



Republic of the Philippines
Supreme Court
Office of the Court Administrator
Manila

OCA CIRCULAR NO. 158 - 2020

TO: ALL JUDGES OF THE FIRST AND SECOND
LEVEL COURTS

RE: REMOTE APPEARANCES OF PARTIES

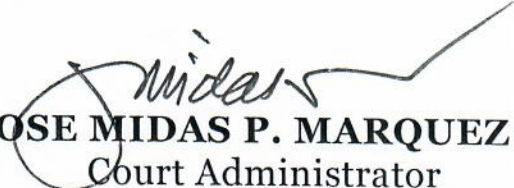
Considering that the entire country remains to be in different levels of Community Quarantine due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and in order to further mitigate the transmission of the virus, there is a continuing need to minimize the number of individuals attending in-court hearings. This is manifested in the letter of the lawyers in the Office of the Solicitor General, dated 9 September 2020, requesting "that its lawyers should not be required to attend in-court hearings until the health situation of the country improves." Similar requests have been relayed by some prosecutors and law practitioners.

Accordingly, upon approval of Chief Justice Diosdado M. Peralta, and pursuant to par. 9, Administrative Circular 45-2020, judges of the first and second level courts, upon proper motion, may allow the parties to appear remotely, without prior permission from the Office of the Court Administrator, provided that judges shall continue to preside over hearings in-court. Prior permission from the Office of the Court Administrator is only necessary if the judge will be presiding over the hearings remotely or out of court.

Judges are likewise reminded to observe utmost caution in resolving a motion for the remote appearance of a witness to be examined, considering that they must be able to properly observe the demeanor, candor, behavior and manner of testifying of the said witness, which may be difficult to do at present in a videoconferencing hearing. Should a party object to a motion for remote appearance, the court, in the interest of justice, safety, and well-being of all concerned, shall exercise its sound discretion in resolving the same.

For the guidance and compliance of all concerned.

22 September 2020


JOSE MIDAS P. MARQUEZ
Court Administrator