



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

OCA CIRCULAR NO. 83-2023

TO : ALL REGIONAL TRIAL COURTS

**SUBJECT : PERIOD TO HEAR, TRY, AND DECIDE
CASES INVOLVING THOSE UNDER THE
WITNESS PROTECTION, SECURITY AND
BENEFIT PROGRAM**

Any person who has witnessed or has knowledge or information on the commission of a crime and has testified or is testifying or about to testify before any judicial or quasi-judicial body, or before any investigating authority, may be admitted into the “Witness Protection, Security and Benefit Program” (Program) implemented by the Department of Justice.¹ Also, a witness in legislative investigations in aid of legislation, with his/her express consent and upon the required recommendation², and any person who has participated in the commission of a crime and desires to be a witness for the State, can apply for and, if qualified, be admitted into the Program.³

The Program provides, among other things, security and protection, a secure housing facility/relocation, assistance in obtaining a means of livelihood, free medical treatment, hospitalization and medicines, and burial benefit.⁴ Owing to the delicate circumstances of such witnesses and/or their families, there is a need to give priority to cases involving them and decide the same expediently.

As such, and in accordance with the mandate of the law to assure a speedy hearing or trial⁵, all concerned courts are **DIRECTED** to **HEAR, TRY, and DECIDE** cases involving those under the Program within the following non-extendible periods:

¹ Republic Act No. 6981, April 24, 1991, An Act Providing for a Witness Protection, Security and Benefit Program and for other Purposes, Sec. 3. *Admission into the Program.*

² Sec. 4. *Witness in Legislative Investigations., ibid.*

³ Sec. 10. *State Witness, ibid.*

⁴ Sec. 8. *Rights and Benefits., ibid.*

⁵ Sec. 9. *Speedy Hearing or Trial., ibid.*

YEARS PENDING	PERIOD TO DECIDE
Cases pending for less than five (5) years	Within three (3) months
Cases pending for five (5) years or more but less than ten (10) years	Within nine (9) months
Cases pending for ten (10) years or more	Within twelve (12) months or one (1) year

An inventory of the above stated cases shall be electronically submitted within **fifteen (15) calendar days** from the date of this Circular through this link <https://forms.office.com/r/0qs2SNqVZd> or by using the QR code below:

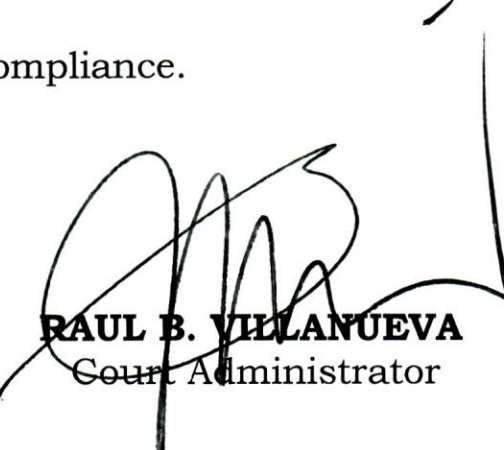


Once the case/s have been decided within the prescribed periods, the same link shall be accessed to update the status of the case/s.

More importantly, priority should be given to the testimonies of witnesses under the Program to be taken primarily thru or via videoconferencing hearing.⁶ Thus, in-person or face-to-face hearings should not be resorted to just to complete the taking of the testimonies of witnesses under the Program.

For strict and immediate compliance.

27 February 2023


RAUL B. VILLANUEVA
 Court Administrator

MMA/ACJ/CP/CircWPP/cek-2-22-23

⁶ following the guidelines in Administrative Matter No. 20-12-01-SC (Re: Proposed Guidelines on the Conduct of Videoconferencing).