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**CLERK OF SUPREME
COURT OF GEORGIA**

March 13, 2020

IN RE: Coronavirus/COVID 19

Dear Colleagues and Leaders:

Governor Kemp of the State of Georgia has issued a call to action. Chief Justice Melton of the Georgia Supreme Court at an emergency Judicial Council meeting approved a template order for declaring a judicial emergency for Chief Judges of Circuits in Georgia to use to suspend all non-essential operation/court functions for a period of up to thirty (30) days in the discretion of the Chief Judge.

In Liberty County alone, next week, we have three major jury selections scheduled for murder, rape, and civil matters. The number of jurors, law enforcement, attorneys, clerks, parties, witnesses, and inmates, with other courts and services would in my estimation involve over 500 people in one courthouse.

The University of Georgia has been cancelled, the State of Georgia Legislature has been cancelled, other judicial circuits non-essential functions have been cancelled, some schools have been cancelled.

The President of the United States has called for travel bans and to restrict socialization.

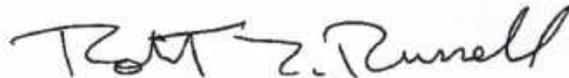
Accordingly, as Chief Judge of the Atlantic Judicial Circuit in an abundance of caution, considering the Coronavirus pandemic high infection rate, I declare a judicial emergency, closing the courthouses and courts of the Atlantic Judicial Circuit from thirty (30) days from March 16, 2020, for non-essential functions.

All parties are urged to conference call and text with Judges and each other for such matters as bond orders, TPO's and emergency matters.

Enclosed please find a copy of the Order.

If I can be of any assistance, please feel free to call me.

Very truly yours,


Robert L. Russell

RLR/cmw

**IN THE SUPERIOR COURTS
FOR THE ATLANTIC JUDICIAL CIRCUIT
STATE OF GEORGIA**

IN RE: Declaration of Judicial Emergency

Date: March 16, 2020

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ORDER DECLARING JUDICIAL EMERGENCY

WHEREAS, IT HAS BEEN DETERMINED that a Judicial Emergency exists in the Atlantic Judicial Circuit affecting all courts such that there is a serious health emergency pursuant to O.C.G.A. § 38-3-60(2)(D). *See* O.C.G.A. § 38-3-60(2)(D) (providing that “Judicial Emergency” means “[s]uch other serious emergency”).

WHEREAS, IT HAS BEEN DETERMINED that the Judicial Emergency substantially endangers or infringes upon the normal functioning of the judicial system as it relates to jury service, including grand jury service, and any non-essential matters, unless they can be conducted via video or teleconferencing.

Therefore, pursuant to O.C.G.A. § 38-3-61, The Honorable Chief Judge Robert L. Russell of the Atlantic Judicial Circuit DOES HEREBY ORDER AND DECLARE the existence of a Judicial Emergency in the Atlantic Judicial Circuit. The nature of this emergency is the continued transmission of Coronavirus/COVID-19 throughout the Atlantic Judicial Circuit and the potential infection of those who are required to appear in our courts and interact with large groups due to jury service, including grand jury service, or other large, non-essential calendars.

Thus, the undersigned hereby makes this declaration of a judicial emergency affecting all courts and clerk’s offices in the Atlantic Judicial Circuit as it relates to jury service, including grand jury service, and any non-essential matters, unless they can be conducted via video or teleconferencing.

Accordingly, IT IS THE ORDER of the Court that no jurors or grand jurors shall report and no jury trials shall be held for a period of thirty (30) days from the effective date of the Order, which is March 16, 2020. Furthermore, no civil or non-essential matters shall be heard by the courts during this 30-day time period, unless they can be conducted via video or teleconferencing. Parties or attorneys in any non-essential matters should contact the chambers of the judge assigned to their case if they have any questions and/or need to ensure their compliance with this Order.

Pursuant to O.C.G.A. § 38-3-62, during the period of this Order, the Court hereby suspends, tolls, extends, and otherwise grants relief from: (1) a statute of limitation; (2) the time within which to try a case for which a demand for speedy trial has been filed; (3) the time within which to hold a commitment hearing; (4) the time within which to return a bill of indictment or an accusation or to bring a matter before a grand jury; and/or (5) such other legal proceedings as determined to be necessary, including calendars involving large numbers of litigants, lawyers, or other persons.

Should the state of emergency extend beyond the period indicated above or should the nature of the emergency otherwise require modification by the Court, the Court will make a determination of available alternative remedies for the conduct of court business, as necessary, and a corresponding Order will be entered and distributed in accordance with Georgia law.

Pursuant to O.C.G.A. § 38-3-63:

IT IS ORDERED that the Sheriffs of their respective counties shall post this Order on his public notification site and in the courthouses;

IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that the undersigned shall immediately notify and serve Chief Justice Harold D. Melton of the Supreme Court with a copy of this Order, such service to be accomplished via email to Tee Barnes, the Clerk of the Supreme Court of Georgia, at barnest@gasupreme.us;

IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that the undersigned shall immediately notify and serve a copy of the order on the judges and clerks of all courts sitting within the jurisdictions affected and on the clerks of the Georgia Court of Appeals and the Georgia Supreme Court, such service to be accomplished through reasonable means to assure expeditious receipt; and

IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that the undersigned shall give notice of the issuance of this Order to the affected parties, counsel for the affected parties, and the public.

IT IS SO ORDERED this 13th day of March, 2020 at 5:00 p.m. The effective date of this Order is March 16, 2020.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Robert L. Russell". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underneath the name.

Robert L. Russell, Chief Judge
Superior Courts
Atlantic Judicial Circuit