

MUSCOGEE COUNTY STATE COURT
COVID 19 Judicial Emergency Schedule
Updated Wednesday, July 8, 2020 at 8:04 AM

Please know that your health is of the utmost importance to those of us working in the court system.

Muscogee County State Court shares the Government Center with offices of the Governing Authority and the following courts: Superior, Probate, Juvenile, Magistrate and Municipal. State Court will adapt and follow all guidelines established by the Chief Superior Court Judge of the Chattahoochee Judicial Circuit. The current standing order is found here:

<http://www.muscogee courts.com/docs/2020-COVID-19-ChattahoocheeJudicialCircuitOrderRegardingJuryTrialsVideoConferenceTechnology,AccessToCourtandSocialDistancing.pdf>

as well as our own guidelines found here:

<https://www.columbusga.gov/statecourt/Emergency%20procedure%20guidelines%20Muscogee%20County%20COVID%2019.pdf>

Muscogee County State Court is fortunate to work with a governing authority that has made extreme efforts to accommodate the needs of the courts in our county. The State Court Courtrooms have limited capacity, the Government Center has only four public elevators and currently only one security screening point through which all members of the public must pass. Toward that end, the Columbus Consolidated Government has allowed the court to use the Civic Center.

During the current state of emergency, the 7th and 11th Floor State Court courtrooms will only be used for civil non-jury matters and teleconference with the Jail courtroom.

It should be emphasized that no person, party or attorney shall be required by a judge to physically attend any court assembly if that participant has any reason to believe his or her health might be compromised until such time as the Chief Justice of the Georgia Supreme Court terminates the state of judicial emergency.

Muscogee County State Court Draft Operations Plan as directed by the City Manager on Mar. 24, 2020

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Judge Richardson and I have implemented emergency procedures as directed by Chief Justice Melton and Chief Superior Court Judge McBride.

- All in court civil matters are continued until large scale teleconferencing protocol can be developed or physical public access is returned to normalcy.
- We have postponed criminal arraignment and trial dockets until large scale teleconferencing protocol can be developed or physical public access is returned to normalcy.
- Paperwork between the Judges, the Solicitor, the Public Defender, the Clerk of Court and the Probation Office are now primarily handled by scanned documents and electronic means.
- Whenever civil or criminal matters can be handled using paperwork rather than physical presence of litigants or parties it is being done.

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- When in-person contact is required between employees of State Court Government Center offices and/or outside attorneys or pro-se litigants protective breathing masks are worn and a six-foot distance between participants is maintained.
- Documents needed by traffic defendants for the Georgia Department of Driver Services license clearance are held pending reopening of that office.
- Arrest and Search warrants for law enforcement agents have either been handled outdoors or, when inside, while wearing protective breathing masks and maintaining a six-foot distance between participants.
- We are constitutionally obligated to hold jail pleas and successfully held the county's first teleconferenced court session between Courtroom 11 East and Recorder's Courtroom #2 on March 19, 2020. Superior Court is planning on using the teleconferencing equipment Judge Richardson and I set up for their hearings involving felony inmates.
- One constitutional inmate extradition hearing has been held by a State Court judge in the Sheriff's lockup since the judicial emergency declaration and a judge will remain available for future extradition hearings. We have appropriate respiratory and ocular protective equipment for being in the 4th Floor lockup and are trying to locate an appropriate hood or other head covering to replace the equipment.

Andy Prather

MUSCOGEE COUNTY STATE COURT

TRAFFIC & MISDEMEANOR DIVISION

Solicitor-General 706 225 4327

Clerk of Court 706 225 4368

CIVIL DIVISION

Clerk of Court 706 225 4361

Judge Prather 706 225 4318

Judge Richardson 706 225 3480

For court dates postponed during the state of emergency, notice of the new court date for traffic and other misdemeanor cases will be mailed to the address shown on your bond. If your address changed during the emergency, please call 706 225 4327.

If you have symptoms of an upper respiratory infection, are over the age of 65, have a preexisting medical condition which places you at higher risk for respiratory complications or have been around someone who has

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tested positive for the coronavirus, contact the Solicitor-General's Office upon receipt of your notice and ask to be rescheduled. You will be required to provide information about your condition. Excuses may be granted, and your case rescheduled. In some circumstances, documentation may be required.

STATE COURT JUDICIAL EMERGENCY SCHEDULE:

CRIMINAL

- All March, April, and May 2020 arraignment and trial dockets are postponed. New notices will be mailed by the clerk's office for all court dates rescheduled.
- Jail Pleas, preliminary extradition inquiries and other essential criminal matters are being held via teleconferencing. Live streaming is available as follows.
- Division 1, Richardson: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC5-rldgsoyceDg3rLreHWtg/live>
- Division 2, Prather: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC3NtPK-EBWyxlIzcyySn4MA>

CRIMINAL (continued from Page 1)

The following State Court Criminal Arraignments and Trial Dockets have been postponed and will be rescheduled. New notices will be mailed by the clerk's office once they are rescheduled.

- March 20 and 27 Arraignments
- April 3, 10, 17, 24 Arraignments
- April 13 Trial Docket
- May 1, 8, 15, 22, and 29 Arraignments
- May 11, Trial Docket
- June 5 and 12 Arraignments
- June 8 Trial Docket

- Bond Forfeiture Show Cause Dates
 - Friday, March 27, 2020 hearings are rescheduled for Friday, July 30, 2020
 - Friday, April 24, 2020 hearings are rescheduled for Friday, June 26, 2020
 - Friday, May 29, 2020 hearing are rescheduled for Friday July 30, 2020

Beginning July 16, 2020, we will conduct Arraignments/Pleas **at 8:00 a.m. and 10:30 a.m.** (instead of 8:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m.).

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All notices for the following Arraignments should be changed to reflect **8:00 a.m. for defendants with last names beginning A-L** and **10:30 a.m. for all defendants with last names beginning M-Z**:

- Thursday, July 16
- Friday, July 17
- *No court July 23, 24*
- Thursday, July 30
- *No court July 31*
- *No court August 1-17*
- Thursday, August 20
- Friday, August 21
- Thursday, August 27
- Friday, August 28

Our **Trial Docket Calls** on July 13th and August 17th and 24th **will still be at 8:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m.** as notices have already been mailed or personally provided to defendants.

CIVIL

- Non-jury civil matters will be rescheduled. Video conferencing for civil matters should be operational by early May.
- Civil jury trial dockets will resume once State Court receives word that juries are available for this purpose. Superior Court domestic and all criminal jury matters have priority.

DPH Guidelines to Prevent Spread of COVID-19

Potential Guidelines for Courts

- Deep clean entire building
- Increase cleaning and disinfection after each day
- Offer multiple sessions to accommodate social distancing of at least 6 feet
- Do not hand out paper-based information
- Provide hand sanitizer
- Encourage elderly and medically fragile individuals to stay home
- Encourage only the person required for court to attend (*hospitals have a NO guest policy*)
- Ensure that everyone is wearing a mask (provide masks for those who don't have one)
- Mark floors as a visual cue for social distancing
- Remove/arrange furniture to support social distancing
- Keep an online meeting option
- Use a screening tool to screen everyone entering the building for exposure to a COVID-19 positive patient, or any symptoms of the virus or illness

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- Screen everyone for fever
- Post signs about non-contact greetings
- Limit bathroom use and control the number of users at one time



MUSCOGEE COUNTY STATE COURT 19 JUNE 2020 HELD IN THE COLUMBUS, GA CIVIC CENTER ICE HOCKY RINK THANKS TO THE MAYOR, CITY COUNCIL AND CITY MANAGER OF THE COLUMBUS CONSOLIDATED GOVERNMENT.

[STANDING ORDER FOR COURT PROCEDURES DURING JUDICIAL EMERGENCY](#)

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