



*Ben Hill County Probate Court*  
*David T. Hobby, Judge*

111 SOUTH SHERIDAN STREET  
FITZGERALD, GA 31750-2866

Telephone (229) 426-5137 • Telefax (229) 426-5486

Melinda Stembridge, Associate Judge  
melinda.stembridge@benhillcounty-ga.gov

Dawn Ryals, Clerk

July 20, 2020

The Ben Hill County Probate Court remains open to serve the needs of our citizens. We do however want to operate in a manner that protects the health and welfare of all. Therefore the following procedures have been implemented:

- The Probate Court is currently handling all matters within its jurisdiction.
- Applicants for marriage and weapons carry licenses are encouraged to utilize the online application at [georgiaprobaterecords.com](http://georgiaprobaterecords.com), but may complete the application on the lobby computer at the Probate Court.
- Appointments are only necessary if you want to speak privately with court personnel. Otherwise, all matters will be transacted through the front window barrier.
- No more than 2 people shall be in the lobby at one time and shall exercise social distancing.
- All persons are encouraged to wear face masks inside the Probate Court office.
- The Probate Court does not perform marriage ceremonies. The court does issue marriage licenses.
- If your Weapons Carry License expired after March 13<sup>th</sup>, 2020, you have 120 days after the expiration date on your license to renew. Your license is still valid during this 120 day period.
- The Court has adopted the COVID-19 Court Operation Guidelines of the Superior Court of Ben Hill County for all matters held in the Superior Court courtroom. A copy is attached hereto
- Additional information may be obtained on our website at [www.benhillcounty-ga.gov](http://www.benhillcounty-ga.gov) or by calling 229-922-0246.

David Hobby, Probate Judge  
Ben Hill County

**IN THE SUPERIOR COURTS FOR THE CORDELE JUDICIAL CIRCUIT**

**STATE OF GEORGIA**


**COVID-19 COURT OPERATING GUIDELINES**

Due to the ongoing public health state of emergency declared by the Governor and a Statewide Judicial Emergency declared by the Chief Justice of the Georgia Supreme Court, the Superior Courts of the Cordele Judicial Circuit will conduct in-person hearings and court sessions on a limited basis subject to the following guidelines.

1. Each person entering the courthouse or a court facility will be required to go through a screening process which will include taking the person's temperature. Anyone with a temperature over 100 degrees will not be admitted to the courthouse. Each person entering the courthouse will be requested to use hand soap and/or hand sanitizer which will be available.
2. Persons falling into one of the following categories shall be denied admittance into any courthouse in the Cordele Judicial Circuit without obtaining an exception from the Chief Judge:
  - a. Anyone entering the courthouse who is experiencing a fever, any shortness of breath, persistent cough or sore throat, or any other symptoms of respiratory infection or who has experienced such symptoms and is subject to Georgia Department of Public Health Isolation Protocol will not be admitted to the courthouse.
  - b. Any person who has traveled to or been in close contact with anyone who has traveled to an area or location with widespread, ongoing transmission of Coronavirus "COVID-19" within the last 14 days immediately preceding attempted access to the courthouse, per CDC Guidelines, which countries presently include China, Iran, South Korea, and all European countries.
  - c. Anyone who has been asked to self-quarantine by any healthcare provider or who lives with someone who has been asked to self-quarantine.
  - d. Anyone who has been diagnosed with or exposed to COVID-19 or has had contact with anyone who has been so diagnosed within the last 14 days will not be admitted.

3. Any person not admitted to courthouse for the foregoing reasons will be given a telephone number or other form of communication to contact court officials regarding all alternative means of pursuing critical judicial matters.
4. Each person admitted to the courthouse will be required to observe social distancing, which includes remaining 6 feet away from anyone else while in the courthouse, entering the courthouse, or exiting the courthouse.
5. All courthouse employees and members of the public are required to wear a mask or face covering when entering the courthouse. The wearing of a mask in the courthouse is encouraged after entry into the court facility except when someone is involved in speaking in the courtroom proceedings.
6. Any person working in a court facility with known or suspected COVID-19 shall be required to isolate himself or herself at home or another location approved by the Georgia Department of Public Health. Any person COVID-19 exposure likely to result in infection shall be required to quarantine himself or herself at home or another location approved by the Georgia Department of Public Health.
7. There will be designated places marked with a blue X where each person is allowed to sit while in the courtroom and which will allow social distancing of at least six (6) feet. Social distancing shall be required by all who enter the courthouse including attorneys, parties, witnesses, spectators and court officials. Social distancing requirements will be strictly enforced.
8. The Court will stagger its proceedings to minimize the number of people in the courthouse at any particular time. All Court proceedings are open to the public; we ask that those attending be limited to only those who are interested in the proceedings going forward at that time.
9. The courtroom and all public areas will be sanitized before and after each session.
10. Any person who meets the criteria for being medically fragile or being at a higher risk of severe illness, per Governor Brian Kemp's Shelter in Place Order and the extensions thereof, will be excused from any court proceeding through the expiration of the Shelter in Place Order and any extension thereof. The current Order mandates that the medically fragile shelter in place through July 15, 2020.

This 10<sup>th</sup> day of July, 2020.

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
ROBERT W. CHASTEEN, JR.  
CHIEF JUDGE, SUPERIOR COURTS  
CORDELE JUDICIAL CIRCUIT

**COURTHOUSE COVID-19 SCREENING PROTOCOL**

Instructions for courthouse security or designated employees:

Upon entering the courthouse, all visitors must attest to or acknowledge to no known illness by responding to the following statements. It is also recommended that persons conducting the screenings should wear a mask and sterile gloves while practicing social distancing with no less than a three (3) foot barrier.

**COVID-19 SAMPLE SCREENING STATEMENTS**

- I attest that I have not traveled to a high-risk area or location identified as a “hot spot” of confirmed coronavirus (COVID-19) cases within the last 14 days.
- I attest that I have not tested positive for COVID-19 or been instructed to isolate or quarantine by a healthcare provider within the past 14 days.
- To the best of my knowledge, I have not had contact with a person confirmed or presumed to have coronavirus (COVID-19) within the last 14 days.
- I attest that I have not, within the past ten days, experienced symptoms of COVID-19, including cough, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, fever above 100 degrees, chills, muscle pain, sore throat, headache, or new loss of taste or smell.
- I attest that I have not exhibited a fever of 100° F or higher within the last 72 hours.

\_\_\_\_\_

Name of Visitor

\_\_\_\_\_

Date

**TO BE COMPLETED BY SCREENER/COURTHOUSE SECURITY**

- Does the individual have a fever greater than 100 F with the temporal thermometer?  
Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

The visitor will be asked to leave the courthouse if he or she (1) is unable to attest to or respond to the above statements or (2) presents a fever of 100° F or higher. The visitor may contact the office of the presiding Judge at \_\_\_\_\_.