

Best Practices for the use of Zoom with ASL Interpreters in the Courtroom

Zoom (or other video conferencing platforms) can be an effective way for courtroom business to be handled when circumstances require a remote/virtual interpreter. However, in the case of ASL interpreters, there are some special considerations that differ considerably from our foreign language counterparts.

1. Being able to hear ALL the participants within the main Zoom meeting is CRITICAL. We cannot do our job if we only hear the judge but not the attorneys, witnesses or other parties who are speaking.
2. Zoom must be set up PRIOR to the hearing that will require ASL interpreters so that the “auto switch to speaker” feature is turned OFF. Sometimes the settings are such that the “view” or “window” automatically switches to whomever is talking, which makes the interpreter disappear for the party requiring the ASL interpreter.

[How to Disable Auto-Switch to Speaker in Zoom](#)

3. ASL interpreters must be able to SEE the Deaf participant(s) clearly at all times in order to provide sign to voice interpretation for them. Split screens or a wide courtroom view render the Deaf participant as a tiny person and we are unable to see well enough to interpret for them.
4. The Deaf participant(s) must be able to see the ASL interpreter at all times. Generally, providing a laptop to the Deaf participant at counsel table helps with both the interpreter’s ability to access the language of the Deaf person as well as the Deaf person being able to see the interpreter clearly at all times.
5. It is also very helpful for the Deaf participant not to have to turn sideways or otherwise need to sit in such a way that they are not looking forward toward the bench both for visual access and comfort. [e.g. large screens mounted on a side wall are not ideal].

**A good rule of thumb is that if each computer has a link that connects to the main Zoom meeting, the interpreters will be able to access the audio from the microphone at each individual computer – HOWEVER, there needs to be testing of this to ensure that multiple machines in the same room on the same meeting do not cause feedback due to multiple mics being active. Alternatively, the mics on the laptops at counsel tables can be muted and, if they are sufficient in volume, the table mics can be used to enhance audio. Speaking into the mics will take concerted effort by counsel and other participants since ensuring audio access in this way is not second nature.

Other tips:

1. Send interpreters links that allow them to turn on their microphones and cameras and name themselves as ASL interpreters. We can’t work if we aren’t let into the meeting or can’t be seen or be able to speak. Having the ability to send chat messages to the host is also helpful.

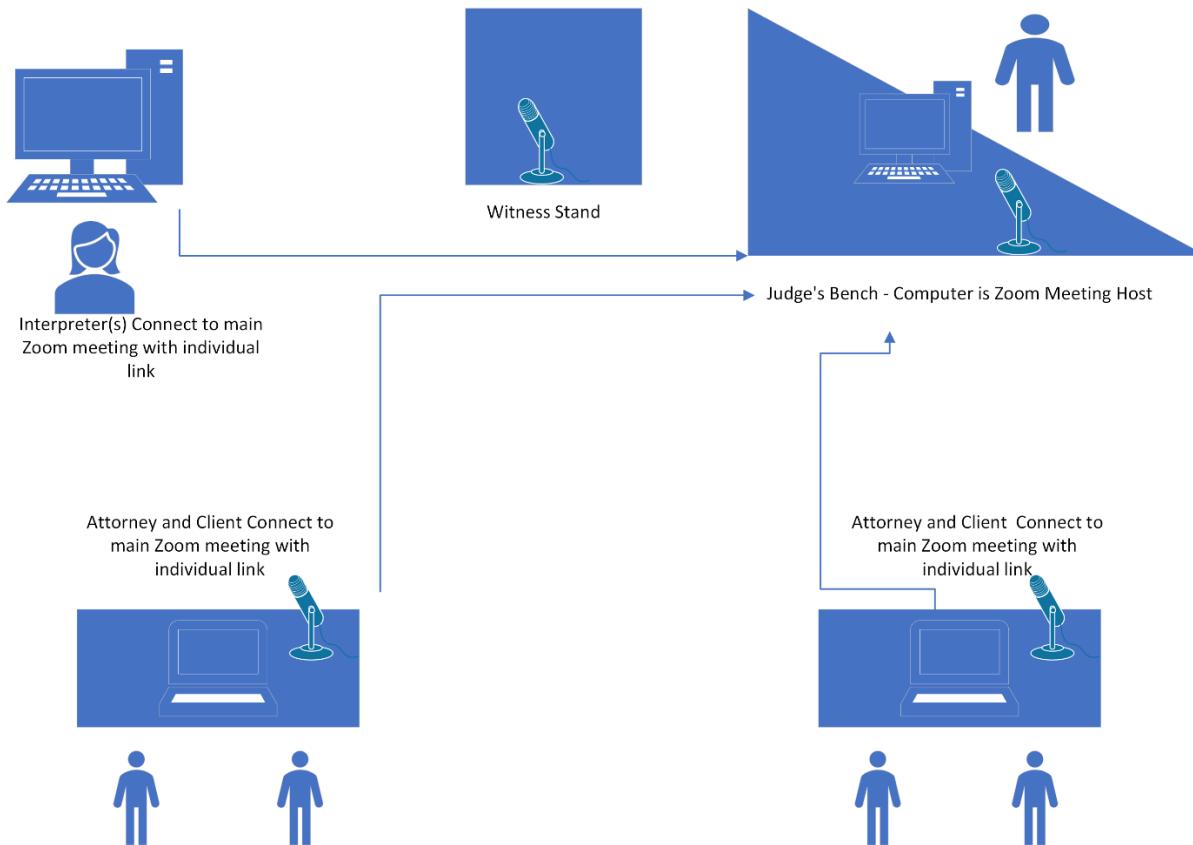
[How to Enable and Disable Participant Video in Zoom](#)

[How to Enable and Disable Participant Mics in Zoom](#)

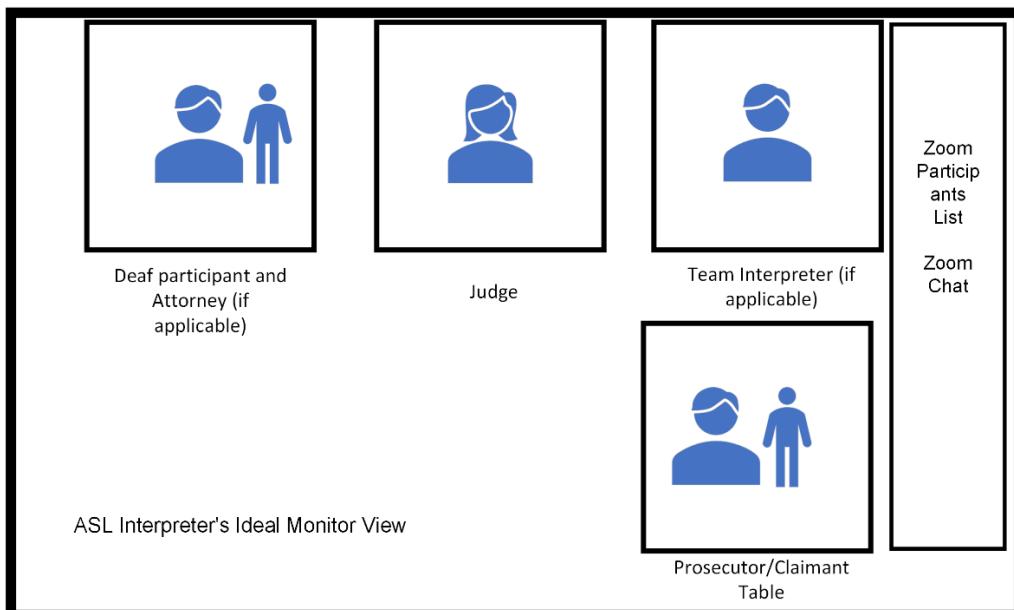
2. Make sure that the interpreters are given the ability to multi-pin at minimum, and potentially spotlight themselves if possible. This will allow the interpreter’s picture to stay in the same place on the screen for the Deaf viewer even if additional people join the Zoom meeting.
3. Allow the Deaf participant to multi-pin as well so they can pin the interpreters on their own screen to make sure that they can see clearly.
4. Enabling the chat feature is helpful to the ASL interpreters when team interpreting – they often use this feature to feed each other information in real time through direct messaging (not visible to others in the meeting). [How to Enable and Disable in-meeting Chat in Zoom](#)

5. Know how all these settings work BEFORE the actual hearing. Trying to troubleshoot this on the fly is both time consuming and frustrating for all involved.

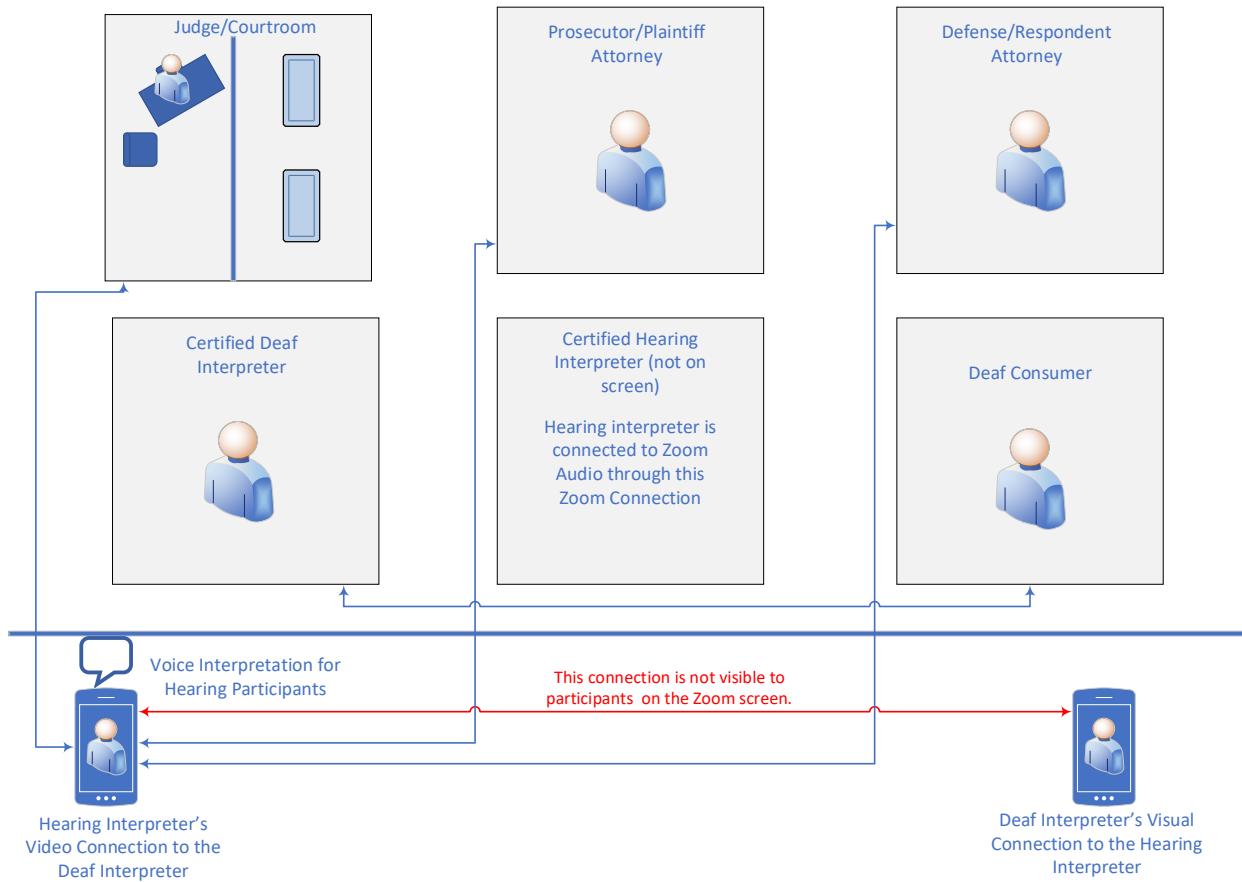
TEST OUT YOUR SYSTEM BEFORE A HEARING IS SCHEDULED TO MAKE SURE EVERYTHING WORKS!!



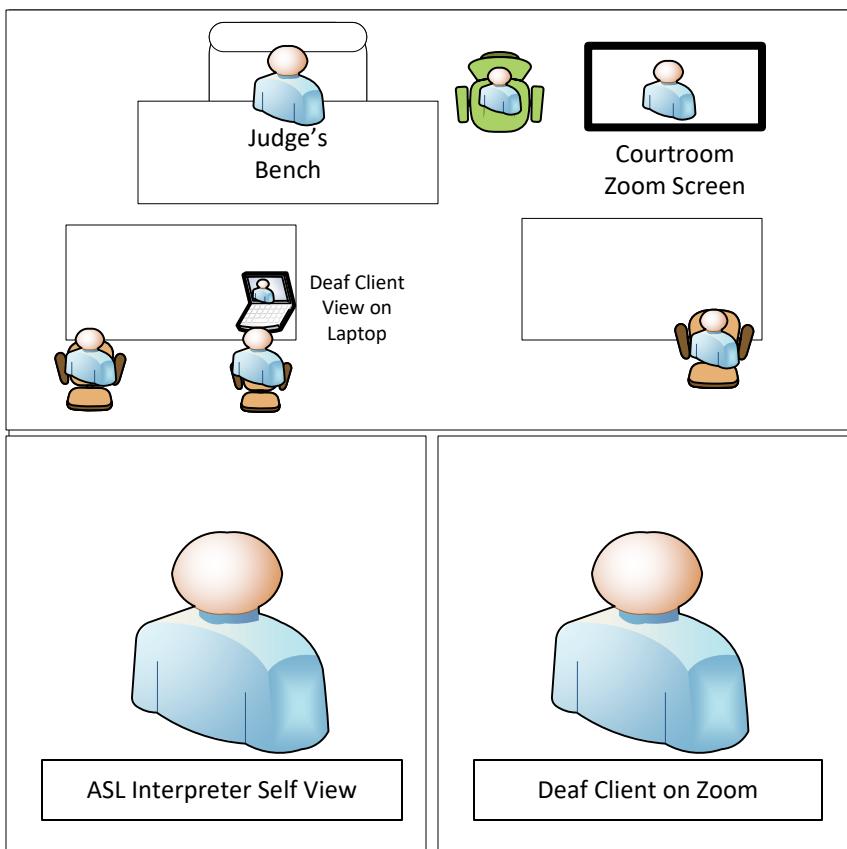
The above picture is a representation of what would be seen in-person by those in the courtroom using a virtual interpreter.



This is a representation of the ASL interpreter's ideal view on their monitor.



Hearing ASL Interpreter's Zoom View



Hearing ASL Interpreter is Remote and Courtroom Personnel and Deaf Client are in-person at the Courthouse

There are a few options for Deaf clients to access Zoom meetings while the client is present in the courtroom.

1. Ideally, the Deaf client will have their own laptop on the table in front of them. This will allow the interpreter to have clear visual access to the ASL interpreter and the ASL interpreter has a clear view of the Deaf client. This solves the problem of the Deaf client appearing very far away on the Zoom screen, and it also solves the problem of the Deaf client having to turn away from the camera facing the courtroom to face an external TV or monitor broadcasting the Zoom meeting to the entire courtroom.

**** Please note**, an external laptop will need to join the Zoom room just as any other participant would join the Zoom room. The Deaf client will need to have the ability to turn on their video so the interpreter can access the Deaf client's signing. The audio on the laptop will need to be muted so there is no feedback by having an additional microphone active on the Zoom meeting. In ANY case, the attorneys will need to be instructed to speak into the microphones so they can be heard on the Zoom connection.

2. The less-desirable way to connect to the interpreter remotely while everyone else is in person at the courthouse, is to have the Deaf client use the camera facing the courtroom to participate in the meeting. This will REQUIRE that the camera be Zoomed in on the Deaf client so the interpreter can access their language. If this can't happen, the Deaf client will be too small and unclear to be seen for an accurate interpretation. The Deaf person would then access the ASL interpreter's interpretation from English to ASL by watching on the external TV or monitor in the courtroom. Depending upon which wall the TV or monitor is mounted on, this may necessitate the Deaf client turning away from the courtroom camera to face the TV screen, so making sure the Deaf client turns back to the camera before beginning to sign.

Both of these scenarios are represented in the above graphic.