

**IN THE PROBATE COURT OF GREENE COUNTY
STATE OF GEORGIA**

**IN RE: Adoption of Guidelines for
Conducting Court and
Resuming In-Person Proceedings**

STANDING ORDER

WHEREAS, Governor Brian P. Kemp issued an Executive Order declaring a Public Health State of Emergency on March 14th, 2020, in response to the advent and spread of the novel Coronavirus and COVID-19.

WHEREAS, the Honorable Harold D. Melton, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Georgia, issued an Order Declaring Statewide Judicial Emergency on the same date.

WHEREAS, the Order Declaring Statewide Judicial Emergency has been extended five (5) times, and the current order (Fifth Order Extending Declaration of Statewide Judicial Emergency) expires on September 10th, 2020.

WHEREAS, the Second Order Extending Declaration of Statewide Judicial Emergency issued on May 11th, 2020, requires courts, prior to holding in-person proceedings, develop and adopt written guidelines for conducting court in a manner that protects the health, safety, and well-being of judges, court personnel, staff, attorneys, litigants, and the public.

NOW THEREFORE, the Honorable LaVerne C. Ogletree, Judge of the Probate Court of Greene County, does hereby adopt the following written guidelines for conducting court and resuming in-person proceedings:

1. All scheduled court dates and hearings shall be held on the third (3rd) floor of the Greene County Courthouse.
2. Court calendars shall be limited to no more than ten (10) defendants.
3. All hearing notices shall contain information requiring defendants to contact the Clerk of Court for the purpose of requesting a continuance in the event of the following:
 - (a) the defendant is currently infected with COVID-19;
 - (b) the defendant is experiencing a fever and/or other symptoms associated with COVID-19;
 - (c) the defendant is in quarantine due to exposure to a person infected with COVID-19;
 - (d) the defendant is a member of an immune-compromised or medically fragile population (or living in a household with someone who is immune-compromised or medically fragile);
 - (e) the defendant is over the age of 65; and/or
 - (f) the defendant has small children and does not have child care due to COVID-19.
4. The public's access to court proceedings is a fundamental principle of the United States and Georgia Constitutions. Accordingly, all court proceedings shall be open to the public. However, the Court asks that defendants refrain from bringing non-essential persons (i.e. children, family members, friends) into the courthouse.

5. Defendants should arrive at the courthouse at least fifteen (15) minutes before the start of court in order to allow time for screening prior to entering the courtroom.
6. All persons entering the courthouse for probate court are required to wear a mask or other face covering. Accordingly, all persons should arrive for court prepared with a mask. The Court will provide a mask to persons who appear for court and do not have their own. If a defendant, attorney, or subpoenaed witness has a medical issue limiting and/or preventing the use of a mask or other face covering, he/she shall notify the Clerk of Court at least five (5) days prior to the court date. The affected case shall automatically be continued to a later court date, and will be specially set or held remotely via Zoom video conferencing.
7. Upon arrival, all persons shall pass through the security checkpoint at the front entrance of the courthouse. There are restroom facilities which contain handwashing and hand sanitizing products on the first (1st) floor.
8. There shall be no congregating in the hallways or common areas of the courthouse. All persons shall proceed directly to the courtroom on the third (3rd) floor after passing through the security checkpoint.
9. Prior to entering the courtroom, designated court personnel shall ask each person the following questions:
 - (a) are you currently experiencing any symptoms of COVID-19 (i.e. cough, shortness of breath, difficulty breathing, chills, muscle pain, sore throat, headache, or new loss of taste or smell);
 - (b) have you experienced symptoms of COVID-19 (i.e. cough, shortness of breath, difficulty breathing, fever above 100.0 degrees, chills, muscle pain, sore throat, headache, or new loss of taste or smell) within the last ten (10) days;
 - (c) have you been in contact with someone known to have COVID-19 within the last fourteen (14) days?
Any person who answers "yes" to any one (1) of the three (3) questions hereinabove shall be denied entry into the courtroom. If such person is a defendant, attorney, or subpoenaed witness, the affected case shall automatically be continued to a later court date.
10. Further, prior to entering the courtroom, designated court personnel shall take each person's temperature using a no-touch thermometer. Any person with a fever of 100.0 degrees or higher shall be denied entry into the courtroom. If such person is a defendant, attorney, or subpoenaed witness, the affected case shall automatically be continued to a later court date.
11. Shaking hands and other unnecessary person-to-person contact is strictly prohibited.
12. All persons shall maintain a distance of at least six (6) feet from each other at all times.
13. Seating is restricted to every other bench (i.e. leaving one (1) empty bench between persons), starting with the first bench at the front of the courtroom. Further, only two (2) persons are permitted per bench, and such persons must sit at opposite ends of the bench.
14. Counsel shall sit at the tables located at the front of the courtroom.
15. All persons shall remain seated unless permitted to approach the prosecuting attorney, public defender, Clerk of Court, or the bench by the Judge. Persons shall not approach the bench or go beyond counsel tables without permission from the Court.
16. Counsel and court personnel should limit their movement in the courtroom. Counsel should present from the counsel tables, unless otherwise directed by the Court.
17. Hand sanitizer is located at the entrance to the courtroom.
18. When signing documents, each person shall use his/her own pen or, alternatively, a pen that has been sanitized by designated court personnel.
19. At the conclusion of court, designated court personnel shall clean, disinfect, and/or sanitize frequently touched objects and surfaces, including ink pens, door handles, countertops, tables, and seating.

20. Probate Court for Greene County is held in the Greene County Courthouse, a facility shared with employees of Greene County and the State of Georgia. In accordance with the Seventh Amended Administrative Order for Public Health Control Measures issued by the Department of Public Health and the Fourth Order Extending Declaration of Statewide Judicial Emergency, the Court shall require isolation of any person who works in the court facility who is known or suspected to have COVID-19, and the Court shall require quarantine of any person who works in the court facility who has been exposed to COVID-19 which is likely to result in infection.
21. The Court shall notify the Greene County Health Department and the Northeast Health District regional office located in Athens, Georgia, in the event that anyone who works in or enters the Greene County Courthouse has been exposed to COVID-19. The Greene County Health Department and/or the Northeast Health District shall notify persons who may have been exposed in accordance with its policy, procedures, and regulations.
22. This Standing Order and the guidelines contained herein shall remain in full force and effect, and all court proceedings shall be conducted in accordance with the provisions herein, for the duration of the statewide judicial emergency, as declared by order of the Supreme Court of Georgia.

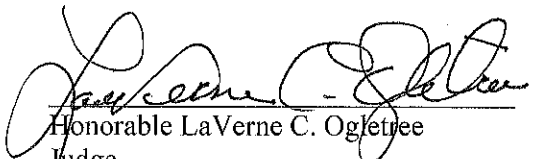
IT IS ORDERED that the undersigned shall serve a copy of this Standing Order on the Honorable Harold D. Melton, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Georgia, such service being effected via e-mail to Therese Barnes, Clerk of the Supreme Court of Georgia, at barnest@gasupreme.us;

IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that the undersigned shall cause a copy of this Standing Order to be submitted to the Administrative Office of the Courts (at <https://georgiacourts.gov/covid-19-court-operating-guidelines-form/>) for the purpose of being posted at <https://georgiacourts.gov/covid-19-court-operating-guidelines/>;

IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that the undersigned shall cause a copy of this Standing Order to be posted at the entrance to the Greene County Courthouse and on the door of the entrance to the courtroom located on the third (3rd) floor;

IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that the Clerk of Court shall include a Notice of courtroom procedures required by this Standing Order with every hearing notice sent to defendants, attorneys of record, and subpoenaed witnesses;

SO ORDERED, this 27th day of August, 2020.


Honorable LaVerne C. Ogletree
Judge,
Probate Court of Greene County