

# MAGISTRATE COURT OF BUTTS COUNTY

835 ERNEST BILES DRIVE  
JACKSON, GEORGIA 30233  
OFFICE: (770) 775-8220  
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REBECCA J. PITTS  
CHIEF MAGISTRATE

LAUREN W. KERSEY  
CLERK

MEGAN H. KINSEY  
MAGISTRATE

BRAD L. CHRISTENSEN  
MAGISTRATE

## COVID-19 HEALTH & SAFETY GUIDELINES

Pursuant to Chief Justice Harold Melton's Fourth Extension of the Judicial Emergency Order and in accordance with the recommendations of the Georgia Court Reopening Guide, the Magistrate Court of Butts County enters the within Health and Safety Guidelines:

### **1. Increased Health and Safety Measures for Healthy and Safe Access to the Court**

The public shall be notified of the increased health and safety measures being taken by the Court through proper signage in the building and through means of social media and/or local news media.

The Court encourages persons to utilize means of technology for conducting court business during the COVID-19 pandemic and judicial emergency. Civil cases and answers to existing civil cases can be filed online at <https://www.efilegeorgia.com/>. Answers to common questions or case inquiries can also be handled by contacting the Court by phone at 770-775-8220 or by emailing the Court at [buttscountymagistratecourt@gmail.com](mailto:buttscountymagistratecourt@gmail.com). Correspondence and filings can also be mailed directly to the Court at 835 Ernest Biles Drive, Jackson, Georgia.

All parties that choose to do business with the Court in person, must comply with assisting the Court maintain a safe and healthy environment. All individuals must sanitize their hands upon entry to the building and upon completion of court business by using the hand sanitizer dispenser located on the wall of the Magistrate Clerk's window. Individuals entering the building are encouraged to wear a face mask and to maintain a safe social distance of at least six feet from other individuals at all times. Plexi-glass has been installed into a door to the Clerk's office for the protection of the Magistrate Clerk, Judges, court staff and the individuals that appearing to conduct business.

All forms necessary for filing cases and answers are located on the wall near the bulletin board in the hallway leading to the Magistrate Clerk's office. Forms can be obtained from the wall or directly from the Clerk through the window. Forms can also be accessed online at <https://georgiamagistratecouncil.com/>.

The Magistrate Court area is cleaned and sanitized multiple times daily. This includes the cleaning and sanitizing of common surface areas and frequently touched objects including door handles, light switches, filing cabinets, countertops, and desks in secure and public access areas.

## **2. Maintaining Healthy and Safe Court Employees & General Infection Control Measures**

Judges, Court employees and individuals conducting in-person business with the Court will be required to follow strict health and safety guidelines. The Court does NOT want anyone (including employees) to come into the Magistrate Court if they have experienced a fever within the last 72 hours, is sick or is currently being quarantined with a fever, flu like symptoms, or symptoms of COVID-19. This includes individuals that have been exposed directly or reside with individuals exposed or exhibiting these symptoms or have been advised to quarantine within the past 14 days. The Court asks that anyone that is considered immune suppressed or at risk for exposure to COVID-19 to contact the Court directly to discuss alternative options for conducting court business.

Hand Sanitizer dispensers are located at all entry and exit points of the building for staff and the public use. Everyone entering the building MUST sanitize their hands and is encouraged to wear a face mask. Individuals are asked to maintain a distance of at least six (6) feet from other individuals.

Each staff member shall practice healthy habits in maintaining a safe and clean working environment. Employees are encouraged to wash their hands frequently and use hand sanitizer in between hand washing.

Staff members have been provided with face masks and are encouraged to use them in common areas of the office building.

Staff members must sanitize their work area including desks, phones, doorknobs, light switches and other office equipment daily.

In the event a staff member become symptomatic, is directly exposed to someone that is symptomatic, or tests positive for COVID-19, the staff member will be required to self-isolate and not return to work until cleared by a physician.

## **3. Maintaining a Healthy and Safe Courtroom**

Virtual hearings: The Court will continue to conduct all first appearance bond hearings and as many other hearings as possible virtually via ZOOM. Public access for virtual hearings will be available through live stream on the Magistrate Court of Butts County YouTube channel. Virtual hearings are an option for all civil and criminal proceedings unless required by law to be in person, or unless it is not practicable for technical or other reasons for persons participating in the proceeding to participate remotely by virtual means.

In person hearings: In the event the Court determines that it can safely hold an in-person hearing in civil, criminal and county ordinance cases, all hearings will be scheduled on a case by case basis at specific times for each case to ensure safe social distancing and proper health guidelines. Scheduling will include additional time before and after the hearing for proper cleaning and sanitization. Each hearing participant MUST wear a mask and sanitize their hands upon entry and exit of the building and courtroom. Hand sanitizer will be available on the wall outside of the courtroom and on the wall next to the Clerk's office.



All hearing notices contain information of increased health and safety measures as well as a health screen questionnaire that must be completed on the day an individual appears for an in-person hearing. This information will be used for contact tracing purposes in the event the Court becomes aware of a staff member or private individual that may have been exposed to a COVID-19 diagnosed individual while at the Magistrate Court.

Due to the small size of the courtroom, in-person hearings held in the Magistrate Court hearing room located at 835 Ernest Biles Drive, Jackson, Georgia will be held on an individual case by case basis only. Hearing participants are required to contact the Clerk before entry to the building to check in and await instructions prior to entering the building and Courtroom. Hearing participants will be required to follow all guidelines previously listed in this document. The courtroom will be properly cleaned and sanitized before and after each individual hearing to ensure the health and safety of all persons in the courtroom.

Staggered calendars for civil cases, arraignments and bench trials and civilian warrant application hearings will be held as needed at the approved judicial annex location in the Central Georgia EMC-Annex Building located at 1083 S. Mulberry Street, Jackson, Georgia. The judicial annex facility will allow the Court to have additional room for safer social distancing on a staggered calendar basis to avoid large calendar calls. The court safety guidelines will be strictly enforced at both hearing locations with proper cleaning and sanitizing by janitorial staff at the facility.

#### **4. Healthy and Safe Inmates and Detainees**

The Court will continue to work closely with the Butts County Sheriff's Office to implement recommendations from the Georgia Court Reopening Guide for safe inmates and detainees that will appear for hearings in the Magistrate Court. The Court will continue to utilize virtual hearings for inmates whenever possible. In the event an inmate or detainee appears for an in-person hearing, all inmates and detainees will wear a mask or face covering as long as the wearing of such does not impact an inmate or detainee's right to a fair hearing. Alternative measures will be taken to ensure those rights when necessary. Each inmate or detainee appearing in the Magistrate Court will be safely social distanced from other individuals, attorneys, court staff and deputies.

This health and safety plan may be amended and modified, as necessary under guidance of the Supreme Court of Georgia, the Butts County Superior Court, the CDC and Georgia Department of Public Health. This health and safety guideline and any amendments or modifications will be made public as required.

This 15<sup>th</sup> day of July, 2020.

**FILED**

JUL 15 2020

**MAGISTRATE COURT  
BUTTS COUNTY, GEORGIA**



Honorable Rebecca J. Pitts, Chief Judge  
Magistrate Court of Butts County, Georgia