

BRYAN COUNTY PROBATE COURT
Covid-19 Response for Court Operations

On March 14, 2020, Governor Brian P. Kemp issued Executive Order 03.14.20.01, declaring a Public Health State of Emergency in Georgia due to the impact of Novel Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19). The number of cases of COVID-19 in the state of Georgia continues to grow and presents a severe threat to public health in Georgia. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (“CDC”) recommends that all states and territories implement aggressive measures to slow and contain transmission of COVID-19 in the United States.

I. Admittance to Probate Facilities

1. **Appointments**: Access to the probate office will require an appointment. Allow 30 minutes per appointment to prevent overlapping of customers. Only one customer at a time shall be allowed entry into the probate office. Appointments shall be scheduled between the hours of 8:30 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. If customers arrive without an appointment, we will assist them time permitting or schedule them for a later date.
2. **Social Distancing**: Individuals whom do not live in the same household will be instructed to maintain a distance of 6 feet between themselves and others.
3. **Hand Sanitizer/Hand Washing**: Individuals will be directed to sanitize their hands upon entry into the probate office. Sanitizer is provided by the court.
4. **Gloves and Mask**: Customers will be advised that entry into the probate office will require a mask or other type of facial covering. The probate office does not provide mask therefore customers showing up for an appointment without a mask shall be denied access. Gloves shall be provided by the court and may only be removed for fingerprinting. It is also recommended that customers bring their own pen for signing documents.
5. **Sanitation**: After each customer has exited the office and prior to entry of another customer, staff will sanitize surfaces accessible to the customer. This includes, but not limited to, countertops, pens, fingerprint scanner, door knobs, etc...
6. **Staff members**: To the extent possible, staff will continue to practice social distancing while in the probate office. Wearing of mask is mandatory when assisting customers and away from your work space. Gloves or optional. If you have tested positive for COVID-19, if you have symptoms of Covid-19, or had close contact (within 6 feet for 10 minutes or more) with a person who has tested positive for Covid-19, you will be required to stay home. Any of the aforementioned situations require notification of the employee supervisor.
7. **Courthouse and Richmond Hill Annex**: The courthouse in Pembroke remains closed and can only be accessed by appointment. Persons entering the courthouse are subject to screening to include questions and temperature check with no contact thermometer. The Richmond Hill Annex building is open to the public, however, the probate office is locked and can only be accessed by appointment. The same rules apply regarding screening.

II. Other

1. **Receiving Payments:** When making appointments, payment over the phone is the preferred method of payment for marriage license, birth and death records and weapons carry license. Credit card, checks and money orders are acceptable forms if not paid up front upon arrival for their appointment. As a last resort cash is acceptable and is discouraged until further notice. Customers will swipe their own credit cards.
2. **Disposition Permits and Registering Death Records:** We will continue to issue disposition permits and register death records as normal. These functions can largely be accomplished through e-mail, fax, or online through GAVERS.
3. **Birth and Death Records:** Request for birth and death records shall be handled by appointment or by mail.
4. **Death Records Funeral Home:** They shall fax or email in the appropriate request form. When completed, the clerk shall call to set up an appointment to pick up the certificates.
5. **Marriage License:** Applicant's shall complete the application online prior to coming in. They should then call back for an appointment and make payment over the phone with a credit card. After you set the appointment following the above guidelines, have them contact the office upon arrival for access to the office. They should return the completed license by mail or by appointment.
6. **Weapons Carry:** Weapons Carry and Renewals will need to make an appointment after completing the online application.
7. **Petitions and other filings:** Can be mailed in with appropriate fees or dropped off by appointment with appropriate fees.

III. Hearings

1. **OTA's:** You may either email or mail the affidavits to the customer(s). They should then call to make an appointment to turn the affidavits in and sign in front of the clerk.
2. **Oaths:** The preferred method of conducting oaths is via zoom. In person oaths will require an appointment following the guidelines as stated in this document for entry into the court. Oaths may be administered by ZOOM using the following procedures:
 - a) Contact the customer and provide information for using the ZOOM app.
 - b) Email or fax the Oath document to the customer. If emailed, they will need to print the Oath.
 - c) Once connected to ZOOM, have them show you a valid government picture identification to verify they are who they say they are.
 - d) The clerk should then administer the oath and the customer should sign at this time.
 - e) The original oath shall be placed in the mail to the probate office. The customer will need to fax or scan and email a copy of the signed oath and identification to the clerk upon completion of the oath.
 - f) The clerk will date the original and copy of the oath the date it was administered to the customer.
 - g) If local, the Oath may also be given in person as long as there is a physical barrier between staff and the customer. Documents will be handled as provided

below. Staff and customers will be required to have on mask and gloves during this brief meeting.

3. **Weapons Carry Hearings:** Applicants who were denied a weapons carry license may schedule an appointment for a hearing following the aforementioned guidelines for admittance to the court. Applicants whom have documentation for the Judge to review may submit such documentation for review prior to scheduling a hearing. If a hearing is scheduled, it will be held in the courtroom in order to maintain social distancing protocol.
4. **Videoconferencing:** Videoconferencing is an option via zoom for all public hearings.
5. **In-person hearings:** The probate court will continue providing in-person hearings to allow interested parties to attend the proceedings. In the event a hearing is required, the courtroom will be arranged so as to provide a minimum of 10 feet between each party. Parties are encouraged not to bring guests who are not needed for their case. Additionally, when at all possible or upon request hearings may be held by videoconference.