

IN THE PROBATE/MAGISTRATE COURTS OF EARLY COUNTY  
STATE OF GEORGIA

ORDER ESTABLISHING GUIDELINES FOR CONDUCTING JUDICIAL PROCEEDINGS IN THE  
PROBATE AND MAGISTRATE COURTS FOR EARLY COUNTY, GEORGIA  
DURING THE STATEWIDE JUDICIAL EMERGENCY

By order entered July 20, 2020, T. Craig Earnest, Chief Judge for the Superior Court of the Pataula Judicial Circuit and Henry L. Balkcom, IV, Judge for the Superior Court of the Pataula Judicial Circuit adopted guidelines for the conduct of Judicial Proceedings during the Statewide Judicial Emergency (the "Order"), a copy of which is attached hereto. It is hereby ordered that the procedures set forth in the aforesaid Order are hereby adopted and approved for the conduct of Judicial Proceedings in the Probate and Magistrate Courts for Early County.

It is ordered that the Clerk of these Courts shall provide notice of the issuance of this Order to the public by any means available, including but not limited to, posting of this order at the Early County Courthouse.

In an attempt to help reduce the rate of infection in Early County, some of the Courts' services must be modified and physical access to the Courts must be limited. **The following limitations will apply, effective immediately:**

- Every person entering the Probate/Magistrate Court office **MUST** wear a face covering.
- No person is allowed entry to the Probate/Magistrate Court office without an appointment.
- The Probate/Magistrate Courts will follow the Georgia Department of Public Health guidelines if an employee tests positive for COVID-19. If the Court must close to the public, persons with appointments will be notified by either mail, email, or telephone.

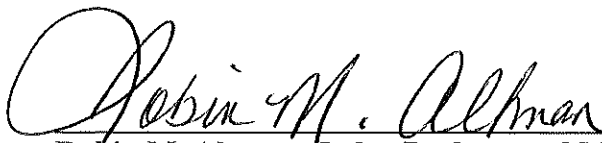
**Applications for Marriage License and Weapons Carry License, new and renewals, are by appointment only.**

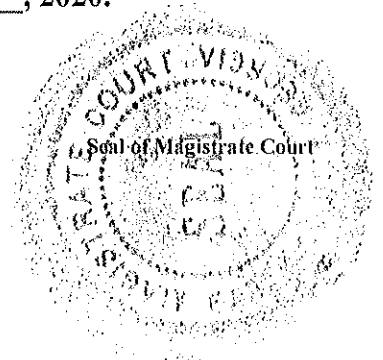
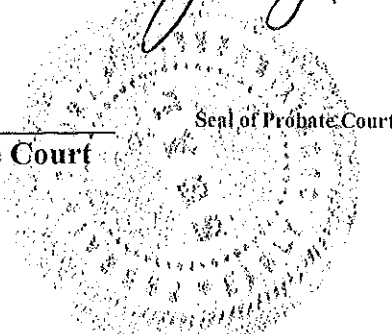
**IF YOUR WEAPONS CARRY LICENSE EXPIRED ON/AFTER MARCH 13, 2020, PLEASE CONTACT THE PROBATE COURT FOR RENEWAL INFORMATION AND TO SCHEDULE YOUR RENEWAL APPOINTMENT.**

*All individuals visiting the Courthouse should follow the recommendations of the Center for Disease Control and the Georgia Department of Public Health. Please refrain from coming to the Courthouse if you have a fever or symptoms of respiratory illness or have been exposed to a person with Coronavirus, flue, or any other transmittable disease.*

The Probate/Magistrate Court will strive to meet the needs of the citizens of Early County in a safe and efficient manner.

SO ORDERED this 21<sup>st</sup> day of July, 2020.

  
Robin M. Altman, Judge Probate and Magistrate Court  
Early County, Georgia





sensitivity to health and other concerns raised by court officials, litigants and their lawyers, witnesses and others” and shall remain in effect through the duration of the statewide judicial emergency. These Guidelines shall be posted at the public entrance of each courthouse in the Pataula Judicial Circuit and a copy provided to the Sheriffs and Clerks of the Superior Courts. These Guidelines shall remain in effect until further order of the Court.

### GUIDELINES

1. Persons entering the courthouse for the purpose of attending court proceedings shall be subject to screening by a law enforcement officer which shall include a body temperature scan and asking certain health-related questions. The following persons **shall not** be admitted into the courtroom:
  - a. persons who have been diagnosed with COVID-19, within the last thirty (30) days; or
  - b. persons with a temperature of 100 degrees Fahrenheit or more, or have had a temperature of 100 degrees Fahrenheit within the last 72 hours.The following persons **may not** be admitted into the courtroom:
  - c. persons who have within the last thirty (30) days had contact with anyone who has been diagnosed with COVID-19;
  - d. persons who are experiencing, or have within the last thirty (30) days experienced respiratory illness, shortness of breath, persistent cough, sore throat, difficulty breathing, chills, muscle pain, headache or loss of taste or smell;
  - e. persons who have been asked to quarantine by any healthcare provider or persons who reside with someone who has been asked to quarantine by a healthcare provider within the last thirty (30) days; or
  - f. persons who have traveled to or from any area in which COVID-19 is particularly active.
2. Persons who are not admitted into the courthouse for any of the above reasons shall be provided by the Court with alternative means of observing court proceedings.

3. The following information should be collected from any person denied entry for health reasons: name, contact information, the court he or she was scheduled to attend and why, and the specific reason for denying entry.
4. Persons entering the courthouse for the purpose of attending court proceedings shall:
  - a. be required to wear a mask that covers his or her mouth and nose;
  - b. remain six (6) feet away from other persons at all times including while entering and leaving the courtroom; and
  - c. sit only in assigned seating inside the courtroom.

Individuals should not congregate in common areas in the courthouse.

5. Parties and their attorneys are required to wear a mask except when directly addressing the Court or questioning witnesses. However, parties and their attorneys are encouraged to wear a mask even when addressing the Court or questioning witnesses provided that court reporters are able to understand and take down statements.
6. Parties and attorneys not wearing a mask when directly addressing the Court or questioning witnesses shall remain ten (10) feet away from other persons.
7. Persons who have been subpoenaed as witnesses may be asked to remain outside of the courthouse or seated in a designated area until a court official calls you in person or over your telephone to enter. If a person who has been subpoenaed as a witness has experienced any of the conditions in Item 1 above, please notify a court official.
8. If a person is an older adult, at risk for severe illness, asthmatic, pregnant, breastfeeding or otherwise at risk for COVID-19 or if your health care providers have instructed said person to refrain from attending gatherings of people, then he or she is strongly encouraged not to enter the courthouse, and may be provided with alternative method of viewing the proceedings as available.
9. Pursuant to Chief Justice Melton's May 11, 2020 Order, the Court may limit the number of occupants in the courthouse, interior areas, and courtrooms based upon their size.

10. Attorneys arguing or presenting before the Court shall notify the Court if they, a member of their staff, their client, witness, expert, or any other person in court for a scheduled court proceeding have COVID-19, tested positive for COVID-19 or have been exposed to a person known to have been diagnosed with COVID-19 prior to that scheduled court proceeding.
11. The Sheriffs of this judicial circuit shall notify the Court, the District Attorney, and the Circuit Public Defender no later than the next business day of any person who tests positive for COVID-19 that is being housed within their detention facility.
12. Per Chief Justice Melton's Fourth Order Extending Declaration of Statewide Judicial Emergency dated July 10, 2020, with regard to everyone who works in a court facility, the operating guidelines shall require "isolation" of any person with known or suspected COVID-19 and "quarantine" of any person with COVID-19 exposure likely to result in infection, in accordance with the Department of Public Health Seventh Amended Administrative Order for the Public Health Control Measures, or any subsequent version thereof, a link to which may be found in the Appendix of said Fourth Order.
13. It shall be the responsibility of the head of a county department with offices in a court facility to notify either Judge Henry L. Balkcom, IV, or Chief Judge T. Craig Earnest when there is reason to believe that anyone who works within or visits a facility housing a department of this Court has COVID-19, tested positive for COVID-19 or been exposed to COVID-19.
14. All courts operating within this judicial circuit shall at a minimum conduct themselves in accordance with this Court's order.
15. The Court may impose without prior notice other rules in addition to these Guidelines in order to promote the health and safety of the public, litigants and their lawyers, and court personnel.

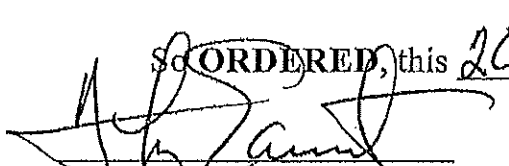
With regard to the Service of this Order:

- a. the respective Sheriffs of Clay, Early, Miller, Quitman, Randolph, Seminole and Terrell Counties shall post a copy of this Order on their public notification site and in the courthouses;

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- b. the County Commissioners of Clay, Early, Miller, Quitman, Randolph, Seminole and Terrell Counties shall post a copy of this Order on their public notification site;
- c. 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](mailto:barnest@gasupreme.us); and
- d. the undersigned shall immediately notify and serve the Administrative Office of the Courts with a copy of this Order, such service to be accomplished via electronic submission at <https://georgiacourts.gov/covid-19-court-operating-guidelines-form/>; and
- e. the undersigned shall immediately notify and serve a copy of this Order on the judges and clerks of all classes of court sitting within the Pataula Judicial Circuit 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.

So ORDERED, this 20<sup>th</sup> day of July, 2020.

  
T. Craig Earnest  
Chief Judge of Superior Courts  
Pataula Judicial Circuit

  
Henry L. Balkcom IV  
Judge of Superior Courts

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