

Guide to Virtual Appearances in NYC Civil Court Consumer Credit Cases

Updated: August 8, 2022

Table of Contents

About this Guide	2
What is a virtual court appearance?	3
How do I know if I have a virtual court appearance?	3
Confirming whether your next court appearance is virtual	3
How do I request an interpreter for a virtual court appearance?	4
Call or go to the Court Clerk’s Office	4
Ask for an interpreter during your court appearance	4
What will I need for a virtual court appearance?	5
To appear virtually, you will need:	5
It may also be helpful to have:	5
How can I request a virtual court appearance?	5
Virtual court appearances related to a disability	5
Other virtual court appearance requests	6
How should I prepare for a court appearance?	6
Setting up	6
Gather information about your case	6
Let the court know if you have evidence or a witness	7
Request an interpreter or an accommodation	7
Practice with Microsoft Teams	7
What can I expect in a virtual court appearance?	10
Logging in	10
During your virtual court appearance:	11
Can I have an attorney help me during a virtual court appearance?	13
Can I observe a virtual court proceeding to see what it is like?	14
What if I cannot appear virtually?	14
Additional resources	15

THE LEGAL AID SOCIETY

Justice in Every Borough.

About this Guide

This guide describes how you can request and participate in a virtual court appearance in a Consumer Credit Case in NYC Civil Court. It is up to date as of August 8, 2022. The information provided in this guide is general and does not constitute legal advice. Every court handles things differently and court policies and procedures change regularly. Contact the court directly for the information about how a specific court is handling virtual court proceedings.

What is a virtual court appearance?

After you or the other side files an Answer or Motion in your case, the court will schedule a court date, or “appearance.” You may have to attend several appearances before the end of the case. The New York State Unified Court System began scheduling appearances virtually in consumer credit cases in 2020 in order to reduce in-person appearances during the Covid-19 pandemic. The Court conducts these virtual court appearances using Microsoft Teams and telephone conferencing. A virtual court appearance is still a court proceeding. In a virtual court proceeding, some or all people participate by video or phone.

Currently, consumer credit courts have a mix of virtual and in-person appearances, though most New York City Civil Courts require pro se litigants to appear in-person. The exception generally is where the court approves virtual appearances when there are health or disability related reasons. When the court approves a virtual court appearance, you may be able to attend your court appearance on a smartphone or computer.

How do I know if I have a virtual court appearance?

The court will notify you if your hearing is virtual. They may contact you by U.S. mail, email, or phone. They will also notify the other parties in your case.

It is very important to be sure of the format, date, and time of your next court date and to show up at that date, even if you settle the case. If you miss one or more court dates, you may end up with a judgment against you.

To confirm whether your next court appearance is virtual:

1. Look at the court papers you received about your case to find the:
 - a) court and county the case is in (for example: Queens County Civil Court);
 - b) and index number of your case (for example: CV-001234-21/QU). This can usually be found in the top right section of court papers such as the complaint, summons, etc.
2. Find the phone number for the court and county in which your case is being heard here: <https://www.nycourts.gov/courts/nyc/civil/addresses.shtml>
3. Call the Civil Court Clerk’s office for the court and county in which your case is being heard. When you speak with a clerk, tell them the index number of your case. Then, ask to confirm when and how you should appear. For example, you can ask:
 - a) “What date and time is the next appearance in my case, index number _____?”
 - b) “Can I appear virtually at this upcoming court appearance?”
 - c) “How and when can I receive the link to access the virtual appearance?”

Tips for your confirming your virtual court appearance:

- If you call the clerk's office and don't reach anyone, keep trying! It may take several tries over the course of one or more days to reach someone.
- Confirm the court has your correct mailing address and email address (if any) on file, and check your mail and email often, so you can receive updates and avoid missing a court date.
- If appearing virtually, confirm what day and time you will receive the link in your email. If you do not receive it the day before your case is scheduled to begin, call the clerk again.
- If you need an interpreter, tell the clerk you will need an interpreter. You have a right to an interpreter free of charge. If an interpreter is not available on the day your court appearance is scheduled, the court is supposed to reschedule the appearance to make sure you have an interpreter.
- You may be able to find the Microsoft Teams link for a New York City Civil, Housing, or Small Claims Court on the court's website here:
<https://www.nycourts.gov/COURTS/nyc/civil/remoteppearances.shtml>.
However, we cannot guarantee this information is correct or current.

How do I request an interpreter for a virtual court appearance?

Call or go to the Court Clerk's Office

You can also ask the court clerk over the phone or in person for an interpreter. You should do this before your court appearance, if possible, so the court has time to find an interpreter in your language. Tell the Court Clerk's office staff member you speak with:

- the index number of your case,
- that you need an interpreter for your court appearance on _____[date], and
- the language you speak.

Ask for an interpreter during your court appearance

You can also ask for an interpreter in the courtroom. But, it will be easier for the court to find an interpreter who speaks your language if you request an interpreter ahead of time. For more information, go to: <https://www.nycourts.gov/courthelp/goingtocourt/interpreters.shtml>

What will I need for a virtual court appearance?

To appear virtually, you will need:

- Reliable internet connection or phone service,
- A computer, tablet, or smartphone with audio and video capabilities,
- A quiet space to speak and hear all participants, and
- All of the relevant documents you would bring to an in-person appearance (see Preparing for your virtual court appearance).

It may also be helpful to have:

- Headphones, and/or
- A pen and paper to take notes.

How can I request a virtual court appearance?

Virtual court appearances related to a disability

- **Step 1:** If your case is in New York City civil court and you cannot appear in person at the courthouse for reasons related to a disability, you can request a virtual appearance by filling out this form: <https://portal.nycourts.gov/ada-wizard/>.
- **Step 2:** If you are unable to receive confirmation that you will be receiving appropriate accommodations, contact The Office of the ADA Coordinator at ada@nycourts.gov or (212) 428-2760 or find other contact information here: <http://ww2.nycourts.gov/accessibility/byCounty.shtml>.
- **Step 3:** If you do not receive a response, call the clerk in the county where your case is in to ask for help reaching the ADA Coordinator, or the staff of the judge in your case. Explain that you need an accommodation because of your disability, and request that you be allowed to appear by video or phone instead, or that the case be adjourned until it is safe for you to appear in person.

For more information, go to <https://ww2.nycourts.gov/Accessibility/faqs.shtml>.

Other virtual court appearance requests

You may also be able to request a virtual court appearance where serious hardship exists that prevents you from appearing in-person.

- **Step 1:** Contact the clerk in the county where your case is in to request information about how to appear virtually due to hardship.
- **Step 2:** If you do not get a response, ask the clerk for contact information for the Part of the court your case will be in on your court date. Explain the hardship that prevents you from being able to appear in-person, and request that you be allowed to appear by video or phone instead, or that the case be adjourned until it is possible for you to appear in person.

How should I prepare for a court appearance?

Setting up

- Make sure you have a good connection to the internet.
- Download the Microsoft Teams application.
- Charge your computer or mobile device. If you are calling in by phone, make sure you have enough minutes.
- Use earbuds or headphones, if possible. This frees up your hands and improves sound quality.
- Find a quiet, well-lit space where no one will interrupt you.

Gather information about your case

It may be helpful to gather some notes about your defenses and options in your case for you to refer to during your court appearance. Here are some ways you can get information about your defenses and options in your case:

1. Keep copies or pictures of documents you sent to or received from the court or other side
2. Online guides you can read to learn more about your rights and defenses are available from:
 - a) [The Legal Aid Society – What You Need to Know About Judgment Proof Status](#)
 - b) [NY Courts Guide to Answering a Case, and](#)
 - c) [NY Courts Guide to Common Defenses.](#)
3. You can request a consultation from the Legal Aid Society by calling 888-663-6880.
4. Other legal services providers may be able to assist in addition or instead. There is a list of numbers you can call to request more help from an attorney in a consumer credit case at lawhelpny.org.

Let the court know if you have evidence or a witness

If you need to show the judge an exhibit during the court appearance, such as a photo or document, contact the court before the hearing and ask if there is an e-mail address where you can send your exhibit before the court appearance. If you need a witness to testify at your hearing, let the court know so it can send the witness information about how to join the court appearance.

Request an interpreter or an accommodation

Let the court know as soon as possible before your court appearance if you will need an interpreter or accommodation.

Practice with Microsoft Teams

1. Download the Microsoft Teams app on your computer or smartphone, if possible.
2. Test the link at least one day before your court appearance to ensure it is working. If you were told you would receive a link but did not receive a link, call the clerk at least one day prior to your appearance, give them your index number and email address, and ask for the link to be emailed to you again.
3. Become familiar with how to:
 - a) mute yourself,
 - b) unmute yourself,
 - c) turn your video on or off,
 - d) read messages in the chat, and
 - e) place your camera to ensure your whole face can be seen on a Teams call.
4. The Legal Aid Society Guides to downloading and using Microsoft Teams below have more information about how to do this.

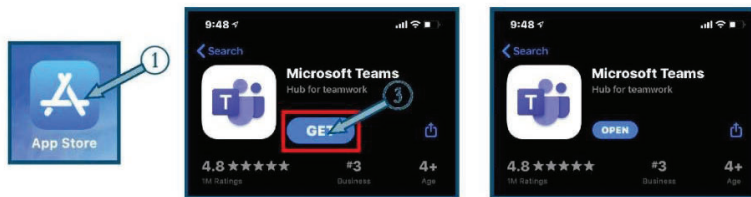
Joining a Microsoft Teams Meeting - iPhone

Joining a Microsoft Teams Meeting

iPhone

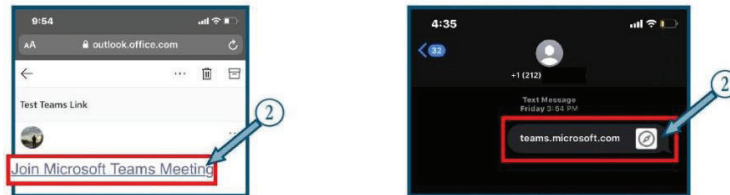
Install Microsoft Teams

- 1 Open the App Store on your iPhone
- 2 Search the App Store for "Microsoft Teams"
- 3 Tap "Get"
- 4 When the installation completes, you may close the App Store.



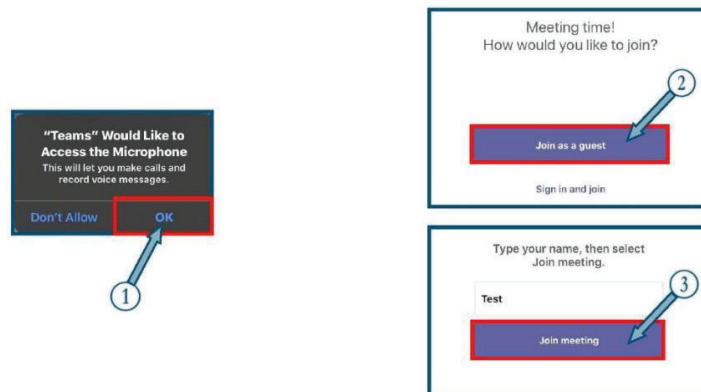
Launch the Microsoft Teams Meeting

- 1 Locate the email or text message containing the meeting link sent by your attorney.
If you are not sure where to find this link, please contact your attorney.
- 2 Tap "Join Microsoft Teams Meeting" (email)
Or tap the "teams.microsoft.com" link (text message)



Join the Microsoft Teams Meeting

- 1 Tap "Allow" or "OK" for each of the prompts requesting access to your iPhone
- 2 Tap "Join as Guest"
- 3 Enter your name and tap the "Join meeting"



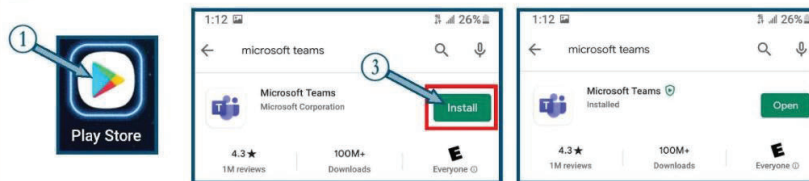
Joining a Microsoft Teams Meeting - Android

Joining a Microsoft Teams Meeting

Android

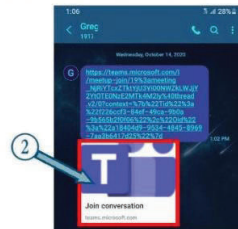
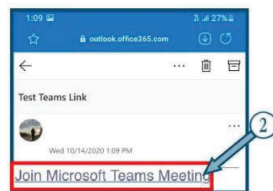
Install Microsoft Teams

- 1 Open the Play Store on your Android device
- 2 Search the Play Store for "Microsoft Teams"
- 3 Tap "Install"
- 4 When the installation completes, you may close the Play Store.



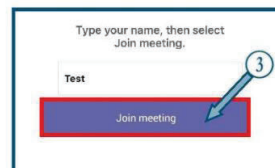
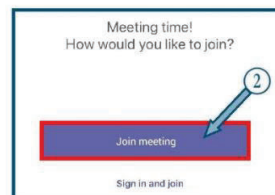
Launch the Microsoft Teams Meeting

- 1 Locate the email or text message containing the meeting link sent by your attorney.
If you are not sure where to find this link, please contact your attorney.
- 2 Tap "Join Microsoft Teams Meeting" (email)
Or tap the "Join Conversation" (teams.microsoft.com) link (text message)



Join the Microsoft Teams Meeting

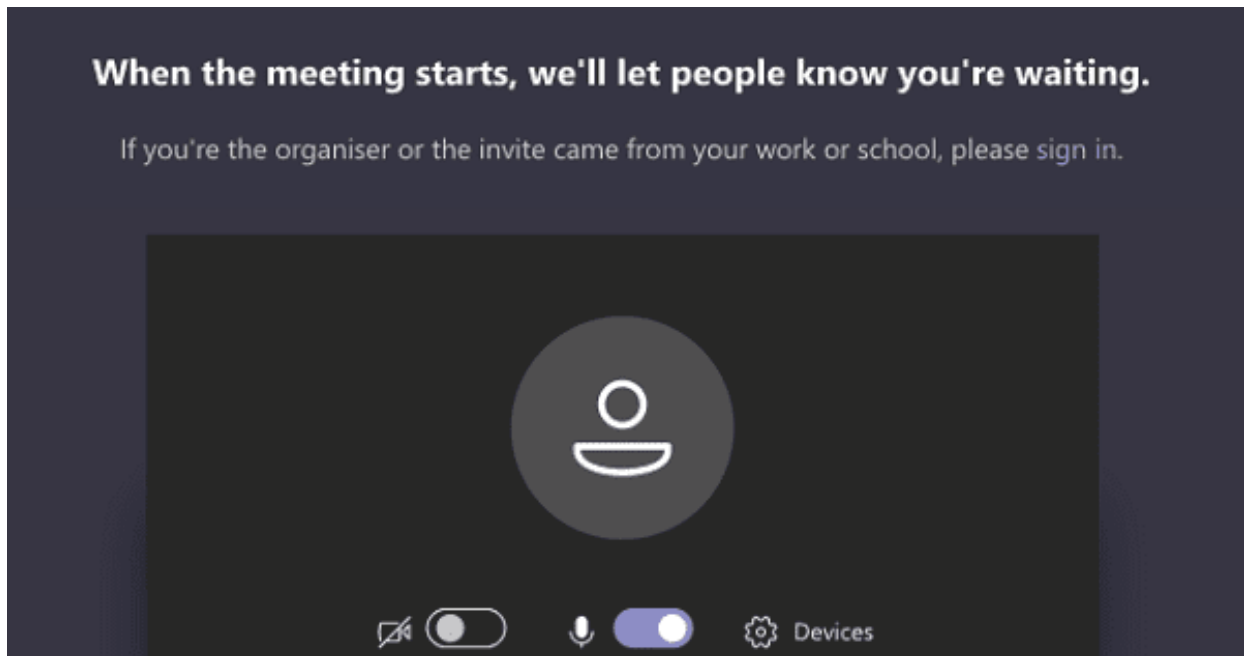
- 1 Tap "Allow" or "OK" for each of the prompts requesting access to your device
- 2 Tap "Join meeting"
- 3 Enter your name and tap the "Join meeting"



What can I expect in a virtual court appearance?

Logging in

1. A few minutes before your virtual court appearance is scheduled to begin, click on the link the court emailed to you.
2. The hearing probably won't start the moment you join. When you click on the link the court sent you and open the Microsoft Teams app, you should see a screen with the phrase "We'll let people know you're waiting" at the time the court appearance is scheduled to begin. The screen should look something like this:



- a) If there is a different message, call the clerk.
- b) Often the court is delayed, so you may have to wait some time to be let into the virtual courtroom.
- c) If you are in the waiting room for more than 15 minutes past the time your court appearance was scheduled to start, call the clerk and let them know "I am in the Microsoft Teams virtual waiting room for a court appearance scheduled to begin at _____ [time] but have not yet been let into the meeting. Has the court appearance started yet or should I stay in the waiting room?"

During your virtual court appearance:

- When the court appearance begins, you will be moved from the “waiting room” to the virtual meeting room.
- During or after the time your court appearance is scheduled to begin, you will see a Microsoft Teams meeting with other litigants, attorneys, the Judge, and the court attorney who is assisting the Judge.
- The court attorney or Judge may take attendance before discussing each case.
- Keep your microphone muted. Unmute yourself only when the Judge or another court official calls your name, calls the name or index number of your case, or asks you who you are and why you are in the courtroom.
- Keep your camera on. Do not turn off your camera unless you are directed to do so by the judge.
- Identify yourself when you start speaking.
- Speak slowly and loudly in case the courtroom is having technical difficulties.
- If you need an interpreter, as soon as the judge or another court official calls your case, tell them you need an interpreter and the language you speak.
- If you send a message using the chat feature on Microsoft Teams during the hearing, it may be visible to everyone. Be careful when using the chat feature as it is easy to accidentally send something to the whole group when you meant to send it to just one person.
- We know court can be overwhelming. We recommend taking notes on the name of the Judge, what happened at the court date, and what you should do next in your case. That way, if you request legal assistance, a lawyer will be better able to advise you. If you get an opportunity to seek legal advice, try contacting The Legal Aid Society at 888-663-6880 or another legal services provider at lawhelpny.org.
- The court appearance is live and may be open to the public. Everyone in the virtual courtroom can hear what you say when you are unmuted.
- Do not eat or drink during your virtual court appearance.
- You are not permitted to record the virtual court proceeding, but you can take notes.
- Let the court know if you cannot hear or see or if you are having trouble with software.
- If you are disconnected from the proceeding, reconnect immediately with the same meeting information.
- Virtual court appearances are like in-person hearings. The judge is in charge during the court appearance. The parties get to speak to the judge. At the end, the judge will make a decision.

Tips for your virtual court appearance:

- You may be asked to provide your phone number, email address, or mailing address to the other side. If this happens and you would like to protect your information, you can ask the judge to have the attorney for the other side give you their contact information instead.
- If the court attorney, Judge, or attorney for the other side is speaking about your case, but it is not clear what is happening in your case, you can ask the court attorney or Judge.
 - a) You may be asked to provide your phone number, email address, or mailing address to the other side. If this happens and you would like to protect your information, you can ask the judge to have the attorney for the other side give you their contact information instead.
 - b) If the court attorney, Judge, or attorney for the other side is speaking about your case, but it is not clear what is happening in your case, you can ask the court attorney or Judge.
- You may have only a short time to speak. However, it is likely the Judge will take a moment to answer your questions as long as you ask before they move on to the next case.

Sharing documents

If you have documents you need to send the court and/or the other party, let the Judge know this and ask where you can email or mail these documents.

Can I have an attorney help me during a virtual court appearance?

Depending on the county in which your case is being heard, an attorney from the Volunteer Lawyer for the Day Program (VLFD) may be able to appear with you during a virtual court appearance.

VLFD is appearing **virtually** with litigants in civil courts in the following counties:

- New York County

To request assistance from VLFD in these counties, as of July 6, 2022:

- Call (212) 267-6646 ext. 217 or fill out the online form at https://nyclaoi.legalserver.org/modules/matter/extern_intake.php?pid=130&h=c59cc5

VLFD is appearing **in person only** with litigants in civil courts in the following counties:

- Bronx County
- Kings County
- Queens County
- Richmond County

To request assistance from VLFD in these counties, as of July 6, 2022:

- Bronx County, Queens County, or Richmond County: arrive to your court date early and request a VLFD attorney from the clerk or court attorney in the courtroom. If no VLFD attorney is available, ask the judge for an adjournment so the case can be rescheduled for a day when a volunteer attorney is available.
- Kings County: call (718) 624-3894 or email info@brooklynvlp.org
- Queens County: call (718) 739-4100

Can I observe a virtual court proceeding to see what it is like?

Yes, in general, New York State civil court proceedings are presumptively open to the public under a law called New York Judiciary Law 4. In some instances, the court can restrict your right to attend a civil court proceeding when there are compelling reasons for closure.

You can find the links to NYC Civil court proceedings here: <https://www.nycourts.gov/COURTS/nyc/civil/remoteppearances.shtml>

Tips for observing a virtual court appearance:

- Mute your microphone and turn off your video unless the judge or another court official speaks directly to you.
- If a judge or another court official asks you who you are and why you are in the courtroom, you can say: *“Your honor, my name is _____, I am a member of the public sitting in to observe today’s court proceedings.”*

What if I cannot appear virtually?

If you cannot appear virtually, you may go in person for your scheduled court appearance in civil court.

Additional resources

Links for Remote Court Appearances in NYC Civil Courts:

<https://www.nycourts.gov/COURTS/nyc/civil/remoteppearances.shtml>

NYSUCS Virtual Court Appearances for the Public:

<https://portal.nycourts.gov/knowledgebase/article/KA-01070/en-us>

NYSUCS Virtual Court Information Center:

<https://portal.nycourts.gov/public-user/>

NYSUCS Microsoft Teams - Virtual Court Appearances:

<https://portal.nycourts.gov/knowledgebase/article/KA-01071/en-us>

NYSUCS Microsoft Teams QA:

https://www.nycourts.gov/courts/nyc/SSI/images/CORONA/Teams_Instructions.pdf

Language Help (Interpreters):

<https://www.nycourts.gov/courthelp/goingtocourt/interpreters.shtml>

NYC Civil Court Phone Numbers & Addresses:

<https://www.nycourts.gov/courts/nyc/civil/addresses.shtml>

Microsoft – How to join a meeting in Teams:

<https://support.microsoft.com/en-us/office/join-a-meeting-in-teams-1613bb53-f3fa-431e-85a9-d6a91e3468c9>

Microsoft Teams Trainings:

<https://learn.microsoft.com/en-us/microsoftteams/instructor-led-training-teams-landing-page>