

**IN THE MUNICIPAL COURT FOR THE CITY OF PALMETTO
STATE OF GEORGIA**

ORDER IN REGARD TO RESUMPTION OF COURT

Pursuant to the Order Declaring a Statewide Judicial Emergency by the Supreme Court of Georgia as a result of the Covid 19 pandemic, the Municipal Court for the City of Palmetto has been stayed from holding courtroom sessions for the months of April and May. The Emergency Order has been extended until June 12, 2020 by the Chief Justice of the Georgia Supreme Court, the Honorable Harold D. Melton. However, pursuant to the terms of the extended Order, Courts are allowed to begin court operations provided courts comply with existing guidelines and best practice guidelines in instituting social distancing to safeguard the public who will come into contact with the Court.

As a result of this authorization to begin Court sessions once again, the Municipal Court for the City of Palmetto will begin Court sessions once again beginning June 23, 2020. The following guidelines will be followed for all courtroom sessions and the procedures and provisions set out herein shall be the Order of the Court and shall be strictly followed by all court personnel. The practice and procedures to be followed are as follows:

SCHEDULING:

1. Court calendars will be scheduled with no more than fifty (50) defendants on any one calendar.
2. Calendar starting times will be staggered to allow for the staggered arrival of defendants so that there are no large groups of defendants waiting at any one time to enter into the courtroom. Multiple times may be scheduled on the same date to accommodate this procedure. For example, if necessary, court times may be scheduled at 6:00 pm, 7:00 pm, 8:00 pm and so on to accommodate the caseload. Additional calendars at different times may be added to any month should this become necessary.
3. The initial calendars will be arraignment calendars with trial calendars to be subsequently scheduled. So as to minimize contact between staff and defendants, negotiations between the solicitor and defendant's will not be initiated and defendants who wish to negotiate a plea or speak with the solicitor will be placed on the trial calendar in order to give them that opportunity.
4. Defendants who request a reset because of Covid 19 concerns shall be granted a 60 day reset if they are: a. member of an at-risk group, such as over 60 years of age, b. they have small children and no available childcare; c. if they have a family member suffering with Covid 19 or been exposed to someone suffering from the virus.

COURTROOM PERSONNEL AND STAFF:

1. All staff members, including, but not limited to, police, clerks, probation personnel, and city employees who may have business or provide services during courtroom sessions shall be required to wear protective masks and protective gloves. In addition, all personnel before entering the courtroom shall be required to have their temperature taken to insure that they do exceed a temperature of 100.4 degrees.
2. All staff members, police, clerks, probation personnel and city employees having business before the Court shall be screened before entering the court by answering a series of screening questions as set out herein.

COURTROOM MANAGEMENT:

1. The table set up for defendants to check in and obtain their Plea Sheets shall be set up on the portico outside the courtroom building so that defendants will not congregate inside the building. Upon arrival the defendants will obtain their plea sheet and a small pencil with which they may sign and fill out the plea sheet.
2. The sidewalk will be marked with tape so as to provide six foot spacing between defendants standing in line. Once the defendant has obtained their plea sheet, they will proceed to the door where a an officer or city EMT will screen the defendant by asking the following questions:
 - a. Have they traveled to or from any area where Covid 19 is particularly active;
 - b. If they or anyone in their household has experienced symptoms of Covid 19
 - c. Have they been tested for the virus? If the response is that yes, they have been tested for the virus, they should be questioned further as to the date and results of the test. If they advise that they tested positive within 14 days of the court date, they should be rescheduled.

If these questions are answered satisfactorily, then in that event, they will have their temperature taken by the EMT and anyone who exceeds 100.4 degrees will be denied entry and their case will be rescheduled. If they do not exhibit a temperature, then in that event they will be admitted inside the building.

3. All defendants will be required to wear a mask before they are allowed to enter the courtroom. If they do not have a mask, they will be provided with a mask by the courtroom staff.
4. After checking in and being screened the defendant will be allowed inside the building and be waned by the police staff and allowed to enter the courtroom. The Courtroom itself will be set up to accommodate no more than 13 persons, with six foot spacing between all chairs observed at all times.

5. If more than 13 persons arrive for any one session, then in that event, the persons will be given a number that corresponds with their court session and told to wait in their cars until they are notified by a police officer. The officer will go to the parking lot and indicate when they are to come to the building by holding up the appropriate number. For example, if a defendant arrives for the first session and is told to wait, he will be advised that he/she is in the number 1 group and to wait in their car until they see an officer come out and hold up one finger or a large number 1.
6. Once in court, proceedings will proceed as normal, with the exception that when defendants come before the judge, the defendants will remain behind the courtroom rail that separates the gallery from the judge's bench and is at least six from the Judge's bench. Plea sheets will be handed by the defendant to an officer who will in turn hand the plea sheet to the clerk. Once the defendant's case has been adjudicated he/she will leave the courtroom by the side entrance door.
7. If it is necessary for the defendant to meet with probation, the probation table will set up so that a plexi-glass or other similar barrier separates the probation staff from the defendant with a pass-through space in order that papers may be passed between the probation staff and the defendant. Once the probation procedures have been completed, the defendant shall exit through the front entrance door.

COURTROOM SIGNAGE

1. Signs shall be posted in prominent locations throughout the courtroom and lobby, advising persons to wash their hands, maintain social distancing and wear protective masks.
2. The court will set up hand sanitizing stations throughout the courtroom and lobby at appropriate locations and defendants will be encouraged to use these stations as they come in and exit the courtroom.

These provisions regarding the conduct of court shall remain in full force and effect until such time as rescinded by further Order of the Court.

SO ORDERED, this 29 day of May, 2020

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Russell T. Ross, Jr.", is written over a horizontal line.

Russell T. Ross, Jr., Chief Judge,
City of Palmetto