

Magistrate Judges

Chief Magistrate
Melinda Anderson

Associate Magistrates
Angela C. Rogers
Jimmie R. Bomar
Gerald Morris
Joelyn Pirkle

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MAGISTRATE COURT
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Staff

Deputy Clerks
Miranda Cole
Wanda Griffin
Lydia Moran
Casey Brady
Kim Sachau

LIBERTY COUNTY MAGISTRATE COURT
201 South Main Street, Justice Center Bldg., Suite 2100
Hinesville, Georgia 31313
(912) 368-2063

MEMORANDUM

TO: All litigants, attorneys and members of the public
FROM: Chief Magistrate Judge Melinda Anderson, Liberty County *MA*
DATE: September 15, 2020

Pursuant to the Second, Third, Fourth, Fifth, and Sixth Orders Extending Declaration of Statewide Judicial Emergency signed by the Honorable Harold D. Melton, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Georgia and an Order Establishing Guidelines For In Person Court Proceedings signed by the Judges of the Georgia Superior Courts for the Atlantic Judicial Circuit, and in order to protect the health of litigants, lawyers, judges, court personnel, and the public and in accordance with said orders, the Magistrate Court will handle matters to the extent feasible and consistent with said Orders, public health guidance and the requirements of the United States and Georgia Constitutions and applicable statutes and court rules, including the public’s right of access to judicial proceedings and a criminal defendant’s right to confrontation and an open courtroom. The following Guidelines and procedures for in-court proceedings and in-person filings shall remain in effect while the Judicial Emergency is in place or until further Order of the Chief Magistrate of the Liberty County, Georgia.

Updated court information is posted on the Liberty County Magistrate Court webpage at www.libertycountyga.com/department/?structureid=55

GENERAL SAFETY GUIDELINES FOR LIBERTY COUNTY MAGISTRATE COURT

The court cannot guarantee, nor does it attempt to guarantee, that strict adherence to the following protocol and guidelines will prevent the contraction or spreading of any infectious disease, including but not limited to COVID-19.

You will **have to comply** with all safety measures in place by the Liberty County Justice Center security upon entering the building.

You will **have to comply** with all safety measures in place by the Liberty County Magistrate Court to enter the courtroom and or office.

The safety measures for Magistrate Court include:

- 1. SCREENING:** Prior to an individual being admitted to the courtroom and or office, they must answer a series of questions and have their temperature taken. No one with a temperature of 100°F or higher will be admitted into the courtroom and or office.

2. **PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT (PPE):** All individuals shall wear a mask or face covering that covers their nose and mouth inside the courtroom and or office. The mask or face covering **shall** remain on while in the Magistrate Court, unless you are given permission to remove the mask or face covering by the judge or other court staff member. If an individual doesn't have a mask the court will provide them with one.
3. **SANITIZATION:** All individuals shall sanitize their hands prior to entering the courtroom and or office. Hand sanitizer dispensers will be available at the entrance to the courtroom and office.
4. **SOCIAL DISTANCING:** All individuals entering the courtroom and or office must practice social distancing by maintaining a distance of at least six (6) feet from others at all times. All individuals must sit in seats marked with an "X", which are already measured six (6) feet apart from other designated and or marked seats.
5. **OCCUPANCY:**
 - The Magistrate Court will remain open for the public but they are encouraged to stay home. Only parties, attorneys and necessary witnesses should appear.
 - Please leave non-essential people at home. Avoid bringing children and or family members especially the elderly.
 - There is a limit on the number of people who may safely enter the courtroom and or office to comply with the social distancing requirements. If you anticipate your case will require additional people to be in attendance at your hearing than can safely fit into the courtroom notify the Magistrate Court sufficiently in advance of the hearing so that accommodations can be made for overflow.
 - In the courtroom, observers may sit in the gallery on the marked "X" only. No one may approach the bench without the permission of the judge or the clerk. People are encouraged to remain outside the courtroom until their case is called. Witnesses are encouraged to remain outside the courtroom until they are called.
 - Seating is on a first come first served basis. If there is not sufficient seating the individual(s) will be asked to have a seat in the hall until they are needed, until their case is called, or until seating is available.
 - A maximum number of sixteen (16) individuals shall be allowed in the courtroom at a time as long as social distancing guidelines are being followed; this number does not include Court personnel. If there are individuals that reside in the same household, they may be allowed to sit together.
6. **CLEANING:** The courtroom, including surfaces of tables, podiums, chairs, and door handles must be cleaned and sanitized between proceedings. All pens and clipboards are sanitized per use.
7. **HIGH RISK INDIVIDUALS:** At risk individuals shall notify the Magistrate Court by calling 912-368-2063 at least three (3) days prior to their scheduled hearing, or as soon as practicable. The notification must include a proposed reasonable accommodation for that individual. It is at the courts discretion as to which accommodation is appropriate.

The following persons are defined as high risk individuals:

- Persons over 65 years of age
- Persons living in a nursing home or long-term care facility
- Persons who have chronic lung disease or moderate to severe asthma
- Persons who have a severe heart condition
- Persons who are immunocompromised which can be caused by many conditions, for example, cancer treatment, smoking, bone marrow or organ transplantation, immune deficiencies, poorly controlled HIV or AIDS, and prolonged use of corticosteroids and other immune weakness medications
- Persons with severe obesity
- Persons with diabetes
- Persons with chronic kidney disease undergoing dialysis

- Persons with liver disease
- No one should come to court if they are not feeling well or have a temperature of 100°F or higher. Contact the Magistrate Court to be excused and to have your case rescheduled.
- Please answer the seven questions below before you come to the Magistrate Court and or Justice Center.
 - 1) In the last 14 days, have you had a fever of 100°F degrees or higher?
 - 2) Have you had a recent onset of coughing?
 - 3) Have you had any recent difficulty breathing and or shortness of breath?
 - 4) Have you had a recent upper respiratory illness accompanied by fever?
 - 5) Have you had a recent change in sense of taste or smell?
 - 6) In the last 14 days, have you or anyone you have had contact with been outside of the country?
 - 7) Have you or anyone you have had contact with been diagnosed with or is under investigation for potential COVID-19 infection?

If your answer to **any** of the seven questions is **YES**, then you should not come to the Court and or Justice Center. Instead, contact the Magistrate Court to be excused and to have your case rescheduled.

- Prior to entering the Magistrate Court and or Justice Center, you should answer the above questions again. If your answer to **any** of the above questions is **YES**, then contact the Magistrate Court to be excused and to have your case rescheduled.

As long as there is a Judicial Emergency, **the following will occur in Magistrate Court:**

- General Civil – Hearings shall be done at the discretion of the Judge.
- Criminal Calendar – Hearings shall be done at the discretion of the Judge. Judges shall hear:
 - Arrest Warrants
 - Search Warrants
 - Initial Appearances / Bond Hearings
 - Extradition Hearings

For all hearings, there shall be strict compliance with public health guidance and social distancing requirements outlined above.

- If you have internet access, please consider E-filing on-line for civil cases, including Small Claims, Garnishments and Dispospossories (Evictions) at <https://www.libertyco.com/services/ECourtServices.aspx>

On June 8, 2020, the Magistrate Court did begin to increase the in-court schedule. For civil and criminal court dates please contact the Magistrate Court.

As always, be sure to bring all evidence you have for your case, such as; contracts, ledgers, receipts, correspondence, pictures, or any witnesses. Be prepared to provide a copy to the Judge and all parties on the day of your hearing if you plan to present any documents to the Court on your hearing date. If you are unable to provide the Judge and all parties copies of your documents be prepared to pay at a rate of \$1.00 per copy. This applies to paper documents only. Photos and other documents on Cell phones and other electronic devices **must** be printed in order to be considered as evidence. Your evidence may not be considered, if your evidence has not been printed from those devices.

Please call our office **(912) 368-2063** or the Clerk’s Office **(912) 876-3625** if you have any questions or if your matter can be resolved with a phone call.

These guidelines are subject to change as new information is discovered or we become aware of any problems.