

THIS DOCUMENT IS AN EXCERPT OF THE FOURTH CIRCUIT COURT'S CHAMBERS RULES PROVIDED FOR YOUR CONVENIENCE.

4TH CIRCUIT COURTROOM DECORUM

The purpose of this section is to set forth basic principles concerning appropriate behavior and decorum when appearing before the Court. These requirements are intended to emphasize and enhance the ethical obligations of attorneys under the Rules of Professional Conduct and the time-honored customs of experienced trial attorneys. They are further intended to inform litigants, witnesses, and spectators of proper etiquette when appearing in court.



It is imperative to remember that a courtroom is a forum for adjudicating the rights and duties of litigants and that discussions that occur in court are highly regulated by the rules of evidence and procedure.

A. THE FOLLOWING ARE REQUIREMENTS WHEN APPEARING BEFORE THE FOURTH CIRCUIT COURT:

1. Always be prompt and in the courtroom ready to proceed at the appointed time. If possible, the Court should be notified in advance if attorney for a party or a party will be late.
2. Attire for attorneys, parties, witnesses, and spectators should be restrained and appropriate to the dignity of a courtroom. Attorneys and court reporters shall be professionally dressed, whether appearing in person or by visually remote means.

Litigants, witnesses, and spectators should avoid wearing shorts, tank tops, mini-skirts and dresses, low cut apparel, sleeveless apparel, flip flops, shirts that depict pictures or words (unless the words are the brand of the apparel), clothes that reveal midriff areas, denim pants, and any other attire that is inappropriate for a formal business setting. Further, unless worn for religious custom and practice, hats and sunglasses shall not be worn in the courtroom. This is applicable to litigants and witnesses whether appearing in person or by visually virtual means.

The Court recognizes that people come to court from all walks of life and may come directly from work or may face challenges that cause them to appear in clothing other than that described above. No one will be prohibited from entering the courtroom or removed from the courtroom based on such attire unless such attire is blatantly offensive.

3. All individuals in the courtroom shall stand when court is opened, recessed, and adjourned, unless limited by a physical disability.

4. All attorneys, parties, and witnesses shall stand when addressing, or being addressed by the Court, with the exception of witnesses testifying on the witness stand and those limited by physical disability.
5. When speaking at the lectern, from counsel table, or on the witness stand, remain at the lectern, counsel table, or witness stand and speak clearly, loudly, and at a consistent pace into the microphone. Exceptions may be when utilizing charts or devices to present evidence. The microphone amplifies sound and is used to capture audio in the recording of the proceeding. The microphone is recording at all times and may capture private conversations.
6. When first addressing the Court, attorneys and self-represented litigants shall state their name, spelling names as needed. Attorneys shall also state the party they represent.
7. Do not approach the witness or the bench without the Court's permission.
8. Refer to all persons, including witnesses, other attorneys, and the parties by their surnames and not by their first or given names. Exceptions may be made in the case of children.
9. Address all remarks to the Court, not to opposing counsel, litigants, or witnesses. Arguments between litigants, their attorneys, and/or witnesses are strictly prohibited. Further, disparaging personal remarks and acrimony toward opposing counsel, a party, or witness are strictly prohibited.
10. Unless making an objection, attorneys, parties, or witnesses are not to interrupt a witness or attorney who is speaking and under no circumstance should the Judge be interrupted when speaking.
11. When making an objection, the objecting party shall stand if physically able to do so, state there is an objection and state VERY briefly the legal grounds for the objection, withholding further comment or argument unless requested by the Court. The proponent of the question shall not make ANY argument to the objection unless the Court requests a response and the witness shall withhold response until such time the Court rules.
12. Gestures, facial expressions, audible comments, or the like as manifestations of approval or disapproval during the testimony of witnesses or at any other time is strictly prohibited.

13. No tobacco use in any form is permitted in the courthouse. No bottles, beverage containers, paper cups, chewing gum, or food are allowed in the courtroom except for the water provided at the counsel table.



14. Cell phones and other electronic devices must be turned off, on vibrate mode, or silenced.

15. It is strongly discouraged and inadvisable for children to be in the courtroom during proceedings, except when testifying during the proceeding or when appearing for a final uncontested adoption hearing.

16. Limit the oral communication of social security numbers and financial account numbers during a hearing to the last 4 digits.

17. Be courteous to everyone in the courtroom, including Court staff.

18. Unless approved in advance by the Court, photographing, recording, or broadcasting court proceedings is strictly prohibited.

19. Repeated entrances and departures in and out of the courtroom are to be avoided.

20. Doorways and passageways in the courtroom should be kept clear at all times.

All attorneys shall provide a copy of this policy on Courtroom Decorum to clients, witnesses, and court reporters prior to coming to court.