



Council of Accountability Court Judges

Chief Judge Kathlene F. Gosselin
Executive Committee Chair
Northeastern Judicial Circuit

Taylor Jones
Executive Director

MEMORANDUM

TO: Accountability Courts

FROM: Council of Accountability Court Judges

RE: Statewide Judicial Emergency and Accountability Court Operations

DATE: March 17, 2020

Please allow this memorandum to serve as a follow-up to the March 13, 2020 memorandum released to accountability courts from the Council of Accountability Court Judges (CACJ).

On March 14, 2020, Chief Justice Melton issued an order calling for a Statewide Judicial Emergency due to COVID-19 until April 13, 2020. Additional information related to the Statewide Judicial Emergency can be found here: https://www.gasupreme.us/court-information/court_corona_info/.

Pursuant to this order, Georgia's courts are able to continue essential functions necessary to protect the health, safety, and liberty of our state's citizens. Further, the order calls for non-essential functions of the court to be postponed and/or cancelled to prevent the infection of court employees and general public attending court. CACJ recognizes the need to prevent the spread of infection and encourages each accountability court to work locally to develop protocols and procedures to continue the essential functions of the program while taking into account stringent safety precautions. Courts may choose to use information found within the sites below when developing protocols and procedures.

- AOC COVID-19 Preparedness webpage: <https://georgiacourts.gov/covid-19-preparedness/>
- CDC COVID-19 Resource: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>
- Georgia Department of Public Health: <https://dph.georgia.gov/novelcoronavirus>

While there is no clear roadmap for us in these times, this a very serious time. We have grouped the guidance below in two groups - **guidelines and suggestions**. Guidelines are akin to best practices that balance the safety of the community, including staff, participants and all who touch each of their lives, and the need to make sure our participants are taken care of and provided resources so as not to veer off their path to recovery/mental health. Suggestions are intended to be ideas collected from around the state to help each program decide how best to address these issues. We will be adding to the suggestions as we get more in from each of you.

Jurisdictions with multiple accountability court programs should consider implementing uniform protocols and procedures while operating under the Statewide Judicial Emergency Order.

Guidelines

- Accountability court **staff should work remotely** when possible.
- **Case management** and **individual treatment** sessions should be conducted via phone and/or by other electronic means. All participant case management sessions, individual treatment sessions, and overall contacts should be documented in the court's case management system.
- Consider using telehealth options for participant treatment sessions. Please check with your treatment providers to learn about options for your court. Additionally, if in-person **groups** are conducted during this time, the court should reconfigure the room to allow for sufficient space between group session attendees, as well as keep the groups to a small size (maybe 10 or less, see CDC guidelines).
- **Court** sessions should include only those participants the team determines need contact with the judge. These sessions should be conducted with a small number of participants at a time with plenty of physical distance from one another. See suggestions below.
- Accountability court staff and/or participants that have a **fever or symptoms** should not participate in program activities. The court may consider requiring appropriate participant medical documentation of reported symptoms when possible.
- Accountability court staff and/or participants that have come into contact with someone with COVID-19 must **self-quarantine**.
- Any **confirmed cases** of COVID-19 should be reported to accountability court program leadership as soon as possible.
- Address the issue of drug testing lines. Reducing the number of tests, using a longer window of time to test, social distancing, use of gloves and other protective items are possibilities.

Suggestions

- Drug testing may occur during surveillance visits. Gloves and other protective items should be used by staff.
- The use of Google Voice numbers may allow staff to use their phones and contact participants.
- Staffing sessions may be conducted via phone conference.
- Courts may choose to suspend participant referrals and evaluations until the end of the Order.
- Courts may choose to postpone graduation ceremonies until the end of the Order.
- Courts may choose to only conduct court sessions for participants being sanctioned for new charges. Video conferencing may be used for lesser sanctions (community service, admonishment, etc.) or for those in the early phases of the program. Consider whether you really want someone performing community service at this time.
- Court programs should work to regularly sanitize accountability court facilities and workspace.
- Community support meetings may be completed via online offerings. A list is available from CACJ.
- Social distancing should be practiced during surveillance visits, when interacting with participants, and amongst accountability court staff.

Should any court have other suggestions related to accountability court operations during this time please contact CACJ staff. We will work to make the information available to all accountability courts.

CACJ staff is available for questions and support. As new information is made available CACJ will provide additional updates as needed. Please do not hesitate to contact staff should you have any questions or concerns.


The Honorable Kathlene F. Gosselin, CACJ Chair


The Honorable Shawn LaGrue, CSCJ President