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**PROBATE COURT OF FRANKLIN COUNTY, OHIO
ROBERT G. MONTGOMERY, JUDGE**

**FILED #29
APR 24 2020
Robert G. Montgomery, Judge
Franklin County Probate Court**

In the Matter of :
COVID-19 Public Health Emergency :
And Court Operations : **Case No. 603535**

**ORDER ON PROCEDURES FOR
UNCONTESTED VIDEO-CONFERENCE ADOPTION HEARINGS**

After careful review and consideration of Governor DeWine’s Executive Order 2020-01D, the Ohio Department of Health’s March 22, 2020 Director’s Stay at Home Order, and in keeping with the spirit of the Supreme Court of Ohio’s guidelines and directives for the operations of courts during this global pandemic, and in the interest of protecting the parties, court staff and general public, with limited exceptions, in-person adoption hearing shall be continued. The court has determined, however, that certain uncontested adoption hearing may be held via video-conference.

Petitioners who are offered the opportunity to conduct an adoption hearing via video-conference may choose to continue their hearing until such time as an in-person hearing can safely be conducted if they choose. All statutory requirements, including post placement visits, shall be required until finalization.

For all hearings that will proceed via video conference, the following guidelines shall be followed. The court is currently using the “Zoom” video-conferencing app. Counsel shall be notified without delay if a new video-conferencing platform is employed by the court.

All statutory requirements for finalization shall be properly filed BEFORE the adoption hearing may proceed via video-conference. A delay in filing the appropriate paperwork shall result in the hearing being continued.

At least 24 hours prior to the hearing, counsel for the petitioners shall be provided with the Meeting ID and Password via email. Counsel shall provide the Meeting ID and Password to the

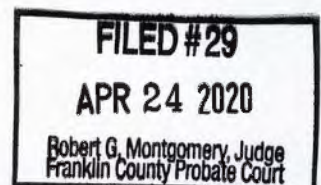
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petitioners and agency representative. Counsel, the petitioner(s), the minor(s), and where required, the agency representative shall join the hearing at the scheduled time. Testimony during the closed portion of the hearing will include confidential and sensitive information. The petitioners shall ensure that they are able to provide such information without the testimony being overheard by the minor or other household members. This is a formal court proceeding which will be recorded by the court, and the participants are requested to conduct themselves accordingly.

Adoption hearings remain confidential proceedings. R.C. 3107.17. To maintain the confidentiality of the minor, petitioner and birth family, the majority of the hearing shall be held without visitors. However, in recognition of the celebratory nature of adoptions, and in understanding that the petitioners may desire to share finalization with their family and friends, prior to the finalization, visitors may be allowed into the video-conference hearing. Counsel may reserve certain non-identifying questions, such as the relationship that has developed between the minor and the petitioners, until all visitors are admitted to the hearing.

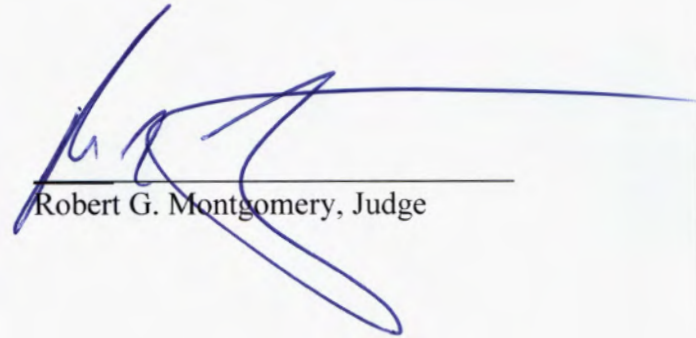
The petitioners are permitted to share the Meeting ID and Password with their family and friends, however, to best protect the confidentiality of the proceeding, the Meeting ID and Password SHALL NOT be shared publicly over social media. All visitors shall remain in the video-conference "waiting room" until admitted by the hearing officer. The court requests that all visitors leave their microphones muted unless and until instructed to unmute the microphone by the court.

All adoption hearings shall be recorded by the court, and an "audio only" version of the video-conference hearing shall be preserved according to statute. Participants in a video-conference hearing are not permitted to make recordings of the hearing, however, still photographs of computer screens are permitted at the discretion of the petitioners.



The court recognizes that the finalization of an adoption is a joyful and celebratory occasion for the participants of the hearing. In order to allow for the timely resolution of cases, the court asks that, in large group settings, the petitioners limit the number of participants who request to comment on the record.

IT IS SO ORDERED.



Robert G. Montgomery, Judge

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