

**UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE
EXECUTIVE OFFICE FOR IMMIGRATION REVIEW
HOUSTON-SMITH ST. IMMIGRATION COURT
1801 SMITH ST., 9th FLOOR
HOUSTON, TEXAS 77002**

STANDING ORDER NO. 01
(PROTOCOLS GOVERNING PROCEEDINGS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC)

Given the severity of the current COVID-19 pandemic, and in consideration of all attendant proclamations and restrictions, the Houston-Smith St. Immigration Court and Annex will implement the precautionary measures listed below.

Effective immediately and until further notice, it is therefore ORDERED as follows:

1. The Court may allow anyone involved in any hearing or proceeding of any kind to participate remotely, such as by teleconferencing or video teleconferencing, as practicable.
2. Attorneys and accredited representatives may elect to make a remote appearance by telephone without filing a motion in advance of a scheduled hearing by calling the Court's main desk at 713-718-3870 at least one business day in advance of the scheduled hearing and providing the following information:
 - a. The client's alien registration number;
 - b. The name of the presiding judge;
 - c. The date of the hearing; and,
 - d. The number at which the attorney or accredited representative can be contacted.
3. To ensure the quality of the record, anyone appearing by telephone shall be in a quiet, private location. The call may never be placed on hold. The use of car phones, speakerphones or phones in public places is prohibited.
4. If an attorney or accredited representative schedules a telephonic appearance and fails to respond when the matter is called, the Court may treat the failure to respond as a failure to appear by the attorney or accredited representative. Scheduling simultaneous appearances in multiple locations does not excuse a failure to appear.
5. Attorneys and accredited representatives who appear by telephone do so with the understanding that paper or electronic filings must be filed in compliance with all deadlines set by the Court or, if none, in accordance with the filing deadlines set forth in the Immigration Court Practice Manual.
6. No filings will be accepted in court on the date of a scheduled hearing unless filed by a *pro se* respondent or applicant. The decision of the presiding judge will be based on documents in the record at the close of the hearing.

7. Filing by mail and electronic means is strongly encouraged. To reduce the threat of contracting or passing the virus, the Court is temporarily accepting motions, pleadings, applications, briefs, notices, and other documents sent by e-mail to Houston.Immigration.Court@usdoj.gov. The filing instructions are found at: <https://www.justice.gov/eoir/filing-email>.
8. The presiding judge reserves the right to halt any remote appearance in progress, to bar any telephone appearances in any case and to order the attorney, accredited representative, respondent, applicant or witness to personally appear.
9. No attorney, accredited representative, respondent, applicant, witness, or member of the public may attend a hearing in person if they have tested positive for COVID-19 in the 14 days prior to the scheduled hearing, have had contact with anyone who has tested positive for COVID-19 in the 14 days prior to the scheduled hearing, have COVID-19 symptoms (fever, cough, shortness of breath), or are under an order to self-quarantine. Parties and counsel shall immediately inform the Court in writing or by calling the main desk at 713-718-3870 if they fall into any of the above-listed categories.
10. Nothing in this Order affects the authority of the presiding judge to exclude persons on a case-by-case basis, including persons exhibiting signs or symptoms of a potentially communicable condition.
11. In-person appearances for scheduled hearings are limited to attorneys, accredited representatives, respondents, applicants, witnesses, Court interpreters, security personnel, and other individuals determined to be essential by the presiding judge.
12. To the extent not already authorized, in all case types, whenever a judge is required to sign an order, judgment, or notification, the judge may electronically sign with a digital signature.

SIGNED, ENTERED, AND ORDERED at Houston, Texas, this 1st day of April, 2020.

Assistant Chief Immigration Judge