

AUGUSTA JUDICIAL CIRCUIT JURY TRIAL PLAN

Operating Guidelines Submitted to the Administrative Office of the Courts.

This submission represents the effort of the Local Committee on Resuming Jury Trials of the Augusta Judicial Circuit which include Burke, Columbia and Richmond Counties. The committee was represented by each class of court, the District Attorney and Solicitor General, the Circuit Public Defender and experienced criminal and civil defense attorneys, representatives of the local bar association, attorneys experienced with jury trials, The Sheriff and designees, each Clerk of Court, jury manager and clerk, representatives of the Marshal's offices, Department of Community Supervision, Fire Chiefs, local Information Technology staff, Central Services, Health Department, Court Administration, and interested parties who volunteered to serve for the purpose of establishing a safe, healthy, and orderly plan for resumption of jury trials in the Augusta Judicial Circuit. The Local Committee's Plan was tailored to meet the individual demands, unique characteristics, and available facilities and services of each county within the circuit. The Committee's plan considered:

1. Identification of facilities for jury assembly, orientation, voir dire and jury trials:
 - Burke County – has the capacity to hold two jury trials per session of court, picking one jury in the morning and one in the afternoon by utilizing two large courtrooms and smaller courtrooms as necessity dictates. Jury deliberation rooms are sufficient to comply with social distancing protocols.
 - Columbia County – similar to Burke County, Columbia has the capacity to hold two jury trials per session of court. Columbia County has the largest courtrooms in the circuit and can easily accommodate a panel of potential jurors. Adequate courtroom space remains to conduct jury trials and for jury deliberations.
 - Richmond County – has the capacity to hold four jury trials per session of court but the courtrooms are inadequate for jury assembly, orientation, and voir dire. The James Brown Arena Civic Center has been reserved to conduct these functions (see Circuit Jury Overview and attachments 1-5). The Justice Center has four courtrooms to conduct the jury trial while using four hearing rooms for jury deliberation.
2. Development of written public health and safety guidelines:

Each County is operating under a **Standing Order for Court Proceedings** signed by all classes of courts (see attachments 6-9). These orders were developed consistent with public health guidance which include sanitization procedures, face-covering (masks/shields), and social distancing protocols. Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) will be required for jury duty and where none is visible, it will be provided (see attachment 10). Rooms utilized by potential and actual jurors will be sanitized each day.
3. Development of notification procedures for alerting stakeholders of positive tests for COVID-19:

Currently, each court and county issues an email statement notifying stakeholders and courthouse personnel of positive tests for COVID-19. Human Resource is notified and they serve as a point-of-contact to direct affected persons to available testing and direct isolation or quarantine as the situation dictates. Affected areas are closed off to the public and are sanitized. Security video is reviewed for contact tracing and persons are notified. The public is turned away from the affected area(s) for their health and safety.

4. Protection of constitutional and statutory rights for litigants, witnesses, victims and observers: With limited available seating in each courtroom of the circuit due to social distancing protocols, having public access to court proceedings has become challenging and required innovation. Burke County – is using TEAMS video-conferencing platform to stream courtroom proceedings to adjoining courtrooms for public viewing. Columbia County – is using WebEx video-conferencing platform to stream courtroom proceedings to adjoining courtrooms for public viewing. Richmond County – is using Youtube to stream jury selection – voir dire - from the JBA Civic Center to a courtroom at the Justice Center. The Court will use WebEx to stream from jury trial proceedings to adjoining courtrooms for public viewing. In all instances, courtroom security staff will ensure the streaming is not being recorded and the constitutional and statutory rights of all are being protected.

5. Notification to potential jurors, the public, and parties of public health precautions being taken by the court:

The Court is taking a multifaceted approach to notification of precautions taken by the court. For jurors, a letter will be included in their summons outlining those procedures, CDC guidelines, and requirements of the Court to ensure their health and safety. For the Bar, we have notified them on their website and invited all attorneys to walk-through and view the health precautions taken and alternate facilities used to ensure their health and safety. For the public, we are utilizing local media to report on public health precautions taken and have been successful in this endeavor (see attachment 11). Further, the committee has evaluated and viewed signage at the entrance and throughout the courthouses of the Augusta Judicial Circuit indicating sanitization procedures, face-covering requirements, and social distancing protocols with visible indicators marking proper locations to stand and limitations imposed - especially at bottleneck areas of the elevator, restrooms, and doorway entrances.

Each class of court is utilizing social media (Facebook, etc.), Court websites, and county websites to update the public.

Lastly, the Court and all stakeholders have viewed the **Guidance for Resuming Jury Trials** based on recommendations made by the Criminal and Civil Law Subcommittees of the Judicial COVID-19 Task Force. We have addressed or considered each of these recommendations and hereby incorporate them into our protocol and share with the appropriate stakeholders.

Submitted on behalf of the Augusta Judicial Circuit, this 10th day of October, 2020.



Honorable Carl C. Brown, Jr., Chief Judge, Augusta Judicial Circuit

AUGUSTA JUDICIAL CIRCUIT PRELIMINARY JURY OVERVIEW

CIRCUIT OVERVIEW:

Capacity to conduct jury assembly, orientation and selection by county –

Burke – 2 jury trials - either picking one jury morning and afternoon or Monday/Tuesday of the week

Columbia – 2 jury trials – one morning and one afternoon or Monday/Tuesday of the week.

Richmond –

On weeks where JBA Civic Center is available for two days - Monday/Tuesday – 4 jury trials each week (2 judges picking 2 juries each on Monday morning and afternoon & 2 judges picking 2 juries each Tuesday morning and afternoon) on a two week rotation.

On weeks where JBA Civic Center is available for one day – Monday – 3 jury trials each week (3 judges picking 2 juries each on Monday morning and afternoon) on a two week rotation.

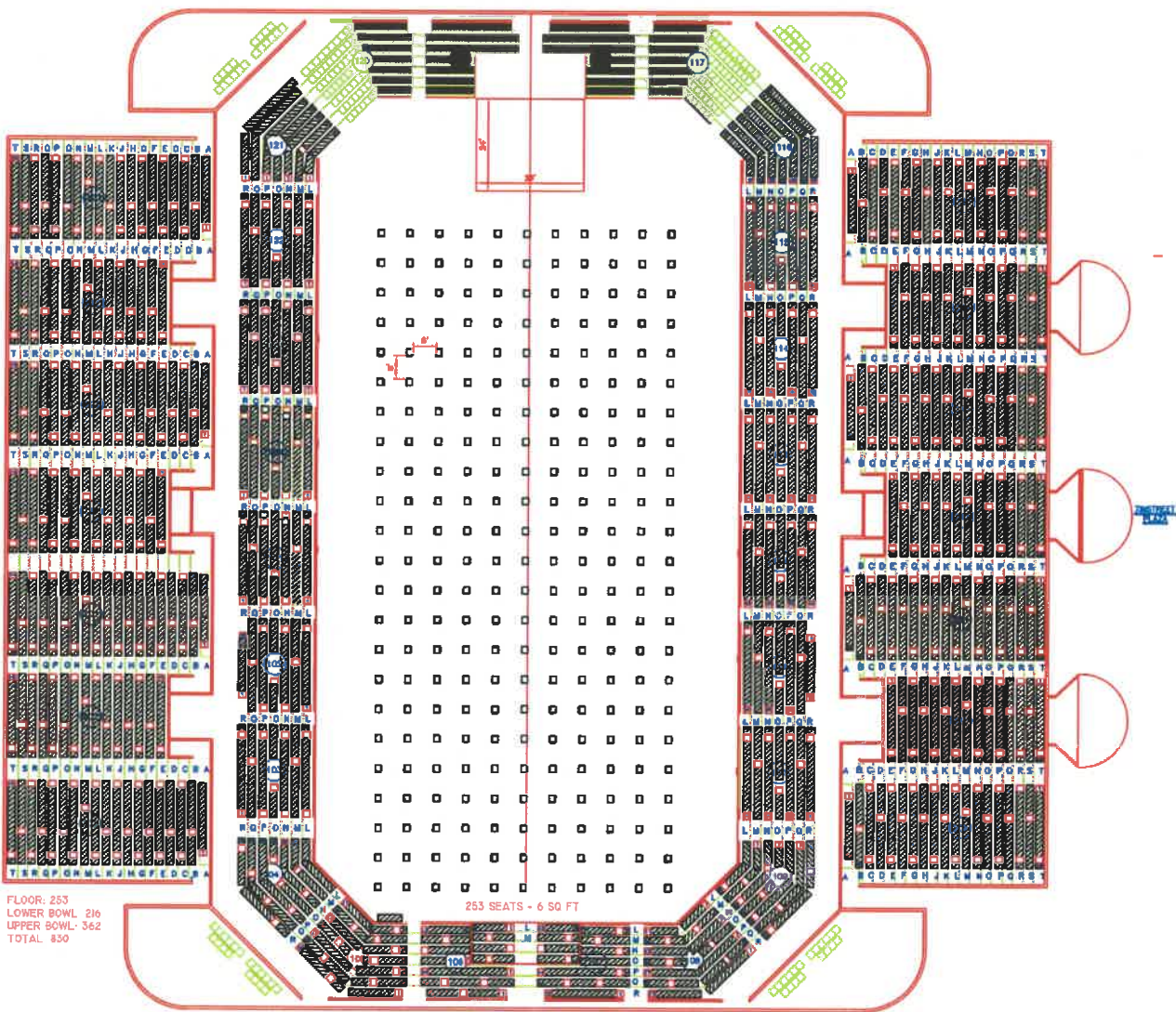
On weeks where JBA not available – Single panels of 45 report to jury assembly and courtroom in staggered groups – One morning/one afternoon – for as many days as needed.

Richmond Detail: Assembly, Orientation, and Selection

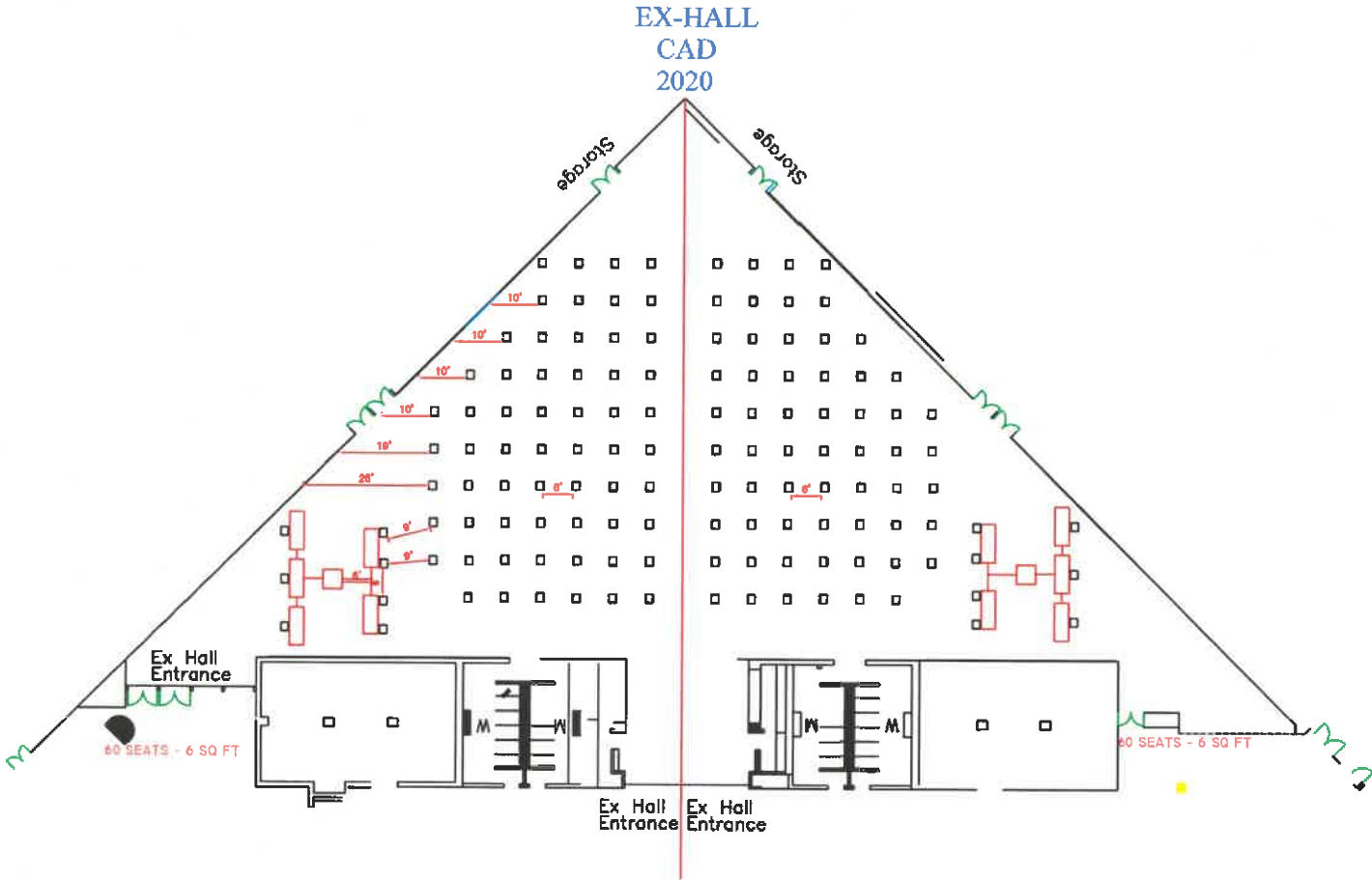
- Prospective jurors enter 7th street entrance of JBA and are screened by the Marshal's Office.
- Prospective jurors proceed to jury clerk tables for scanning of summons and payment card
- Prospective jurors are seated for orientation – 1-200 to floor, 201-400 on near-side upper bowl, 401-600 on far-side upper bowl.
- First 50 jurors are seated and given a panel juror number sticker and corresponding number on paper – sent to Exhibit Hall (1)
- Second 50 jurors are seated and given panel juror number sticker and corresponding number on paper – sent to Exhibit Hall (2)
- If Third group needed at that time – same procedure – sent in groups of 25 to meeting room (A/B) or can report to jury assembly in the afternoon.
- Jurors will use numbered paper to indicate affirmative answers during questioning (voir dire) and proceed to a podium to answer specific follow-up questions (individual voir dire) as directed.
- Selected jurors will be given a report back instruction form for jury duty for that week or next week.
- Rejected jurors will report back for afternoon session at JBA or for state/magistrate court needs.

JURY ASSEMBLY AND ORIENTATION

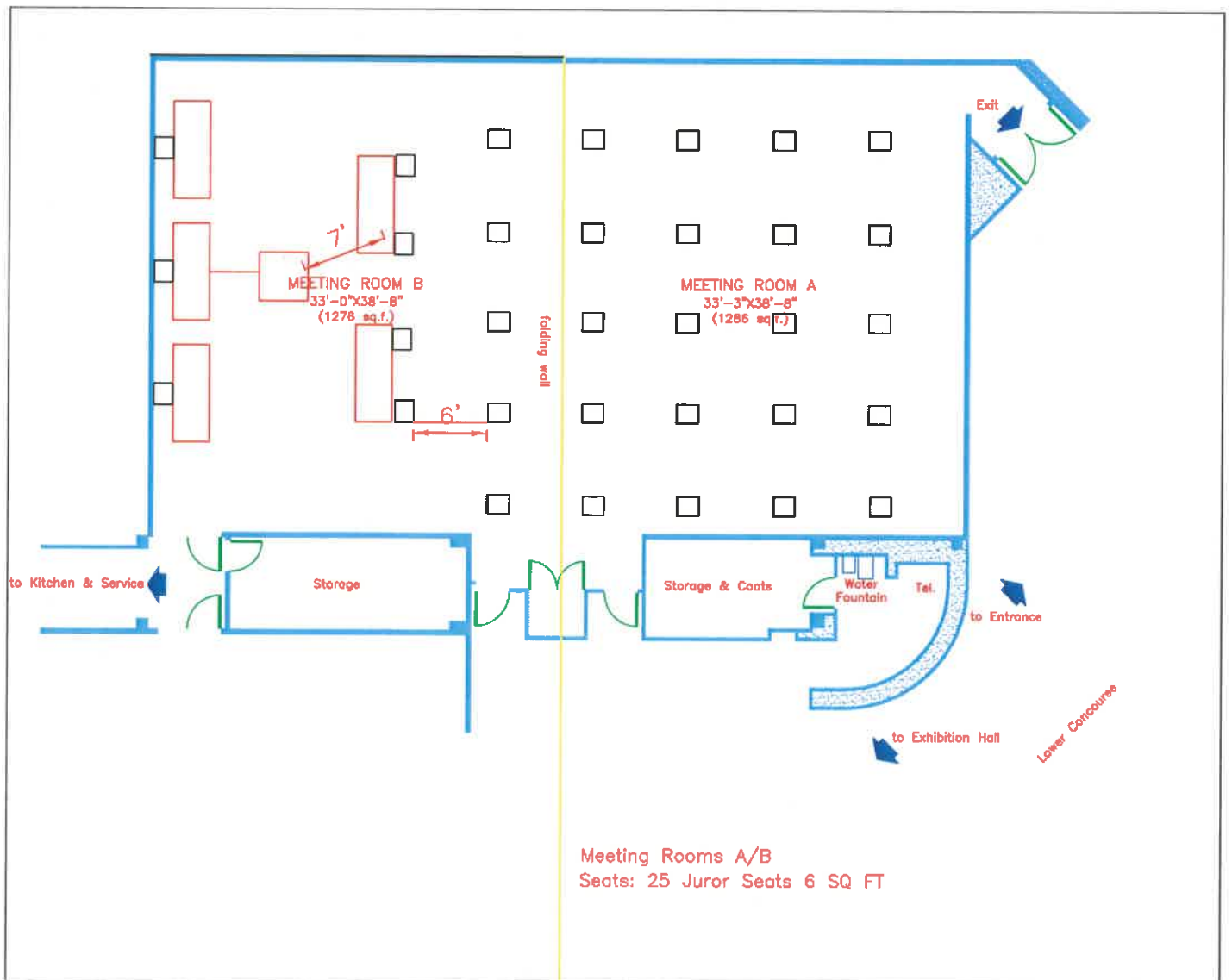
James Brown Arena
CAD
2020



JURY SELECTION ROOMS



JURY SELECTION FOR STATE, MAGISTRATE, CIVIL CASES





IN THE SUPERIOR COURT OF BURKE COUNTY

CLERK OF SUPERIOR, STATE AND JUVENILE COURT FILED FOR RECORD

STATE OF GEORGIA

2020 JUN 26 PM 2: 04

STANDING ORDER FOR COURT PROCEEDINGS

DETA G. SMITH, CLERK BURKE COUNTY, GA.

Pursuant to the THIRD ORDER EXTENDING DECLARATION OF STATEWIDE JUDICIAL EMERGENCY dated June 12, 2020, the following guidelines based on the "Georgia Court Reopening Guide"¹ for conducting court proceedings shall be effective immediately:

PURPOSE: The purpose of this Standing Order is to:

- Reduce the transmission of COVID-19 among court employees and the public.
- Maintain healthy court operations and facilities for the public.
- Maintain a healthy work environment for court employees.
- Exercise flexibility when applying these guidelines to ensure each litigant receives a fair hearing as required by law.

DEFINITIONS: "Face mask" means a covering of the mouth and nose but not the rest of the face.
 "Courthouse" means the Burke County Judicial Center, located at 200 East 6th Street, Waynesboro, GA 30830.
 "Public area" means all parts of the Courthouse not reserved for staff.

PUBLIC ADMISSION & SCREENING: The following questions shall be posted at the public entrance to the courthouse. Individuals answering YES to any of the following will be directed not to enter the courthouse:

- Whether or not they have traveled to or from any areas in which COVID-19 is particularly active.
- If they have, within the past ten days, experienced symptoms of COVID-19, including: cough, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, fever above 100.0 degrees, chills, muscle pain, sore throat, headache, or new loss of taste or smell.
- If they have been in contact with someone known to have COVID-19 within the last 14 days.
- If they have a fever of 100.0 degrees or higher or who have reported a fever above 100.0 degrees in the past 72 hours.

Individuals exhibiting symptoms of COVID-19 shall be screened. They shall be DENIED entry to the courthouse if they answer YES to any of the above questions or have a fever of 100.0 degrees or higher as determined by a touchless thermometer.

If an individual with a scheduled court date is prohibited from entering the Courthouse for any of the above reasons, the Burke County Sheriff's Office Courthouse Security staff shall contact the specific court for which attendance is mandated and inform the court that the individual is unable to attend due to screening criteria. The person who is prohibited from entry should refer to the information posted at the Courthouse entrance and contact the appropriate court and request further instructions regarding future court attendance.

If an individual with a scheduled court date has other health limitations which make them especially vulnerable to COVID-19 or have other concerns with entering the Courthouse, he or she should refer to the information posted at the Courthouse entrance and should contact the appropriate court to request that their case be rescheduled.

¹ <https://georgiacourts.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Georgia-Court-Reopening-Guide-FINAL.pdf>

Pursuant to CDC guidance², all persons admitted to the Courthouse are strongly encouraged to wear face masks while in the public areas of the Courthouse. Masks are available at the entrance for individuals who do not have a mask. Individual offices within each courthouse may implement mandatory wearing of masks due to space and high-volume contact with the public.

For individuals who do not have a court appearance but are accompanying a family member or friend, it is strongly encouraged that they consider not entering the Courthouse. People at higher risk for severe illness³ and children⁴ are strongly discouraged from entering the Courthouse unless they are directly involved in a case.

Everyone in the Courthouse should comply with social distancing protocols⁵ and remain six (6) feet apart from other persons in common areas, offices, and courtrooms.

Individuals are strongly encouraged to leave any unnecessary belongings in their vehicle or at home in order to minimize surfaces for possible infection.

EMPLOYEE ADMISSION & SCREENING: With social distancing protocols in place, the Courts recognize that security screening will become more challenging with the increase in public access. Therefore, security staff have requested that each department strongly encourage their respective employees to report to work prior to and no later than 8:30 a.m. This will allow all employees to be swiftly screened and in place before the public arrives. It is anticipated that long lines will form, with individuals standing 6 feet apart to wait their respective turn to access the courthouse. There will be indicators that will direct the public where to stand to comply with social distancing protocols. Any employee caught up in the screening line after 8:30 a.m. will have to wait their respective turn and will be subject to the policies and procedures of their respective department.

DEFENSE COUNSEL IN CRIMINAL MATTERS: With social distancing protocols in mind, defense counsel should make every attempt reasonable to meet with their client(s) prior to court. The Sheriff's Offices should work cooperatively to allow defense counsel to privately meet with their clients in the jail or via remote video while protecting all persons from potential exposure to COVID-19.

VIRTUAL COURT PROCEEDINGS: All judges will continue to use technology to provide an alternative to in-person proceedings. Participating remotely by video conference may be an option in many courts but may differ from court to court and hearing to hearing. Individuals should contact their specified court ahead of time to find out more details. Such virtual court proceedings will follow open court requirements such as live streaming.

IN-PERSON COURT PROCEEDINGS: The Court is employing special procedures to minimize the risk to everyone's health. To accommodate for social distancing and cleaning, court sessions may be staggered with fewer cases scheduled per session. Additionally, seating in the courtroom will be limited to designated seats. Social distancing will be enforced in conferences with staff. Some court sessions may be scheduled in rooms not typically used in order to accommodate social distancing in courtroom spaces. Handling of paperwork will be kept to a minimum.

Persons entering courtrooms must comply with directions given by Courthouse security and/or staff with respect to seating and social distancing. Additionally, absent further direction of the presiding judge in each courtroom, the following capacity limits are established:

² <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/cloth-face-cover.html>

³ <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/index.html>

⁴ <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/children/protect-children.html>

⁵ <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/social-distancing.html>

Burke County Judicial Center

Courtroom	Normal Capacity	Social Distancing Capacity
1	160	45
2	108	39
3	100	33
4	100	33

Former Burke County Courthouse

Courtroom	Normal Capacity	Social Distancing Capacity
1	150	43

In the event that a courtroom is at capacity and an individual who is not a party to the case being heard requests entry, notice shall be given to the presiding judge. Accommodation may be provided to include, but not limited to: entry, viewing remotely, etc.

CLEANING & DISINFECTING: All efforts will be made to have court or county personnel clean and disinfect areas of the courtroom between court sessions. All staff and the public are encouraged to follow best practices to prevent infection, including frequent hand washing for at least 20 seconds with soap and water. Hand sanitizer will be available in high use areas along with cleaning supplies for use by staff.⁶

COORDINATION OF COURTROOM NEEDS: As the Courthouse begins to return to full operations, communication will be of utmost importance. In order to ensure that communication remains a priority, a copy of all notices of hearings, calendars and events shall be sent to Court Administrator, Nolan Martin, nmartin@augustaga.gov. The Court Administrator will work with Courthouse security staff to resolve any issues that may arise from the increased need for courtroom space.

INHERENT POWER: Nothing in this proposed plan shall be construed to limit the inherent power of the court. Each assigned judge may direct and control their respective cases and those persons before them in their courtroom as they deem necessary for the administration of justice. This order shall be in effect until further modification, extension or termination.

⁶ <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/hand-hygiene.html>

PUBLIC NOTICE: A copy of this Standing Order shall be available in each Clerk of Court's office, posted at or near the Courthouse entrance, posted on the Burke County Clerk of Court's website at burkeclerkofcourt.com, and sent to the Clerk of Supreme Court and the Administrative Office of the Courts.

SO ORDERED, this 26 day of June 2020.

Carl C. Brown Jr.
Chief Superior Court Judge
Augusta Judicial Circuit

[Signature]
Chief State Court Judge
Burke County

[Signature]
Probate Court Judge
Burke County

[Signature]
Chief Magistrate Court Judge
Burke County

[Signature]
Presiding Juvenile Court Judge
Burke County

IN THE SUPERIOR COURT OF COLUMBIA COUNTY

DEPT. OF SUPERIOR &
JUVENILE COURTS
FILED FOR RECORD

STATE OF GEORGIA

2020 JUN 24 PM 3:05

STANDING ORDER FOR COURT PROCEEDINGS

CINDY MASON CLERK
COLUMBIA COUNTY GEORGIA

Pursuant to the THIRD ORDER EXTENDING DECLARATION OF STATEWIDE JUDICIAL EMERGENCY dated June 12, 2020, the following guidelines based on the "Georgia Court Reopening Guide"¹ for conducting court proceedings shall be effective immediately:

PURPOSE: The purpose of this Standing Order is to:

- Reduce the transmission of COVID-19 among court employees and the public.
- Maintain healthy court operations and facilities for the public.
- Maintain a healthy work environment for court employees.
- Exercise flexibility when applying these guidelines to ensure each litigant receives a fair hearing as required by law.

DEFINITIONS: "Face mask" means a covering of the mouth and nose but not the rest of the face. "Courthouse" means the Columbia County Justice Center, located at 640 Ronald Reagan Drive, Evans, GA 30809. "Public area" means all parts of the Courthouse not reserved for staff.

PUBLIC ADMISSION & SCREENING: The following questions shall be posted at the public entrance to the courthouse. Individuals answering YES to any of the following will be directed not to enter the courthouse:

- Whether or not they have traveled to or from any areas in which COVID-19 is particularly active.
- If they have, within the past ten days, experienced symptoms of COVID-19, including: cough, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, fever above 100.0 degrees, chills, muscle pain, sore throat, headache, or new loss of taste or smell.
- If they have been in contact with someone known to have COVID-19 within the last 14 days.
- If they have a fever of 100.0 degrees or higher or who have reported a fever above 100.0 degrees in the past 72 hours.

Individuals exhibiting symptoms of COVID-19 shall be screened. They shall be DENIED entry to the courthouse if they answer YES to any of the above questions or have a fever of 100.0 degrees or higher as determined by a touchless thermometer.

If an individual with a scheduled court date is prohibited from entering the Courthouse for any of the above reasons, the Columbia County Sheriff's Office Courthouse Security staff shall contact the specific court for which attendance is mandated and inform the court that the individual is unable to attend due to screening criteria. The person who is prohibited from entry should refer to the information posted at the Courthouse entrance and contact the appropriate court and request further instructions regarding future court attendance.

If an individual with a scheduled court date has other health limitations which make them especially vulnerable to COVID-19 or have other concerns with entering the Courthouse, he or she should refer to the information posted at the Courthouse entrance and should contact the appropriate court to request that their case be rescheduled.

¹ <https://georgiacourts.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Georgia-Court-Reopening-Guide-FINAL.pdf>

Pursuant to CDC guidance², all persons admitted to the Courthouse are strongly encouraged to wear face masks while in the public areas of the Courthouse. Masks are available at the entrance for individuals who do not have a mask. Individual offices within each courthouse may implement mandatory wearing of masks due to space and high-volume contact with the public.

For individuals who do not have a court appearance but are accompanying a family member or friend, it is strongly encouraged that they consider not entering the Courthouse. People at higher risk for severe illness³ and children⁴ are strongly discouraged from entering the Courthouse unless they are directly involved in a case.

Everyone in the Courthouse should comply with social distancing protocols⁵ and remain six (6) feet apart from other persons in common areas, offices, and courtrooms.

Individuals are strongly encouraged to leave any unnecessary belongings in their vehicle or at home in order to minimize surfaces for possible infection.

EMPLOYEE ADMISSION & SCREENING: With social distancing protocols in place, the Courts recognize that security screening will become more challenging with the increase in public access. It is anticipated that long lines will form, with individuals standing 6 feet apart to wait their respective turn to access the courthouse. There will be indicators that will direct the public where to stand to comply with social distancing protocols. Any employee caught up in the screening line will have to wait their respective turn and will be subject to the policies and procedures of their respective department.

DEFENSE COUNSEL IN CRIMINAL MATTERS: With social distancing protocols in mind, defense counsel should make every attempt reasonable to meet with their client(s) prior to court. The Sheriff's Offices should work cooperatively to allow defense counsel to privately meet with their clients in the jail or via remote video while protecting all persons from potential exposure to COVID-19.

VIRTUAL COURT PROCEEDINGS: All judges will continue to use technology to provide an alternative to in-person proceedings. Participating remotely by video conference may be an option in many courts but may differ from court to court and hearing to hearing. Individuals should contact their specified court ahead of time to find out more details. Such virtual court proceedings will follow open court requirements such as live streaming.

IN-PERSON COURT PROCEEDINGS: The Court is employing special procedures to minimize the risk to everyone's health. To accommodate for social distancing and cleaning, court sessions may be staggered with fewer cases scheduled per session. Additionally, seating in the courtroom will be limited to designated seats. Social distancing will be enforced in conferences with staff. Some court sessions may be scheduled in rooms not typically used in order to accommodate social distancing in courtroom spaces. Handling of paperwork will be kept to a minimum.

Persons entering courtrooms must comply with directions given by Courthouse security and/or staff with respect to seating and social distancing. Additionally, absent further direction of the presiding judge in each courtroom, the following capacity limits are established:

² <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/cloth-face-cover.html>

³ <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/index.html>

⁴ <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/children/protect-children.html>

⁵ <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/social-distancing.html>

Columbia County Courthouse

Courtroom	Normal Capacity	Social Distancing Capacity
1	88	33
2	126	42
3	88	33
4	88	33

Appling Courthouse

Courtroom	Normal Capacity	Social Distancing Capacity
1	80	30

In the event that a courtroom is at capacity and an individual who is not a party to the case being heard requests entry, notice shall be given to the presiding judge. Accommodation may be provided to include, but not limited to: entry, viewing remotely, etc.

CLEANING & DISINFECTING: All efforts will be made to have court or county personnel clean and disinfect areas of the courtroom between court sessions. All staff and the public are encouraged to follow best practices to prevent infection, including frequent hand washing for at least 20 seconds with soap and water. Hand sanitizer will be available in high use areas along with cleaning supplies for use by staff.⁶


COORDINATION OF COURTROOM NEEDS: As the Courthouse begins to return to full operations, communication will be of utmost importance. In order to ensure that communication remains a priority, a copy of all notices of hearings, calendars and events shall be sent to Court Administrator, Nolan Martin, nmartin@augustaga.gov. The Court Administrator will work with Courthouse security staff to resolve any issues that may arise from the increased need for courtroom space.

INHERENT POWER: Nothing in this proposed plan shall be construed to limit the inherent power of the court. Each assigned judge may direct and control their respective cases and those persons before them in their courtroom as they deem necessary for the administration of justice. This order shall be in effect until further modification, extension or termination.

⁶ <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/hand-hygiene.html>

PUBLIC NOTICE: A copy of this Standing Order shall be available in each Clerk of Court's office, posted at or near the Courthouse entrance, posted on the Columbia County Clerk of Court's website at clerkofcourtcolumbia.com, and sent to the Clerk of Supreme Court and the Administrative Office of the Courts.

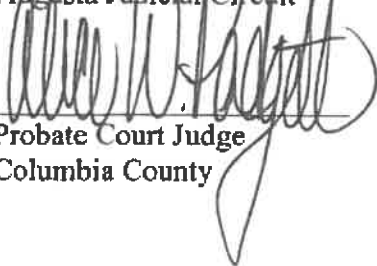
SO ORDERED, this 24th day of June 2020.



Chief Superior Court Judge
Augusta Judicial Circuit



Chief Magistrate Court Judge
Columbia County



Probate Court Judge
Columbia County



Presiding Juvenile Court Judge
Columbia County

IN THE SUPERIOR COURT OF RICHMOND COUNTY
CLERK OF SUPERIOR COURT AND JUVENILE COURT
FILED FOR RECORD

STATE OF GEORGIA

2020 JUN 24 AM 11:47

STANDING ORDER FOR COURT PROCEEDINGS

DEBORAH L. SULLIVAN
CLERK, RICHMOND CO., GA.

Pursuant to the THIRD ORDER EXTENDING DECLARATION OF STATEWIDE JUDICIAL EMERGENCY dated June 12, 2020, the following guidelines based on the "Georgia Court Reopening Guide"¹ for conducting court proceedings shall be effective immediately:

PURPOSE: The purpose of this Standing Order is to:

- Reduce the transmission of COVID-19 among court employees and the public.
- Maintain healthy court operations and facilities for the public.
- Maintain a healthy work environment for court employees.
- Exercise flexibility when applying these guidelines to ensure each litigant receives a fair hearing as required by law.

DEFINITIONS: "Face mask" means a covering of the mouth and nose but not the rest of the face. "Courthouse" means the John H. Ruffin, Jr. Courthouse, located at 735 James Brown Blvd., Augusta, GA 30901. "Public area" means all parts of the Courthouse not reserved for staff.

PUBLIC ADMISSION & SCREENING: The following questions shall be posted at the public entrance to the courthouse. Individuals answering YES to any of the following will be directed not to enter the courthouse:

- Whether or not they have traveled to or from any areas in which COVID-19 is particularly active.
- If they have, within the past ten days, experienced symptoms of COVID-19, including: cough, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, fever above 100.0 degrees, chills, muscle pain, sore throat, headache, or new loss of taste or smell.
- If they have been in contact with someone known to have COVID-19 within the last 14 days.
- If they have a fever of 100.0 degrees or higher or who have reported a fever above 100.0 degrees in the past 72 hours.

Individuals exhibiting symptoms of COVID-19, shall be screened. They shall be DENIED entry to the courthouse if they answer YES to any of the above questions or have a fever of 100.0 degrees or higher as determined by a touchless thermometer.

If an individual with a scheduled court date is prohibited from entering the Courthouse for any of the above reasons, the Richmond County Marshal's Courthouse Security staff shall contact the specific court for which attendance is mandated and inform the court that the individual is unable to attend due to screening criteria. The person who is prohibited from entry should refer to the information posted at the Courthouse entrance and contact the appropriate court and request further instructions regarding future court attendance.

If an individual with a scheduled court date has other health limitations which make them especially vulnerable to COVID-19 or have other concerns with entering the Courthouse, he or she should refer to the information posted at the Courthouse entrance and should contact the appropriate court to request that their case be rescheduled.

¹ <https://georgiacourts.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Georgia-Court-Reopening-Guide-FINAL.pdf>

Pursuant to CDC guidance², all persons admitted to the Courthouse are strongly encouraged to wear face masks while in the public areas of the Courthouse. Masks are available at the entrance for individuals who do not have a mask. Individual offices within each courthouse may implement mandatory wearing of masks due to space and high-volume contact with the public.

For individuals who do not have a court appearance but are accompanying a family member or friend, it is strongly encouraged that they consider not entering the Courthouse. People at higher risk for severe illness³ and children⁴ are strongly discouraged from entering the Courthouse unless they are directly involved in a case.

Everyone in the Courthouse should comply with social distancing protocols⁵ and remain six (6) feet apart from other persons in common areas, offices, and courtrooms.

Individuals are strongly encouraged to leave any unnecessary belongings in their vehicle or at home in order to minimize surfaces for possible infection.

EMPLOYEE ADMISSION & SCREENING: With social distancing protocols in place, the Courts recognize that security screening will become more challenging with the increase in public access. Therefore, security staff have requested that each department strongly encourage their respective employees to report to work prior to and no later than 8:30 a.m. This will allow all employees to be swiftly screened and in place before the public arrives. It is anticipated that long lines will form, with individuals standing 6 feet apart to wait their respective turn to access the courthouse. There will be indicators that will direct the public where to stand to comply with social distancing protocols. Any employee caught up in the screening line after 8:30 a.m. will have to wait their respective turn and will be subject to the policies and procedures of their respective department.

DEFENSE COUNSEL IN CRIMINAL MATTERS: With social distancing protocols in mind, defense counsel should make every attempt reasonable to meet with their client(s) prior to court. The Sheriff's Offices should work cooperatively to allow defense counsel to privately meet with their clients in the jail or via remote video while protecting all persons from potential exposure to COVID-19.

VIRTUAL COURT PROCEEDINGS: All judges will continue to use technology to provide an alternative to in-person proceedings. Participating remotely by video conference may be an option in many courts but may differ from court to court and hearing to hearing. Individuals should contact their specified court ahead of time to find out more details. Such virtual court proceedings will follow open court requirements such as live streaming.

IN-PERSON COURT PROCEEDINGS: The Court is employing special procedures to minimize the risk to everyone's health. To accommodate for social distancing and cleaning, court sessions may be staggered with fewer cases scheduled per session. Additionally, seating in the courtroom will be limited to designated seats. Social distancing will be enforced in conferences with staff. Some court sessions may be scheduled in rooms not typically used in order to accommodate social distancing in courtroom spaces. Handling of paperwork will be kept to a minimum.

Persons entering courtrooms must comply with directions given by Courthouse security and/or staff with respect to seating and social distancing. Additionally, absent further direction of the presiding judge in each courtroom, the following capacity limits are established:

² <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/cloth-face-cover.html>

³ <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/index.html>

⁴ <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/children/protect-children.html>

⁵ <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/social-distancing.html>

Courtroom	Normal Capacity	Social Distancing Capacity
2A	24	15
2B	24	14
2C	24	12
2D	24	12
2E	135	43
2F	115	39
2G	80	30
2H	80	30
3A	28	19
3B	28	15
3C	24	13
3D	24	13
3E	115	37
3F	115	37
3G	80	30
3H	80	30
Jury Assembly	451	60

In the event that a courtroom is at capacity and an individual who is not a party to the case being heard requests entry, notice shall be given to the presiding judge. Accommodation may be provided to include, but not limited to: entry, viewing remotely, etc.

CLEANING & DISINFECTING: All efforts will be made to have court or county personnel clean and disinfect areas of the courtroom between court sessions. All staff and the public are encouraged to follow best practices to prevent infection, including frequent hand washing for at least 20 seconds with soap and water. Hand sanitizer will be available in high use areas along with cleaning supplies for use by staff.⁶


COORDINATION OF COURTROOM NEEDS: As the Courthouse begins to return to full operations, communication will be of utmost importance. In order to ensure that communication remains a priority, a copy of all notices of hearings, calendars and events shall be sent to Court Administrator, Nolan Martin, nmartin@augustaga.gov. The Court Administrator will work with Courthouse security staff to resolve any issues that may arise from the increased need for courtroom space.

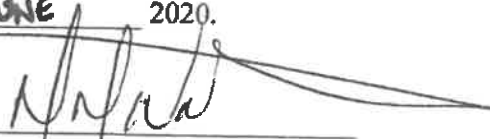
INHERENT POWER: Nothing in this proposed plan shall be construed to limit the inherent power of the court. Each assigned judge may direct and control their respective cases and those persons before them in their courtroom as they deem necessary for the administration of justice. This order shall be in effect until further modification, extension or termination.

⁶ <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/hand-hygiene.html>

PUBLIC NOTICE: A copy of this Standing Order shall be available in each Clerk of Court office, posted at or near the Courthouse entrance, posted on the Richmond County Clerk of Court's page at Augustaga.gov, and sent to the Clerk of Supreme Court and the Administrative Office of the Courts.


SO ORDERED, this 24th day of JUNE 2020.


Chief Superior Court Judge
Augusta Judicial Circuit


Chief State Court Judge
Richmond County


Probate Court Judge
Richmond County


Presiding Civil & Magistrate Court Judge
Richmond County


Presiding Juvenile Court Judge
Richmond County

Protocol for Reopening the Courthouses of the Augusta Judicial Circuit
To Normal Court Operations

Purpose. The purpose of this plan is to provide guidance for the orderly and safe return to normal court operations in anticipation of the Georgia Supreme Court lifting the Emergency Stay placed upon the Court due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Underlying Premise. Each class of Court recognizes that Justice delayed is justice denied. The public and litigants have a fundamental right to access the courts of Burke, Columbia and Richmond counties to seek relief and have their cases heard. With that said, nothing in this guide shall compromise the health, safety and welfare of the public, court personnel, and employees. Social distancing protocols will be practiced throughout the courthouses of the Augusta Judicial Circuit.

PPE Requirements. County governing authorities may require masks, gloves and or other PPE to ensure the safety of the public in the courthouse. Masks and other PPE is required upon entry to the courthouse. Judges will require PPE in their respective courtroom provided it does not interfere with court testimony, court reporting and other essential court activities.

Defense Counsel in Criminal Cases. With social distancing protocols in mind, defense counsel should make every attempt reasonable to meet with their client(s) prior to the schedule listed below. The sheriffs should work cooperatively to allow defense counsel to privately meet with their clients in the jail while protecting all persons from potential exposure to Covid-19. Attorneys must follow the process for meeting with their clients at each detention center.

Prior to July 12, 2020 – By Court approval/Order

Beginning July 12, 2020 – The Charles B. Webster Detention Center and all detention centers in the circuit will allow attorneys with upcoming bench trials face-to-face meetings with inmates with proper protocols in place.

Beginning August 1, 2020 - The Charles B. Webster Detention Center and all detention centers in the circuit will allow all attorneys face-to-face meetings with inmates with proper protocols in place.

Grand Jury. Upon approval by the Georgia Supreme Court, the Grand Jury of each county of the Augusta Judicial Circuit may convene consistent with their respective terms of court and consistent with the guidance of the Georgia Supreme Court (July 10, 2020). Grand Juries must follow social distancing protocols and be directed to use a courtroom or alternative space sufficient for their needs.

Resumption of Court Schedule. This timeline represents a phasing in of court operations:

Beginning May 18, 2020 – As the public is allowed to return to courthouses, Judges may schedule hearings consistent with the provisions allowing same under the Georgia Supreme Court Declaration of Statewide Judicial Emergency.

Beginning June 15, 2020 – Judges will be able to conduct pretrial hearings and motions. Case managers should stagger the reporting times to effectively limit the number of persons in each courtroom during each hearing (for instance, during a calendar call have 10 cases scheduled for 9am, 10 cases for 10am, etc.) Ideally, no more than 10 cases per hour. Each judge will have discretion to increase or decrease the numbers as necessity dictates but to reasonably comply with social distancing protocols. All

arraignments and bond hearing in jail cases will continue via video conferencing and in civil/domestic cases, Judges may continue to use A/V conferencing where possible;

Beginning July 6, 2020 – Judges will be able to conduct bench trials. Depending on the interest of the public, an additional courtroom may be required where a monitor may be placed for public viewing; and

Upon approval of the Georgia Supreme Court – Judges will be able to conduct jury trials. This will require a large courtroom where the jury will be placed in both the jury box and a portion of the gallery that will be roped off for their use. The other side of the gallery will have limited public seating where benches will be marked to indicate where the public can safely sit. Security should monitor the space between the gallery of jurors and the public gallery. Additionally, a small courtroom should be used as the jury deliberation room. And in the event of significant public interest, a monitor should be setup in a third courtroom for public viewing. Judges will have the sole discretion as to how best to implement this practice. If possible, no jurors should be summoned on the same day as a jury calendar call. Allowing the calendar to take advantage of potential dispositions and for the judge to determine case(s) actually requiring a jury prior to requesting the jury will limit the number of persons in the courthouse.

Courthouse Access. With social distancing protocols in place, the Courts recognize that security screening will become more challenging with the increase in public access. Therefore, security staff have requested that each department strongly encourage their respective employees to report to work prior to and no later than 8:30 a.m. This will allow all employees to be swiftly screened and in place before the public and potential jurors report for duty. It is anticipated that long lines will form, with individuals standing 6 feet apart to wait their respective turn to access the courthouse. There will be indicators that will direct the public where to stand to comply with social distancing protocols. Any employee caught up in the screening line after 8:30 a.m. will have to wait their respective turn and will be subject to the policies and procedures of their respective department.

Security staff will not allow members of the public to gather in common areas. Security will direct the public to their respective destination. It is suggested for those using elevators that no more than four (4) persons be allowed on an elevator at any given time.

Clerks/Jury Clerks. It is anticipated that fewer jurors will report than did prior to the pandemic. Summoning more jurors than usual in order to get the required number is suggested. When jurors are summoned for the week of August 17, 2020 or later, the following guidance is suggested.

1. In jury assembly rooms, seating should be marked to accommodate as many potential jurors as possible while practicing social distancing. Any additional seating (overflow) should be directed to the closest courtroom practical. Orientation may have to be staggered in two (2) or more sessions with the first group of oriented jurors available for voir dire.; and
2. Juror “call in” lines should indicate the heightened need for jurors, that PPE (masks, gloves, and hand sanitizer) will be available in limited quantities, and potential jurors are encouraged to bring their own.
3. After jury orientation, judges may direct jury selection – striking a jury – in the jury assembly room or other room designated for such purpose before moving to a courtroom for the start of the trial.

Coordination of Courtroom Needs. As the courthouses of the Augusta Judicial Circuit begin to return to normal operations, communication will be of utmost importance. Judicial Case Managers and Judicial Assistants should coordinate with the Superior Court Administrative Assistant for the number of courtrooms needed. The administrative assistant will work with each Clerk of Court and Courthouse Security to resolve any issues that may arise from the increase need for courtroom space. Together, we can make this process work for members of the public, litigants, and employees of Burke, Columbia, and Richmond Counties.

Please note the social distancing capacity for courtrooms provided below is demonstrative of the challenges the Court is facing as we move toward normal court operations. With these limitations, *it may become necessary for the Court to Order non-traditional and/or existing facilities to be used for court purposes including jury trials.*

Inherent Power. Nothing in this proposed plan shall be construed to limit the inherent power of the court. Each assigned judge may direct and control their respective cases and those persons before them in their courtroom as they deem necessary for the administration of justice. It is the goal of the Augusta Judicial Circuit to operate in a manner which instills public trust and confidence in the court system.

Space and Facilities in Consideration.

Courthouse – Courtroom # - Normal Capacity/Social Distancing Capacity

Note: Total Capacity is based on Fire Marshal room limits and Social Distancing includes employees.

Burke County Courthouse

Courtroom 1- 160/45 2 – 108/39 3 – 100/33 4 – 100/33

Burke County (former) Courthouse/Government Center

Courtroom 1 – 150/43

Columbia County Courthouse

Courtroom 1 – 88/33 2 – 126/42 3 – 88/33 4 – 88/33

Appling Courthouse

Courtroom 1 – 80/30

Richmond County Courtrooms

2A - 24 /15 2B - 24/14 2C - 24/12 2D – 24/12 2E - 135 /43 2F - 115 /39 2G -80/30 2H - 80/30

3A - 28/19 3B - 28/15 3C - 24/13 3D - 24/13 3E - 115/37 3F - 115/37 3G - 80/30 3H – 80/30

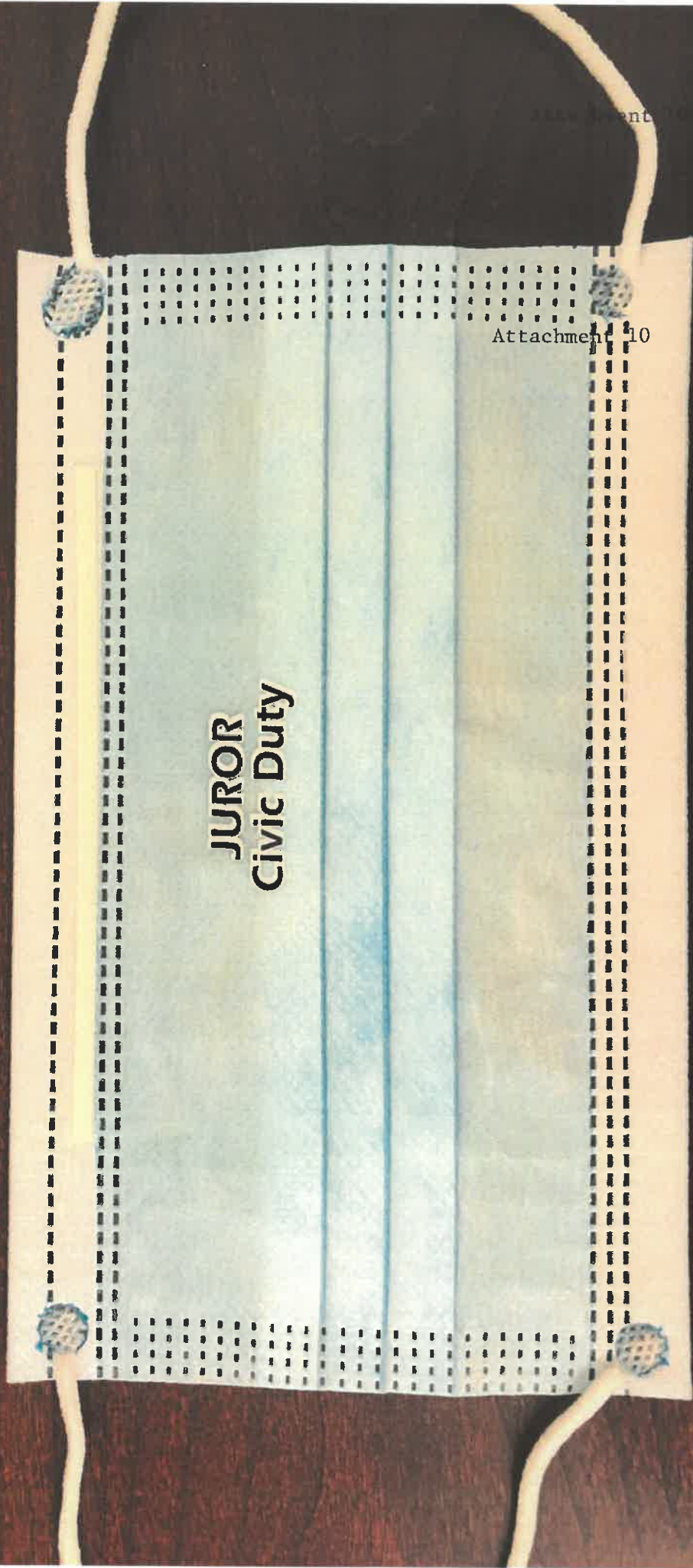
Jury Assembly – 451/60

Augusta-Richmond County Municipal Building Courtroom

Courtroom/Commission Room – 196/50 plus additional 30 with monitors outside the doors

401 Walton Way Courtrooms

JUROR
Civic Duty



From: Nolan Martin
Sent: Wednesday, September 30, 2020 9:03 AM
To: Nolan Martin
Subject: RE: [EXTERNAL] COVID-19 court trial backlog to ease with use of James Brown Arena

-----Original Message-----

From: James Blanchard <grandyx407@comcast.net>
Sent: Tuesday, September 29, 2020 9:02 PM
To: Nolan Martin <NMartin@augustaga.gov>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] COVID-19 court trial backlog to ease with use of James Brown Arena

Read more on COVID-19 court trial backlog to ease with use of James Brown Arena at
<https://www.wrdw.com/2020/09/29/covid-19-court-trial-backlog-to-ease-with-use-of-james-brown-arena/>
<https://www.augustachronicle.com/news/20200929/richmond-county-jury-selection-is-new-kind-of-show-for-james-brown-arena>
