

IN THE PROBATE COURT OF HARRIS COUNTY
STATE OF GEORGIA

FILED IN PROBATE COURT
HARRIS COUNTY, GA

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THOMAS W. LAKES
PROBATE JUDGE

**Covid-19 Court Operating Guidelines
During Statewide Judicial Emergency**

ORDER

Pursuant to the Order Declaring Statewide Judicial Emergency (Amended) entered by Chief Justice Harold Melton on March 14, 2020, and extended by his subsequent Fourth Order Extending Declaration of Statewide Judicial Emergency entered on July 10, 2020, and Chief Superior Court Judge Bemon G. McBride III's local Order On In-Person Proceedings In The Chattahoochee Judicial Circuit entered on July 17, 2020, and posted on the Administrative Office of the Court's website under the section designated "COVID-19 Court Operating Guidelines" and on the website of the Harris County Clerk of Superior Court, the Probate Court of Harris County will be providing limited in-person functions through August 11, 2020 or until these Orders are terminated or extended.

THEREFORE, IT IS HEREBY ORDERED that the following Operating Guidelines are in effect for the Probate Court of Harris County until further notice:

GENERAL OPERATING GUIDELINES

1. All services provided by the Probate Court are **by appointment only** until further notice. The Court cannot accommodate walk-in appointments at this time.
2. All individuals are subject to being screened at the entrance to the Harris County Courthouse by Sheriff's Office Court Services personnel.
3. All individuals attending Probate Court matters **must wear a mask over their face and nose at all times** unless otherwise directed by the Court.
4. The Probate Court Office lobby will be cleaned each day and between each appointment as time allows.
5. Probate Court personnel will adhere to current recommended health and safety measures outlined by the aforementioned Orders, Georgia Court Reopening Guide, Department of Public Health ("DPH"), and the Center for Disease Control ("CDC").
6. Probate Court Office interactions with the public will be done behind a glass partition. All other in-person contact will be done with face coverings and gloves as necessary with handwashing and sanitizing between appointments.
7. Hearings are open to the public unless otherwise restricted by law. In-court seating will be limited due to social distancing. Litigants and attorneys will be seated first. Others will be allowed into the courtroom as space permits.
8. Anyone with a scheduled hearing or appointment who (1) has COVID-19; (2) is in quarantine due to exposure to someone with COVID-19; (3) is, or lives with someone who is, immune-compromised or medically fragile; (4) is over the age of 65; or (5) cannot arrange childcare due to COVID-19 should contact the Court before appearing in person.
9. In the event any Probate Court employee tests positive, displays symptoms, or is exposed to COVID-19, the Probate Court shall comply with the recommendations and requirements of the aforementioned Orders, Georgia Court Reopening Guide, Georgia DPH, and the CDC regarding isolation, quarantine, and notifications.

SUBJECT MATTER SPECIFIC GUIDELINES

ESTATES AND GUARDIANSHIPS

1. All matters are by appointment only. Call the Probate Court Office to set an appointment before coming to the Courthouse. The Court cannot accommodate walk-in appointments at this time.
2. To minimize in-person contact, pleadings should be completed before coming to the Probate Court to file. Information on how to access Georgia Probate Court Standard Forms can be found on the Court's website at harrisprobate.com.
3. Pleadings and documents may be filed in person or by mailing to P.O. Box 569, Hamilton, Georgia 31811. Please call ahead to arrange payment of court costs.
4. Oaths in uncontested matters may be administered by video conference.
5. Video conferencing in contested matters will be allowed on a case by case basis as practical.
6. For in-person hearings where videoconferencing is not practical, in-court seating will be limited due to social distancing. Litigants and attorneys will be seated first. Others will be allowed into the courtroom as space permits.
7. Witnesses will be sequestered in compliance with social distancing requirements.
8. The Courtroom will be cleaned and disinfected as appropriate after each proceeding.
9. Additional information is available at harrisprobate.com.

TRAFFIC COURT

No In-Person Hearings Until Further Notice

1. In-person Traffic Court proceedings have been cancelled until further notice. Notices for new in-person hearing dates will be mailed to all concerned as appropriate.
2. For matters that do not require an in-person appearance, defendants may still pay fines online at www.ezcourtpay.com or by calling 800-262-0128.
3. If a charge requires a Court appearance, a defendant may waive arraignment, plead not guilty, and request a bench trial or jury trial without coming to Court. Contact the Probate Court for more information.
4. To work out a plea agreement or discuss charge(s) with a prosecutor, call 706-628-4080.
5. For anyone who cannot afford an attorney, contact the Public Defender's Office at 706-653-4301 to qualify for free legal representation.
6. For those who have appeared at a previous Court date and have completed the terms of a plea agreement, contact the Court for available options to resolve the matter.
7. First appearances, probation revocations, and other matters involving individuals incarcerated at the Harris County Jail, will be handled by videoconference in compliance with all rights and privileges afforded to the accused.

When In-Person Proceedings Resume

8. When in-person proceedings resume, please arrive at least 30 minutes early to allow time to get through security and to be seated in the courtroom.
9. Please observe floor and seat markers and follow directions of Court security.
10. Unless otherwise noted, masks will be required to enter the Courtroom.
11. In-court seating will be limited due to social distancing. Individuals with traffic citations and attorneys will be seated first. Others will be allowed into the courtroom as space permits.
12. The Courtroom will be cleaned and disinfected as appropriate after each proceeding.
13. To request a continuance for good cause, contact the Court to send a written request and reason(s) for the continuance request before the scheduled Court date.
14. Additional information is available at harrisprobate.com.

WEAPONS CARRY LICENSES

1. Applications for Weapons Carry Licenses are by appointment only. Applicants must call the Probate Court Office to set an appointment before appearing in person at the Courthouse. The Court cannot accommodate walk-in appointments at this time.
2. Only Applicants may attend appointments. Friends and family members must wait outside.
3. Applicants must arrive at the appointed date and time. Those who arrive early must wait outside to allow other applicants to finish due to limited space for social distancing. Those who arrive late will be rescheduled to a later date and time.
4. To minimize in-person contact and to speed up the process, complete the application online by following the link and instructions on the Court's website at harrisprobate.com or at www.georgiaprobaterecords.com.
5. Applicants for new licenses must be fingerprinted. Court staff shall wear a mask and gloves while fingerprinting applicants and shall clean and sanitize all appropriate equipment between each appointment.
6. Additional information is available at harrisprobate.com.

MARRIAGE LICENSES

1. Applications for Marriage Licenses are by appointment only. Applicants must call the Probate Court Office to set an appointment before appearing in person at the Courthouse. The Court cannot accommodate walk-in appointments at this time.
2. Only Applicants may attend appointments. Friends and family members must wait outside.
3. Applicants must arrive at the appointed date and time. Those who arrive early must wait outside to allow other applicants to finish due to limited space for social distancing. Those who arrive late will be rescheduled to a later date and time.
4. To minimize in-person contact and to speed up the process, complete the application online by following the link and instructions on the Court's website at harrisprobate.com or at www.georgiaprobaterecords.com.
5. Additional information is available at harrisprobate.com.

ESTATES AND TITLE RESEARCH

1. All in-person record research is by appointment only. Call the Probate Court Office to set an appointment before coming to the Courthouse. The Court cannot accommodate walk-in appointments at this time.
2. Public records dating back to 2016 are viewable online at www.georgiaprobaterecords.com. Older records are scanned and posted online as time permits.

ALL OTHER MATTERS

Contact the Probate Court Office or visit harrisprobate.com for more information.

SO ORDERED this 30th day of July, 2020.



Thomas W. Lakes
Judge, Probate Court of Harris County