name of Party	Name of Counsel	Counsel's Law Firm

2. This Stipulation pertains to the hearing scheduled for [insert date and time] on CM/ECF No. _____.

3. Select all that apply:

<input type="checkbox"/>	Counsel for [Names of Parties] will only appear remotely at the hearing identified in paragraph 2. This stipulation applies to all counsel who may be acting for the identified parties.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Witnesses will only appear remotely at the hearing identified in paragraph 2.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Witnesses will appear both remotely and in-person. Counsel must provide a list identifying which witnesses will appear remotely and which will appear in person.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Other:

4. This Stipulation is binding when it is electronically filed with the Clerk. This Stipulation may not be modified except by Court order.

Dated: _____

[ADD SIGNATURE BLOCKS]