

Courtroom Attire in the Coronavirus World

By: Jack Greiner on April 21, 2020 on graydon.law

I attended a hearing in Hamilton County Juvenile court yesterday via Zoom. [As you can see from the photo](#), my attire was bit of a mixed bag. Coat and tie paired with jeans and Chuck Taylor gym shoes. Given that I argued my position in a seated position, this seemed appropriate.

But it made me think about [this New York Times article](#) I read earlier in the week. A judge in Broward County Florida sent [a letter](#) to the local bar association addressing procedures for remote hearings. Included in the letter was this admonition:

“One comment that needs sharing and that is the judges would appreciate it if the lawyers and their clients keep in mind these Zoom hearings are just that: hearings. They are not casual phone conversations. It is remarkable how many ATTORNEYS appear inappropriately on camera. We’ve seen many lawyers in casual shirts and blouses, with no concern for ill-grooming, in bedrooms with the master bed in the background, etc. One male lawyer appeared shirtless and one female attorney appeared still in bed, still under the covers. And putting on a beach cover-up won’t cover up you’re poolside in a bathing suit. So, please, if you don’t mind, let’s treat court hearings as court hearings, whether Zooming or not.”

I think there a couple of issues here. First, did a lawyer really appear shirtless for a hearing? I’m not doubting the judge, but I am having a hard time envisioning a lawyer being that big of a knucklehead I would never do such a thing, partially for reasons of decorum and partially because given the shape I’m in, I don’t even like to take my shirt off at the beach.

But the judge makes a valid bigger point. A hearing is a hearing. It matters. And just because the Coronavirus has necessitated remote access, it shouldn’t bleed over into a casual attitude. Lawyers need to prepare and dress for a Zoom hearing as they would for an in person session. Those who don’t do a disservice to their clients.

I do disagree, though, with his criticism of lawyers who participate from their bedrooms “with the master bed in the background.” Everyone has different circumstances. It’s

possible that the lawyer working from a bedroom has limited space and young kids in the other room. The bedroom may be the only alternative. While judges have every right to insist on appropriate attire and that lawyers actually, you know, get out of bed, they may want to be a little empathetic as it relates to the real challenges everyone faces in an unanticipated work from home world.