

Heard County Probate Court  
Judge Joseph Bledsoe  
215 East Court Square  
P.O. Box 478  
Franklin, GA. 30217

Phone: 706-675-3353

Fax: 706-675-0819

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Tuesday July 21, 2020

**GUIDELINES FOR HEARD COUNTY PROBATE COURT**

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, judicial emergency orders were issued by Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Georgia, Harold Melton. Chief Justice Melton directed courts to develop guidelines for in-court proceedings to protect the health of all involved. To comply with that direction, below are the guidelines of the Heard County Probate Court.

1) Basic Measures

Social Distancing - Individuals will be directed to keep 6 feet between themselves and others with whom they do not live in the same household. Large crowds may not congregate.

Good Hygiene - Individuals will be directed to wash hands and use sanitizers. Sanitizers will be placed strategically in the lobby of the courthouse and courtroom

Cleaning Surfaces - Frequently touched surfaces will be sanitized regularly with disinfectant spray.

Face Coverings - Face coverings will be required Pursuant to Order of Chief Superior Court Judge John Simpson dated 21<sup>st</sup> day of May 2020. Face coverings will be required in all shared spaces of the Probate Court when guest are present.

Self-Quarantine Policy - Mandatory self-disclosure and self-quarantine policies are in place to immediately alert the Probate Judge if they have symptoms, test positive, or have had close contact with anyone who has tested positive. Close contact is within 6 feet for 10 minutes or more. Any employee that meets these criteria will be required to stay home

Screening at courthouse entrance - Individuals entering the courthouse are subject to screening which may include questions and a temperature check.

- 2) Courtroom - The Probate Courtroom is shared with the Chief Magistrate, Juvenile Judge, and Superior Court Clerk. It has seating for over 100 people but we will only allow a maximum of 20 not including bailiffs, court clerk, probation officer and judge. A second small courtroom that is shared will hold a lot less and only allow 8 guests plus a bailiff, clerk, probation officer and the judge. Visitors that visit the court will be encouraged to not bring unnecessary guest with them.

- 3) Probate Court Specific Plan for Hearings

Oaths - Oaths will be conducted using Skype when possible. In person oaths will be given/allowed by appointment in the courthouse lobby and when multiple oaths are needed the appointments will be staggered to limit the number of people.

Essential Hearings - Probate Court will conduct essential hearings in one of two courtrooms following the guidelines submitted above for the use of the courtroom.

Non-Essential Hearings - All cases will be specially set to allow interested parties to attend without courtroom overflow.

Filings - All individuals who wish to submit filings are encouraged to submit through the mail. Individuals are allowed to enter the courthouse and submit to the clerk in the courthouse lobby as room permits. Questions or completion of forms will not be allowed while in the courthouse but must be asked via telephone.

4) Applications

Weapons Carry License - Applicants are encouraged to complete application online at [Georgiaprobate.com](http://Georgiaprobate.com) and schedule appointment prior to visiting the Probate Court. Knowing internet service is very sparse in our rural county we will accept walk-ins when the courthouse lobby can accommodate. WE have provided a table and chair in the lobby to allow completion and signing of application. Table, chairs, pens and any other items used will be sanitized frequently. Hand sanitizer is also provided at the table and courthouse lobby for all to use.

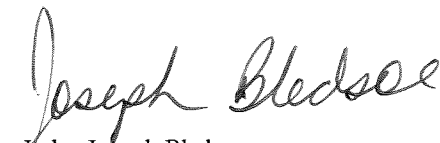
Marriage License - Applicants are encouraged to complete application online and schedule appointment prior to coming to courthouse. Again, knowing internet service is very sparse we will accept walk-ins when we can safely accommodate.

Records Searching - Records researchers are allowed to visit without appointment, but may be asked to leave if others enter the Probate Court to maintain low numbers.

All other services - Everyone is encouraged to call the court to ask questions.

The Probate Court will likely need to change and adjust these plans as time moves forward and better ideas are discovered. When changes happen, the guidelines will be made available on the court website at <http://heardcountyga.com/probate.html>. To contact the court by telephone please call 706-675-3353.

Respectfully,



Judge Joseph Bledsoe  
Probate Judge