

COURT PROCEDURES AND PRACTICE TIPS

Judge David R. Jones

August 11, 2020

1) Contact with Court and Court Personnel.

- a) All requests for relief should be in the form of written motions filed with the Clerk of the Court. For procedural questions, such as scheduling, parties should contact the Court's case manager: Albert Alonzo by email at Albert.Alonzo@txs.uscourts.gov or phone at (713) 250-5467 (office) or 832-993-7656 (mobile or text). If Mr. Alonzo is unavailable and an emergency exists, please contact Judge Jones' (i) courtroom deputy, Vriana Portillo by email at Vriana_Portillo@txs.uscourts.gov or phone at (713) 250-5713 or (ii) law clerk, Jeannie Andresen by email at Jeannie.Andresen@txs.uscourts.gov or phone at (713) 250-5673.
- b) *Ex parte* contact with Judge Jones about pending cases is strictly prohibited. All communications about pending cases should be made on the record in open court. "Chambers' conferences" will not be conducted under any circumstances.
- c) At Judge Jones' direction, his staff may contact counsel as the need arises. If such contact is made, please refrain from engaging in discussions regarding legal matters which are not the subject of the call.

2) Obtaining Settings for Hearings.

Unless otherwise specifically ordered, all hearings are evidentiary.

- a) **Self-Calendaring.** Certain motions such as fee applications may (but are not required to) be self-calendared. When an eligible motion is filed in the Court's electronic filing system (CM/ECF), the system will prompt the filer for the date of a hearing. Only a date that is listed as an available date on the Court's website should be selected. You must select a date that is at least 25 days from the date that you file the motion. **All motions for relief from stay (§ 362) and objections to claims must be self-calendared for a hearing.** You must select a date that is designated as available in CM/ECF.
- b) **Settings by the Court.** If a pleading is filed for which self-calendaring is not available or if an eligible motion is not self-calendared, the Court will review the pleading and either rule on the motion or set a hearing. Objections should indicate whether a hearing is requested.

3) **Pending Motions and Applications.**

Motions will not ordinarily be considered until at least 25 days after filing. If the Court has not ruled on a motion within 30 days after filing, parties should contact the Court's case manager to inquire about the status of the motion. Applications to employ should comply with Bankruptcy Local Rules 2014-1, 9003-1 and 9013-1(e) and FED. R. BANKR. P. 6003. **Please note that Bankruptcy Local Rule 9013-1(b) does not apply to employment applications.**

After the expiration of one business day after a response deadline has passed, and with no response filed, counsel for the movant may file a Certificate of No Objection ("CNO"), stating that no objection/response was filed. By filing the CNO, counsel for the movant represents to the Court that the movant is unaware of any objection to the motion or application and that counsel has reviewed the Court's docket and no objection/response appears thereon. Upon receipt of the CNO, the Court may enter the order without further notice or hearing. Once the order is entered, the hearing scheduled on the motion is cancelled.

Objection(s) to a motion, application, objection to claim or other pleading filed with the Court may be resolved by filing an agreed form of order filed with a Certificate of Counsel ("CoC") consistent with this paragraph. The CoC must be signed by counsel with a certification that all known objections have been resolved by the agreed form of order. A CoC should not be filed if it resolves less than all filed objections. If there is an applicable objection deadline, the CoC may not be filed until twenty-four (24) hours after that deadline. Upon receipt of the CoC, the Court may enter the order attached to the CoC without further notice or hearing.

Every motion, CNO and CoC should include a proposed form of order. Proposed orders should be filed as a separate attachment and have no cover page. Proposed orders should also attach copies of any referenced exhibits. Any CNO or CoC that includes a proposed form of order that varies from the original proposed order must include (a) a redline of the revised form of order against the order filed with the subject motion and (b) a clean copy of the form of order without a cover page.

4) **Emergency Motions.**

Emergency motions should be filed using the CM/ECF event code for an "emergency motion." **When filing an emergency motion, please identify the date by which emergency relief is needed just below the language required by Local Bankruptcy Rule 9013-1(b) and include a short explanation of the nature of the emergency. The Court strongly urges movants seeking emergency relief to notify the Court's case manager upon the filing of the motion.**

5) **Expedited Motions.**

Motions that are not emergency motions but which require consideration prior to the standard 21-day response time may be styled as an "Expedited Motion." Expedited motions should be filed using the "Expedited" CM/ECF event code. **When filing an expedited motion, (i) please identify the date by which expedited relief is needed just below the language**

required by Local Bankruptcy Rule 9013-1(b); and (ii) include an explanation in the body of the motion setting forth why expedited consideration is required and the harm that will be suffered if expedited relief is not obtained. **The Court strongly urges movants seeking expedited relief to notify the Court's case manager upon the filing of the motion.**

6) **Continuances.**

A continuance may only be requested by motion. Parties are requested to contact the Court's case manager as soon as the motion is filed. All motions for a continuance should concisely state the reason a continuance is being requested; whether the continuance is agreed; and the amount of additional time that is needed. Until a motion for continuance is granted, all parties should assume that no continuance will occur.

7) **Extensions of Deadlines.**

If the parties wish to modify deadlines that do not impact the Court's calendar, such as extensions of discovery deadlines or the date for filing an answer in an adversary proceeding prior to an initial scheduling conference, the parties may agree among themselves to such extensions without the necessity of a court order so long as the agreement is embodied in a writing (such as a stipulation) filed with the Court. All other extensions, such as a party's deadline to respond to a pending motion, or a request to change a hearing date, require a written motion and order from the Court.

8) **Video/Telephonic Participation.**

- a) Counsel are permitted to participate in hearings by video/telephone without prior permission of the Court.
- b) Witnesses may not be examined nor evidence offered by telephone/video, except in emergency situations in which the Court determines sufficient cause exists to waive the prohibition.
- c) **The Court's dial-in line is live.** Do not use a speakerphone when addressing the court. When not speaking, parties should mute their line. Parties participating by phone must assure that no background noise is transmitted, including music, typing and third-party conversations, etc. **Parties are encouraged to use a headset/earphones.**
- d) The following dial-in instructions should be used:

The dial-in number is **832-917-1510**. You will be responsible for your own long-distance charges. You will be asked to key in the conference room number. Judge Jones' conference room number is **205691**.

Once the code is entered, you will be connected **live** to the courtroom. You will be able to hear persons speaking in the courtroom and other persons on the call addressing the Court. You will be able to address the Court directly. The Court will

hear all sound on your line. **PLEASE mute your line if you are not addressing the Court.**

If there are multiple parties on the call, the Court may activate the “hand raise” feature. The system will announce that this feature has been activated. If the hand raise feature has been activated, you will not be able to address the Court until the Court addresses you or you request to speak and the Court grants the request. If you wish to address the Court, you must press 5*. Within 5 seconds, the Court will receive a signal that you wish to speak. When the Court calls on you, you will hear a recorded message that you have been recognized. When you are done, the Court will again mute your call.

Details regarding the use of the conferencing system are available at <https://www.conferencecalling.com/help>

- e) Video participation is available via GoToMeeting. To use GoToMeeting, the Court recommends that you download the free GoToMeeting application prior to the hearing. If a browser connection is used, Chrome is generally recommended. A mobile version of the application is also available. The meeting code is “judgejones”. You may also connect directly by clicking the link on Judge Jones’ home page on the Southern District of Texas website. Once connected, click the settings icon in the upper right corner and enter your name under the personal information setting.
- f) Audio recordings of all non-chapter 13 panel hearings will normally be available on CM/ECF using CourtSpeak. The audio file will be reflected on the docket as an .mp3 filed embedded within a .pdf document. The .pdf file will contain basic instructions for accessing the audio file.

9) **Discovery Disputes.**

Discovery disputes that cannot be resolved between the parties should ordinarily be submitted by written motion. However, if a dispute arises during an oral deposition or Rule 2004 examination, a party may contact the Court’s case manager during the questioning and request a telephonic hearing with the Court.

10) **Settlements.**

- a) If a matter is settled, please immediately contact the Court’s case manager so that the Court may readjust court resources accordingly.
- b) If reduced to writing and signed by all parties prior to a scheduled hearing/trial, a proposed settlement should be filed with the Clerk of the Court. If the proposed settlement has been filed, then only one counsel is required to attend the scheduled hearing/trial, though all interested parties are invited to attend. Telephonic attendance is permitted under this paragraph.
- c) If a proposed settlement has not been reduced to writing and signed by all parties prior to a scheduled hearing, all parties must appear and announce the terms of the settlement into

the record. Once the terms of a settlement are announced, the Court will consider the parties bound by the agreement subject only to court approval as required.

- d) If a settlement requires approval pursuant to Federal Rule of Bankruptcy Procedure 9019, **a motion seeking approval of the settlement should be filed in the main bankruptcy case only.** Along with the motion, parties should submit a proposed form of order approving the settlement in the main case and a proposed form of judgment or dismissal order in the adversary proceeding (if applicable).

11) Courtesy Copies.

The Court does not need to receive copies of documents that have been electronically filed with the Clerk of the Court via CM/ECF.

In chapter 9 and 11 cases, parties are requested to submit proposed confirmation orders in MS Word format to the Court's case manager at least 24 hours prior to the scheduled confirmation hearing.

12) Courtroom Technology.

All courtrooms are equipped with technology that will allow parties to broadcast exhibits and other documents to opposing parties, witnesses and the Court from the display output on most laptop computers and tablets or via wifi using GoToMeeting. Judge Jones' Houston courtroom is also equipped with AirMedia technology to allow wireless connection to the broadcasting system.

13) Wireless.

The courtroom is equipped with wireless access to the internet. The wireless connection is "Jones_Crt_AW". The network key is djones_crt.

14) Exhibits.

- a) All hard copy exhibits should be clearly marked, tabbed and bound in a 3-ring notebook or another binding method that allows the exhibit book to be opened and lay flat on an even surface. In addition to copies for opposing parties, counsel should bring two hard copies of the exhibits to the scheduled hearing or trial—one for the Court and one for witnesses.
- b) The Court will strictly enforce Bankruptcy Local Rule 9013-2. **Unless otherwise specifically ordered or stated in the Local Rules, all hearings are evidentiary.**

15) Corpus Christi and Laredo.

Judge Jones holds hearings in Corpus Christi and Laredo. Hearing dates in each division will be published on Judge Jones' home page. If parties in these divisions require expedited or emergency relief, they should contact the Court's case manager for an alternative setting.

16) Conditional Approval of Disclosure Statements in Certain Chapter 11 Cases.

Under appropriate circumstances, the Court will consider motions for expedited approval of a disclosure statement. The Court will also consider motions requesting conditional approval of a disclosure statement in all chapter 11 cases.

17) Fee Applications.

a) Fee Applications in cases under chapters 7, 9, 11, 12 and 15

Applications for compensation and reimbursement in cases under chapters 7, 9, 11, 12 and 15 must contain a summary table on the first page of the application. A sample document for chapter 11 in Word format containing the table is available on the Court's website. In addition, all applications shall (i) include a narrative description of the services performed and the benefits of those services; (ii) address the factors set forth in 11 U.S.C. § 330(a)(3); and (iii) attach copies of all fee statements and a proposed form of order.

b) Fee Applications in cases under chapter 13.

Pursuant to the local rules on fee applications, approved *fixed fee applications* do not require the filing of subsequent applications. Otherwise, applications for compensation and reimbursement in cases under chapter 13 shall contain a summary table beginning on the first page of the application. A Word document containing the table is available on the Court's website. In addition, all applications shall (i) include a narrative description of the services performed and the benefits of those services; and (ii) attach copies of all fee statements and a proposed form of order.

The proposed order shall, at a minimum, contain the following paragraph:

It is ordered that [name of applicant], is awarded fees and costs as an administrative expense for the period _____ through _____ as follows:

Fees: \$ _____

Expenses: \$ _____

Total: \$ _____

[Name of applicant] is authorized to apply its retainer in the amount of \$ _____ against the awarded compensation.