

RCW 7.105.205 Hearings—Remote hearings. (1) Hearings on protection orders, including hearings concerning temporary protection orders, full protection orders, compliance, reissuance, renewal, modification, or termination, may be conducted in person or remotely in order to enhance access for all parties.

(2) In the court's discretion, parties, witnesses, and others authorized by this chapter to participate in protection order proceedings may attend a hearing on a petition for a protection order, or any hearings conducted pursuant to this chapter, in person or remotely, including by telephone, video, or other electronic means where possible. No later than three judicial days before the hearing, the parties may request to appear at the hearing, with witnesses, remotely by telephone, video, or other electronic means. The court shall grant any request for a remote appearance unless the court finds good cause to require in-person attendance or attendance through a specific means.

(3) Courts shall require assurances of the identity of persons who appear by telephone, video, or other electronic means. Courts may not charge fees for remote appearances.

(4) Courts shall not post or stream proceedings or recordings of protection order hearings online unless (a) a waiver has been received from all parties, or (b) the hearing is being conducted online and members of the public do not have in-person access to observe or listen to the hearing. Unless the court orders a hearing to be closed to the public consistent with the requirements of Washington law, courts should provide access to members of the public who wish to observe or listen to a hearing conducted by telephone, video, or other electronic means.

(5) If a hearing is held with any parties or witnesses appearing remotely, the following apply:

(a) Courts should include directions to access a hearing remotely in the order setting the hearing and in any order granting a party's request for a remote appearance. Such orders shall also include directions to request an interpreter and accommodations for disabilities;

(b) Courts should endeavor to give a party or witness appearing by telephone no more than a one-hour waiting time by the court for the hearing to begin. For remote hearings, if the court anticipates the parties or witnesses will need to wait longer than one hour to be called or connected, the court should endeavor to inform them of the estimated start time of the hearing;

(c) Courts should inform the parties before the hearing begins that the hearing is being recorded by the court, in what manner the public is able to view the hearing, how a party may obtain a copy of the recording of the hearing, and that recording or broadcasting any portion of the hearing by any means other than the court record is strictly prohibited without prior court approval;

(d) To minimize trauma, while allowing remote hearings to be observed by the public, courts should take appropriate measures to prevent members of the public or the parties from harassing or intimidating any party or witness to a case. Such practices may include, but are not limited to, disallowing members of the public from communicating with the parties or with the court during the hearing, ensuring court controls over microphone and viewing settings, and announcing limitations on allowing others to record the hearing;

(e) Courts shall use technology that accommodates American sign language and other languages;

(f) To help ensure that remote access does not undermine personal safety or privacy, or introduce other risks, courts should protect the privacy of telephone numbers, emails, and other contact information for parties, witnesses, and others authorized by this chapter to participate in protection order proceedings, and inform them of these safety considerations. Materials available to persons appearing remotely should include warnings not to state their addresses or telephone numbers at the hearing, and that they should ensure that background surroundings do not reveal their location;

(g) Courts should provide the parties, in orders setting the hearing, with a telephone number and an email address for the court, which the parties may use to inform the court if they have been unable to appear remotely for a hearing. Before dismissing or granting a petition due to the petitioner or respondent not appearing for a remote hearing, or the court not being able to reach the party via telephone or video, the court shall check for any notifications to the court regarding issues with remote access or other technological difficulties. If any party has provided such notification to the court, the court shall not dismiss or grant the petition, but shall reset the hearing by continuing it and reissuing any temporary order in place. If a party was unable to provide the notification regarding issues with remote access or other technological difficulties on the day of the hearing prior to the court's ruling, that party may seek relief via a motion for reconsideration; and

(h) A party attending a hearing remotely who is unable to participate in the hearing outside the presence of others who reside with the party, but who are not part of the proceeding including, but not limited to, children, and who asserts that the presence of those individuals may hinder the party's testimony or the party's ability to fully and meaningfully participate in the hearing, may request a continuance on that basis. Such requests may be granted in the court's discretion. In considering the request, the court may consider the rebuttable presumption against delay and the purpose of this chapter to provide victims quick and effective relief. [2022 c 268 s 13; 2021 c 215 s 25.]

Effective dates—2022 c 268: See note following RCW 7.105.010.