

City of Vidalia Municipal Court

Best Practices & Guidelines for Operating Municipal Courts During the COVID-19 Recovery

PURPOSE

To protect the courtroom staff and the citizens while they conduct business before the court.

PERSONNEL/STAFF

- Discourage workers from using other workers' phones, desks, offices, or other work tools and equipment;
- Where possible, stagger workstations to avoid employees standing adjacent to one another or next to each other. Where six (6) feet of separation is not possible, consider spacing options that include other mitigation efforts with increased frequency of cleaning and sanitizing surfaces;
- Require all employees to wear face coverings at all times, while Court is in session; and
- Require workers who exhibit signs of illness to not report to work or to seek medical attention.

NOTIFICATION

Citizens who been noticed to appear before the Court, and who fall within one of the categories listed below, may request an automatic 30-60 day continuance by contacting the Clerk of Court prior to the date he/she is scheduled to appear. Anyone needing an interpreter will have his/her case continued to the next court date so one can be scheduled.

Affected Categories:

- is a member of an immune-compromised population (or living in a household with someone who is immune-compromised);
- if they are over 65; and
- if they have small children and do not have child care.

COURTROOM MANAGEMENT

The following guidelines will be adhered to regarding management of the courtroom:

Low-Density Population

Parties attending Court will maintain a six (6) foot distance from other attendees, unless the other attendee resides in the same home.

The square footage of the courtroom is 1,840. The current capacity limit is 96 people. We are reducing the number of people allowed in the courtroom at any given time to 24 people per session.

Staggered Scheduling

Instead of having all noticed parties entering the courtroom at once, noticed parties will check-in with Court staff and wait outside. The number of noticed parties allowed in the courtroom at one time will be determined by the number of non-noticed parties attending open Court.

Screening

Parties attending Court will be asked the following screening questions:

1. Have you recently traveled to or from any areas in which COVID-19 is particularly active?
2. Have you or anyone in your household experienced symptoms of COVID-19?
3. Have you been tested for COVID-19?

Temperature checks will also be conducted of all parties attending Court. Anyone with a fever higher than 100.4 degrees will be refused admission and their case continued.

Staging

Patrons will not be allowed to congregate in waiting areas or common areas. Attendees will be allowed to wait outside the building or in their vehicles as long as they are immediately available to enter the courtroom when called.

Protective Equipment

All courtroom staff will be equipped with masks and will be educated on and given the opportunity to wash their hands frequently. Equipment such as telephones and computer keyboards should not be shared. Hand sanitizing stations will be available to both staff and the public.

Noticed and non-noticed parties attending Court will be required to wear face masks. If they do not have a mask, one will be provided.

Bathrooms are available for handwashing.

Protective Plexiglass screens are used at the payment window.

Markings on the floor in common areas visually remind attendees of social distancing.

Signs throughout the Court provides visual reminders and information on Social Distancing.

Each individual who signs a document will be allowed to retain the pen he or she uses to avoid cross-contamination.

Flow

Certain seating areas will be taped off.

Attendees will enter through one door and exit through another.

Open Courtroom Concerns

Many individuals bring support persons when they come to Court. This will still be allowed, and these non-noticed parties will be considered when determining the number of noticed parties allowed in the courtroom at any given time.

SIGNAGE

A sign will be placed near the entry of the building that states that individuals who have a fever or other symptoms of COVID-19 shall not enter the building.

SANITATION

The courtroom and the annex building will be sanitized. Disinfectant wipes and sprays will be used on benches, tables, and other shared furniture and equipment between uses.

Bathrooms and other shared facilities be cleaned and sanitized regularly.

Judge Malcom F. Bryant, Jr.

Judge Daniel O'Conner

Municipal Court Clerk Dewey Anderson

Vidalia Municipal Court

302 First St. East

Vidalia, GA 30474

(912)537-4123