



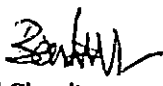
BEMON G. McBRIDE, III
CHIEF JUDGE OF SUPERIOR COURTS

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Memo

To: Members of the Columbus Bar Association & Attorneys who practice in the Chattahoochee Judicial Circuit

From: Judge Bemon G. McBride, III 
Chief Judge, Chattahoochee Judicial Circuit

Date: February 17, 2021

Re: Video Conference Decorum for Court Proceedings

As the pandemic continues, our courts have made many adjustments, some of which will remain after most of us are vaccinated and life resumes some of its old familiarity. Zoom, WebEx and other video platforms have been indispensable and will probably continue to play key roles, which is what prompts this word of caution.

Lawyers and judges have remarked in recent weeks about the wide variety of screen backgrounds attorneys use when appearing remotely by Zoom or similar video services. Given the stress and difficulty of navigating through these uncertain times, most of us appreciate well-timed humor, even in the courtroom. I certainly welcome a lighthearted moment, and know others are grateful for a lighter touch as well. On the other hand, it is important that we pause and consider how others less familiar with the courts may perceive an attorney who appears for court against a backdrop which depicts a Looney Tunes character, Darth Vader or popular figures from the world of entertainment or sports.

I do not propose that we invest scarce time and energy to determine what is--or is not--appropriate for a video background in a court proceeding, but I do urge everyone to be mindful of this concern. Others have mentioned it to our judges, which is why our judges raise the concern with you. What does it say to a crime victim or a defendant's

mother if an attorney appears with a comic book figure in the background? Is that lawyer serious about the case? How about the parents of children caught up in a hotly contested custody dispute who see an attorney appearing with a questionable Zoom screen?

We should be mindful that many of our court proceedings are live streamed over the internet. With our use of screens and backgrounds, we may unintentionally be signaling a lack of seriousness about ourselves and our work or even a cavalier approach to cases which involve a client's liberty, children or property. I don't believe any of us intend disrespect with our decisions about how we appear for video conferenced proceedings, but court proceedings, as most of us understand, are situations where perception is often just as important as good intentions.

Please bear these concerns in mind going forward. For most attorneys, appearing before a wall of books or from one's office will probably be perfectly adequate. Hopefully, we will soon spend less time in virtual environments and more time back among each other. I will be glad when we reach that point.

Thank you for your consideration.