

REMOTE HEARINGS

As a Bridge to Justice

Despite the challenges and uncertainty brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, about 90% of all criminal and civil non-trial matters, as well as more than 60% of civil trials, were heard (either fully or partially) through video conferencing technology in 2021. This ensured continued access to justice through remote hearings.

The Courts have used the Zoom platform since the Circuit Breaker in 2020, and no additional fees were charged for lawyers or litigants using it. Each hearing was preceded by a video conference notice issued to the lawyers or self-represented litigants, which provided them with details on how to join the Zoom hearing. The notice also offered instructions on how to use Zoom as well as links to online resources about the technology. Written guides and answers to frequently asked questions (FAQs) continued to be made available on the Courts' website, which provided litigants with information and assistance regarding technical and operational matters.

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In some cases, litigants were able to use video conferencing facilities at the Supreme Court building to attend a remote hearing. This ensured that users without suitable devices could access remote hearings.

Self-represented litigants and witnesses who were unable to come to Singapore owing to travel limitations, or who could not physically attend court due to pandemic-related movement restrictions, were accommodated through the use of video conferencing for their hearings. Interpretation services were also provided remotely to ensure that non-English speakers could participate.

Remote hearings of interlocutory applications and other procedural matters resulted in improved case management efficiency. This reduced the cost of litigation because lawyers and litigants did not need to physically attend court for shorter hearings, which would otherwise have incurred additional time and expense of travelling to court.

Civil Trials

Following a successful pilot in 2020, where a motor accident claim was brought before the Civil Trial Courts and conducted entirely by video conference with all the parties involved, 68 civil trials were conducted remotely in 2021, of which eight were entirely via video conference.



Increased reliance on remote hearings has allowed trials to continue uninterrupted and helped bridge the justice gap.

This initiative allowed civil trials to proceed uninterrupted when parties were unable to attend a physical hearing for pandemic-related reasons, which might have otherwise resulted in the postponement of trial dates or prevented trial dates from being fixed altogether. Remote hearings proved to be particularly useful for industrial accident trials, as many of the plaintiffs were residing overseas and unable to travel to Singapore due to travel restrictions. Remote hearings were also useful for parties who could not attend court physically because they were under quarantine.

The State Courts have received positive feedback on the use of video conferencing for the conduct of civil trials. In line with the principle of open justice, these remote trials are broadcast in the courtroom.



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Therapeutic Justice

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Strengthening
PartnershipsDeveloping
Our CapabilityConnecting With
The Community