



UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
Southern District of Mississippi
Office of the Clerk

Seventh Revised Video-Conferencing Plan

TO: U. S. District and Magistrate Judges
Courtroom Deputy Clerks (CRDs)
Law Clerks
Probation Officers
Criminal Counsel in the Southern District

FROM: Arthur Johnston, Clerk

DATE: February 20, 2025

SUBJECT: Seventh Revised Video-Conference Plan in Response to the
Coronavirus

- (1) In close consultation with the United States Marshals Service (USMS) and its local contract holding facilities, the Court has developed the following Video-Conferencing Plan. To coordinate scheduling, to give advance notice to the local facilities, and to ensure video-conferencing resource availability at the national bridge, all attorneys, probation officers, judges, and chambers staff are asked to adhere to it as much as possible.
- (2) Importantly, video-conferencing is a privilege and is offered as a convenience only. There are no contracts or memoranda of understanding in place. Consequently, the local facilities have the right to disallow this service at any time for any reason or no reason. Matters of security and physical health and safety of facility personnel, inmates, and the public are always paramount. Those availing themselves of this service must be respectful and courteous at all times and comply with any requirements or schedule adjustments which may be necessitated by local facility personnel.
- (3) The USMS' contract holding facilities have agreed to dedicate video-conferencing rooms and equipment for **exclusive federal court use** (to include attorney consultation and probation interviews as they relate to the client's/inmate's

criminal proceeding pending in the U. S. District Court for the Southern District of Mississippi) on the following current¹ schedule:

Facility	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Madison County	8:00 a – 11:00 a	8:00 a – 11:00 a	8:00 a – 11:00 a	8:00 a – 11:00 a	8:00 a – 11:00 a
	1:00 p – 5:00 p	1:00 p – 5:00 p	1:00 p – 5:00 p	1:00 p – 5:00 p	1:00 p – 5:00 p
Stone County	9:30 a – 4:00 p	9:30 a – 4:00 p	9:30 a – 4:00 p	9:30 a – 4:00 p	9:30 a – 12:00 p
Harrison County	9:00 a – 11:00 a 1:00 p – 4:00 p	9:00 a – 11:00 a 1:00 p – 4:00 p	N/A	9:00 a – 11:00 a 1:00 p – 4:00 p	9:00 a – 11:00 a 1:00 p – 4:00 p
Pearl River County	N/A	8:00 a – 3:00 p	N/A	8:00 a – 3:00 p	N/A
Plaquemines Parish	9:00 a – 4:00 p	9:00 a – 4:00 p	9:00 a – 4:00 p	9:00 a – 4:00 p	9:00 a – 4:00 p
Forrest County	8:00 a – 5:00 p	N/A	8:00 a – 5:00 p	8:00 a – 5:00 p	8:00 a – 5:00 p

- (4) Apart from the procedures described herein, the Madison County Detention Center has agreed that the following option is also available to defense counsel and probation officers on any weekday or weekend day from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. If on a weekend day, defense counsel and probation officers are advised to press the call button, upon arrival, for entry to the lobby.
- (5) Private, non-recorded consultation **in person** behind Plexiglass in the facility's consultation room which is fully sanitized after every use. Neither counsel nor probation officers will have any personal contact with anyone else in the facility. To utilize this option, defense counsel and probation officers may simply appear at the detention center and request the consultation with Sgt. Branch in the waiting area.
- (6) Apart from the procedures described herein, the Stone County Regional Correctional Facility requires that all attorneys and probation officers call (601) 928-7042 Ext 0 to let the operator know when the video-conference has ended. The attorney and probation officer should remain on the video-conference screen until an officer removes the inmate and ends the video-conference.
- (7) All video-conference requests, whether by probation officers, FPD or CJA counsel, or CRDs, must be submitted by sending an email to Video_Hearings@mssd.uscourts.gov. The request should include the following information:

¹ A facility's schedule or availability may change, with or without advance notice. As a result, a scheduled video-conference may need to be rescheduled. In such instance, the requestor will be notified, and an alternate date and time will be requested or proposed.

Facility:	
Requestor:	
Client/Inmate:	
Participant Names:	
Purpose: (i.e., attorney-client meeting / PSI Interview)	
Preferred Date/Time:	
Alternate Date/Time:	
Duration:	

An alternate date and time must also be included. Failure to include an alternate date and time, or any other requested information, may result in a delay in scheduling the requested video-conference. A shared calendar **will** be made available for court users, so that chambers staff may see what is scheduled and when.

- (8) **Whitney Dilmore** with the Jackson Clerk's Office will be the court's primary point of contact for matters to be scheduled through the facilities outlined in section (1) above, with **Patrick Watson** and **Trey Mitchell** serving as additional points of contact.

Keithfer Robinson will (a) serve as the district's overall video-conferencing project manager, (b) provide daily in-courtroom assistance during "court" weeks, (c) ensure emails from the shared inbox are routing properly, (d) provide leadership and support to Dilmore, Watson, and Mitchell, and (e) trouble-shoot the entire process throughout.

- (9) Video-conferences will be scheduled on a first come, first served basis.² Dilmore, Watson, or Mitchell will monitor the Video Hearings email account and, when a request is submitted, will schedule the date and time requested (or the alternate date and time requested). If neither the requested nor alternate dates and times are available, then Dilmore, Watson, or Mitchell will reply with proposed dates and times.
- (10) All video-conference requests included in an email must be related to the same facility. If a request is received containing multiple video-conferences for multiple facilities, then the requestor will be asked to resubmit their request.

Those wishing to schedule video conferences should refrain from contacting Robinson, Watson, Mitchell, or Dilmore directly, unless no confirmation has been received after 24 hours of submission to the Video Hearings email address.

² A court hearing will take priority over an attorney and probation consultation. Therefore, an already scheduled attorney or probation consultation will be rescheduled if the same is scheduled during a time the court hearing has been set.

- (11) **Advance notice is critical, and at least one (1) week** advance notice is necessary for video conferencing, so please use best efforts to schedule court proceedings and attorney and probation consultations as much ahead of time as possible -- and stick to them as much as possible.
- (12) Video-conference requests will not be responded to on days the Clerk's office is closed – weekends and holidays.³ Requests received on such days will be responded to the following business day on which the Clerk's office is open. In addition, video conferences will not be scheduled on days the Clerk's office is closed even if the facility is open.
- (13) As noted above, the scheduling of a video-conference is a privilege allowed by the USMS and its local contract holding facilities. As such, the USMS and/or the local contract holding facility may deny any request, with or without advance notice. Suspected and/or confirmed use of video-conferencing outside the intended purpose, may result in the cancellation of and/or denial of any future requests submitted by the requesting party.
- (14) The Court or the local facility may limit video conferences to less time than is requested due to an increase in video conference requests and/or court proceedings which will take priority.
- (15) Separate attorney/client consultations during the midst of court proceedings will take place by muting the incoming sound at the courtroom control panel such that only the inmate, defense counsel, and interpreter can be heard. IT staff will be present to facilitate.
- (16) As much as possible, initial appearances, arraignments and detention hearings should be fit into the schedule set forth above, with the caveat that some attorney consultations and probation visits may be pre-empted when arrests are made at times not conducive to the schedule. Jails will be asked to make special accommodation for these matters outside the schedule whenever possible.
- (17) The Federal Public Defender and the U. S. Attorney's Office have developed and agreed upon certain "Consent to Proceed by Videoconference" forms specific to the various proceedings that may take place by video. It is preferable that the judges use the forms.
- (a) **For proceedings before District Judges**, the forms will be made available to the prisoner at the facilities during attorney consultations and signed at that time by the prisoner if agreeable. On Friday afternoons of the consultation weeks, the USMS will collect all signed forms and return them to the assigned District Judge's CRD for other signatures and docketing.

³ A list of holiday closures can be found on the court's website at www.mssd.uscourts.gov.

- (b) **For proceedings before Magistrate Judges,** the CRD will email the forms needed for that particular proceeding, including the applicable “Consent to Proceed by Videoconference” form, to the contacts at the contract holding facility who will print them. The forms will be presented to the defendant for signature during the video-conference hearing, and the signed forms will be scanned and returned by email to the CRD. The originals will be collected each week by the USMS as noted in subparagraph 12 (a), above.
- (c) **Alternate Arrangements for the Delivery/Retrieval of Forms.** Chambers staff are free to make alternate arrangements for the delivery and retrieval of such forms subject to the agreement of the USMS and the respective holding facility.