

Chelan County District Court
350 Orondo Avenue, 4th Level
Wenatchee, WA. 98801

Re: Request for Expanded Availability of Zoom Hearings

Dear Honorable Judges,

We, the undersigned members of the Chelan County defense bar, write to respectfully request broader availability for defendants to appear via Zoom. Given the recent increase in immigration enforcement in our community, we are deeply concerned about the chilling effect this may have on individuals who need to access the court system.

Many of our clients are facing an impossible dilemma: comply with their legal obligations and risk detention, or avoid court altogether and face the consequences of failing to appear. This is not just an immigration issue—it is a fundamental access-to-justice issue. When individuals fear coming to court, it undermines the integrity of our legal system and makes it harder for all parties involved to ensure due process is served.

We recognize that under CrRLJ 3.4, a defendant's presence is required at hearings set by the court, but the rule also grants discretion for remote appearances in many instances. In particular, CrRLJ 3.4(c) allows for remote appearances at the court's discretion, and CrRLJ 3.4(e) states that the court must find good cause to require physical or remote presence for hearings beyond those explicitly listed. Given the current climate, we believe there is good cause to allow greater flexibility in permitting defendants to appear remotely.

As defense counsel, we have an ethical duty to protect our clients, including those who may be particularly vulnerable to immigration enforcement. However, we cannot and should not be placed in the position of having to disclose a client's immigration concerns as a basis for requesting a remote appearance. To do so would violate their privacy, expose them to potential harm, and create an unjust disparity between defendants. Instead, we urge the court to adopt a broad policy allowing all defendants to appear via Zoom whenever possible. This approach ensures equal treatment for all individuals while preserving the discretion of the court to require in-person appearances when truly necessary.

Expanding Zoom hearings will not only enhance access to justice but will also benefit the court by reducing unnecessary failures to appear, improving efficiency, and allowing cases to proceed without disruption. We respectfully ask the court to consider this request and would welcome the opportunity to discuss it further.

Thank you for your time and thoughtful consideration.

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