



Republic of the Philippines  
Supreme Court  
Manila

**ADMINISTRATIVE CIRCULAR NO. 37 - 2020**

TO : ALL LITIGANTS, JUDGES AND COURT PERSONNEL OF THE FIRST AND SECOND LEVEL COURTS, AND MEMBERS OF THE BAR

RE : PILOT TESTING OF HEARINGS OF CRIMINAL CASES INVOLVING PERSONS DEPRIVED OF LIBERTY THROUGH VIDEOCONFERENCING

Considering the extension of the Enhanced Community Quarantine and the imposition of General Community Quarantine in the different provinces and cities in the country, and the reported infection of some Persons Deprived of Liberty (PDLs) to Covid-19 in the different detention facilities, there is a serious need to further restrain the movement and travel of court users, PDLs, judges and court personnel to further reduce the spread of the dreaded infectious disease. Accordingly, with the concurrence of all the members of the Court, the following directives are hereby issued -

1. The hearings on urgent matters in criminal cases involving PDLs through videoconferencing shall be pilot tested during this period of public health emergency in the following authorized court stations identified by the Office of the Court Administrator (OCA):

All court stations in the National Capital Judicial Region;

Luzon

Region I - La Trinidad, Benguet; Baguio City; Dagupan City, Pangasinan;

Region II - Ilagan, Isabela; Santiago City; Cabagan, Isabela; Roxas, Isabela; and Lubuagan, Kalinga;

Region III - Olongapo City; Balanga City; Mariveles, Bataan; Gapan City; Sto. Domingo, Nueva Ecija; San Fernando, Pampanga; Guagua, Pampanga; Angeles City; Capas, Tarlac;

Region IV - Tanauan, Batangas; Balayan, Batangas; Nasugbu, Batangas; Rosario, Batangas; Tagaytay City; Trece Martires, Cavite; Imus, Cavite; Naic, Cavite; San Pablo City; Calamba, Laguna; Lucena City, Gumaca,

Quezon; Binangonan, Rizal; San Mateo, Rizal; Morong, Rizal; Antipolo City; Boac, Marinduque; Calapan City; Puerto Princesa, Palawan;

Region V - Legazpi City; Naga City; Sorsogon City;

Visayas

Region VI - Iloilo City; Bacolod City; San Jose, Antique; San Carlos City, Negros Occidental;

Region VII - Cebu City; Lapu Lapu City; Mandaue City; Dumaguete City; Tanjay City;

Region VIII - Tacloban City; Ormoc City;

Mindanao

Region IX - Dipolog City; Ipil, Zamboanga Sibugay; Zamboanga City; Pagadian City; Isabela City, Basilan; Jolo, Sulu;

Region X - Cagayan de Oro City; Surigao City; Malaybalay City, Bukidnon;

Region XI - Tandag City; Digos City; Gen. Santos City; Koronadal City; Polomok City; Alabel, Sarangani;

Region XII - Shariff Aguak, Maguindanao; Marawi City; Iligan City; Kidapawan City and Midsayap, North Cotabato.

2. The hearings through videoconferencing shall cover all PDLs and may apply to all stages of trial of newly-filed and pending criminal cases, including but not limited to, arraignment, pre-trial, bail hearings, trial proper, and promulgation of judgment.

3. The courts shall ensure at all times that all the constitutional rights of the accused are protected and observed, including “[t]he rights of the accused to be present and defend in person at every stage of the proceedings, to testify as a witness in his or her own behalf, and to confront and cross-examine the witnesses against him or her at trial,” which the Court en banc, in its Resolution in A.M. No. 19-05-05-SC, dated 25 June 2019, said “are deemed satisfied when such appearance and testimony are made remotely through videoconferencing...”

4. Considering that the remote locations of the participants are extensions of the court, the in-person appearances, testimonies and experiences of the litigants and parties in courts shall always be closely resembled in the remote appearances and testimonies of the litigants and parties in the videoconference proceedings. In the same manner, the dignity and solemnity of in-court proceedings shall at all times be mirrored in videoconference proceedings.

5. For this purpose, the above-mentioned authorized courts shall each be provided with Microsoft Office 365 E1 licenses which have, among others, the Outlook application for their official email accounts, and the Teams application to host the videoconference proceedings. No other platforms shall be used for

the videoconference proceedings, and neither shall the courts use a different email address aside from the authorized account officially provided.

6. It is clearly understood that these hearings in criminal cases through videoconferencing are only for pilot testing, and shall apply only during this public health emergency period.

7. The Office of the Court Administrator shall immediately issue the necessary directives and take the requisite steps to implement this pilot testing of hearings in criminal cases through videoconferencing, and thereafter submit a report to the Court within six (6) months from the implementation of this Administrative Circular, or immediately after the end of this public health emergency period, whichever is earlier.

FOR IMMEDIATE IMPLEMENTATION.

Parañaque City, 27 April 2020

(original signed)  
Hon. Diosdado M. Peralta  
Chief Justice