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Superior Courts  
**ALAPAHA JUDICIAL CIRCUIT**  
ATKINSON, BERRIEN, CLINCH, COOK AND LANIER COUNTIES

ORDER ESTABLISHING GUIDELINES FOR IN PERSON  
COURT PROCEEDINGS:

Preface.

On May 11, 2020, the Honorable Chief Justice Harold D. Melton of the Supreme Court of Georgia issued the Second Order Extending the Declaration of Statewide Judicial Emergency addressing continuation of essential court functions and the re-opening of non-essential court services. The order further stated that with written guidelines in place, which conform to CDC and Georgia Department of Health restrictions, courts may begin to resume functions in a manner that protects public health.

Based upon the authority granted to the Superior Court of the Alapaha Judicial Circuit, this set of guidelines is created to clarify directions under which the court will resume functions. New guidelines are developing daily in these uncertain times; therefore, this Order may be amended to reflect further guidance or changes created by the Supreme Court of Georgia or the CDC.

## 1. Courthouse and Courtroom Admittance.

Hearings and non-essential court functions will resume on June 1<sup>st</sup>, 2020, with the following guidelines applicable to the courthouse and courtroom procedure.

Other constitutional officers, Magistrate and Probate Judges, and other occupants such as tax assessors, elections office, county commissioners, and other governmental entities that maintain office space in the courthouse should develop occupancy guidelines consistent with public health guidelines, courthouse safety plans and other relevant factors. Admittance to the courthouse will be in the discretion of the Sheriff of each county, consistent with public health guidelines, courthouse safety plan, the guidelines established by varying occupants of each courthouse, and other relevant factors in the discretion of each Sheriff.

The term "Courtroom" shall include, but not be limited to, the common areas of the courthouse immediately adjacent to a courtroom, jury rooms, jury assembly rooms, witness sequestration rooms, judge's chambers, law libraries attendant to the courtroom, attorney lounges attendant to the courtroom, hallways, corridors, and any other rooms regularly used when court is in session.

The number inside the court room shall not exceed the number that can be admitted safely within social distancing and public health guideline restrictions. The court is aware that due to physical attributes of some facilities, the enactment of these standards may differ in some facilities more than others. The goal of this order is to protect the public's right to an open forum, while maintaining public health standards. In furtherance of this goal, the Sheriff or his designee shall be responsible for the implementation of these guidelines and shall seat visitors to the courtroom within appropriate standards. The Sheriff or his designee shall place a marker

designating where a person may be seated in accordance with social distancing guidelines. A person may be seated only on a marker. However, if persons in the visitor section reside in the same household, they may be allowed to sit together. Then, the next visitor must be seated on a marker at an appropriate social distance. Once the visitor section is fully occupied using such social distancing guidelines, then no additional persons may enter the courtroom.<sup>1</sup> If an attorney is not engaged in a hearing in progress, she or he shall sit in the visitor section of the courtroom, or may remain outside the courtroom awaiting the calling of her or his case for trial/hearing.

In the front of courtroom, where the hearing/trial is conducted, all persons, including but not limited to the judge, court reporter, clerk, and attorneys and her or his client shall exercise social distancing guidelines. If an attorney and client need closer contact for confidential matters, they shall request to be excused from the courtroom for such contact. Sequestered witnesses shall observe social distancing guidelines, and the Sheriff is ordered to find sufficient rooms to sequester witnesses while maintaining social distancing guidelines. Furthermore, while court is in session, the Sheriff shall assure that social distancing is being followed by all persons in the courtroom, as the term courtroom is defined above.

## 2. Health Screening.

When court hearings are scheduled, a Health Screening shall be conducted on each person entering the courthouse. The Sheriff or his designee shall conduct a health screening using the tool provided as Exhibit A to this order. The Sheriffs of each county shall make best efforts to use

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<sup>1</sup> Each court is encouraged, but not mandated, to provide an overflow room where the proceedings may be watched via a live video feed. The court is aware that based upon the physical attributes of some facilities, this may be easily accomplished, and that based upon the physical limitations of some facilities, this may be more difficult, if not impossible to accomplish. In criminal proceedings, the constitutional right of the Defendant to an open proceeding shall not be abridged, and the application of these guidelines shall not be construed to in any way limit this constitutional right. Furthermore, in all proceedings, the goal is to provide an open forum for public viewing, while at the same time attempting to provide a safer environment based upon existing public health guidelines, and these guidelines shall be interpreted and implemented consistent with such goals.

a no-contact thermometer to take the temperature of those entering the courthouse. Should any of the questions be answered in the affirmative, then such person shall not be allowed to enter the courthouse. If the person who is not allowed to enter the courthouse is a litigant or witness in a case scheduled, then the Sheriff shall immediately notify the court (presiding judge or staff) of the person not to be admitted. If a person is seeking to enter the courthouse for reasons other than court attendance, the Sheriff shall contact the office the person requests for further instructions.

### 3. Personal Protective Equipment.

Personal Protective Equipment ("PPE") is strongly encouraged for all persons who enter the courthouse for court proceedings. PPE, including but limited to masks (paper or cloth) and gloves, may be worn by all persons entering the courtroom in their discretion. Court Personnel and visitors may be supplied with PPE if they notify the screening individual of such need, for as long as supplies last. Masks and PPE equipment shall be health oriented and may be required to be removed for identification purposes.

### 4. Objections.

The court cannot guarantee, nor does it attempt to guarantee, that strict adherence to guidelines will prevent the contraction or spreading of COVID or any infectious disease. Admission and attendance in each courtroom shall be governed by public health guidelines, specifically, though not limited to, social distancing practices. If any person has an objection to attendance or participation in an in-person court proceeding, then a written objection must be delivered to the court, and all parties involved, within three days, or as soon as practicable, and shall be accompanied with a proposed reasonable accommodation to insure participation in the

proceeding. The object shall be filed with the Clerk of Court. The court will consider the request, and in its discretion, will rule as to which accommodation, if any, is appropriate.

#### 5. Sanitation Practices.

The county commissioners of each county shall ensure that custodial staff or other personnel are sufficiently trained in the method and manner for sanitizing a courtroom, as the term courtroom is defined in this order herein. Person's tasked with this sanitation process shall follow appropriate guidelines published by the CDC, Georgia Department of Health, and/or county health department. Courtrooms shall be cleaned and disinfected prior to the next use, and certain high traffic areas in the courtroom may need cleaning more often, in accordance with public health guidelines.

Each county shall provide hand sanitizer for use in the courtroom, which shall be made available for use by court personnel. All persons in the courtroom, including but not limited to the judge, court reporter, clerk, and attorneys and her or his client shall exercise social distancing guidelines. If an attorney and client need closer contact for confidential matters, they shall request to be excused from the courtroom for such matters. Furthermore, writing instruments shall be personal, disposable or sanitized after each use and before use by another person in the courtroom.

#### 6. Past Calendar.

If you had a hearing scheduled on a calendar during March through June 1<sup>st</sup> that was not handled by a remote call or otherwise resolved, then it is the responsibility of the attorney to reschedule those hearings. The Clerk's office will not be responsible for rescheduling any past hearings.

#### 7. Implementation.

Except as otherwise specified herein, the Sheriff of each county, in the exercise of his discretion, shall be responsible for the full implementation of these guidelines.

#### 8. Publication and Dissemination of Guidelines.

This order and guidelines shall be published at the entrance to each courthouse. A copy of this order shall be available at the Clerk of Superior Court office in each county within the Alapaha Judicial Circuit and shall be posted in each courthouse where public announcements are posted. Furthermore, the Clerk of Court shall email a copy of this order to each attorney who has an office within the respective counties.

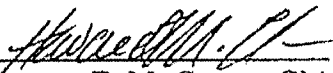
#### 9. Professionalism

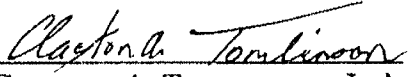
In all matters during this challenging time, all lawyers are reminded by the Supreme Court of their obligations of professionalism. Court officials, litigants, and their lawyers should strive to cooperate with the court to dispose of matters promptly, efficiently, and fairly.

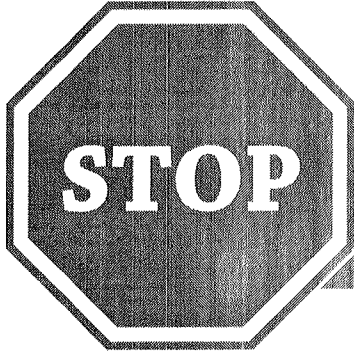
#### 10. Duration

This order shall be effective until termination of the Declaration of the Judicial Emergency by the Supreme Court of Georgia.

SO ORDERED on this the 28<sup>th</sup> day of May, 2020

  
HOWARD E. MCCLAIN, Chief Judge  
Alapaha Judicial Circuit

  
CLAYTON A. TOMLINSON, Judge  
Alapaha Judicial Circuit



## Feeling Sick?

Stay home when you are sick!

If you feel unwell or have the following symptoms  
please leave the building and contact your health care provider.  
Then follow-up with your supervisor.

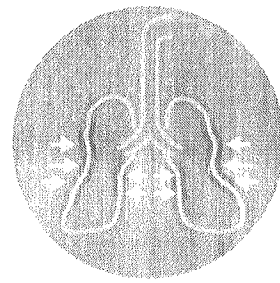
DO NOT ENTER if you have:



FEVER



COUGH



SHORTNESS OF  
BREATH



[cdc.gov/CORONAVIRUS](https://www.cdc.gov/CORONAVIRUS)

What you need to know about:

# COVID-19 + CONTACT TRACING

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## Q: What is contact tracing?

A: Contact tracing is a tool used by Public Health to quickly identify people who have been exposed to an infectious disease (COVID-19, measles, Ebola, TB, STDs) and alert their contacts of their exposure.

## Q: Why is contact tracing done?

A: The goal of contact tracing is to help prevent the further spread of infection, to identify hotspots of infection, and to protect friends, families and communities from potential infection.

## Q: Is contact tracing confidential?

A: Confidentiality is critical to the success of contact tracing. Contact tracing in Georgia is 100% confidential — the identity of the person who tests positive and the information on those who might have been exposed will not be shared. Georgia's contact tracing does not use technology to track movements.

## Q: How is contact tracing done?

A: Trained public health staff work with people diagnosed with COVID-19 to help them recall everyone who they have had close contact with while they were infectious. Public health staff then alert these exposed individuals (contacts) as quickly as possible to prevent additional spread of the disease.

## Q: How will contacts be notified?

A: A trained DPH staff member will notify the contact by text or phone that they may have been exposed to COVID-19 and encourage them to self-quarantine to prevent the spread of the disease.

## Q: What are contacts asked to do?

A: Contacts must stay at home and maintain social distancing (at least 6 feet) from others they live with, including animals, until 14 days after their last known exposure. Contacts should check their temperature twice daily and monitor for symptoms:

- Fever
- Cough
- Chills
- Muscle Pain
- Shortness of breath / difficulty breathing
- Sore Throat
- New loss of taste or smell

If contacts develop symptoms, they should call their local health department to schedule an appointment for a COVID-19 test, seek medical care if needed, or call 911 if there is a medical emergency.

## Q: Is there a way to report my symptoms electronically?

A: There is a web-based portal that allows identified contacts to easily answer questions about their health and their symptoms related to COVID-19. Contacts will receive a daily text message for 14 days reminding them to report if they have symptoms through the monitoring tool, and they will also receive information about what to do if they are or become sick. Individuals who do not report daily will be contacted by DPH. For people who do not wish to use the online system or receive texts, they can call DPH directly to report their symptoms.

## Q: How has contact tracing been used previously?

A: Contact tracing was used during the 2014 Ebola virus outbreak, as well as in the SARS outbreak in 2003. Contact tracing is also used to combat sexually transmitted disease, measles and tuberculosis.

For more information about contact tracing:

**dph.georgia.gov** or call **1-866-PUB-HLTH**  
(1-866-782-4584)

