

COVID TRIAL/GRAND JURY TOWNS COUNTY RESTART COMMITTEE

OFFICIAL MEETING MINUTES:


Meeting Date: November 5, 2020

Present via ZOOM: Raymond George, Chief Superior Court Judge – Presiding
T. Buckley Levins, Superior Court Judge
Cecil Dye – Clerk of Superior Court
Cliff Bradshaw - Commissioner
Terry Conner – Capt. TCSO
Deputy McCoy - TCSO
Steve Ferrell, DCA
Melissa Jackson – Judicial Assistant (Judge Joy Parks)
Penny Hunter – Public Defender’s Office
Jason Major – Assistant Chief – CSO
Heather Wheeler – Judicial Assistant (Judge Jeremy Clough)
Lauren Shuder, Towns County Health Department

Pursuant to discussions, agreements and directions the following procedures will be followed to facilitate the reconvening of Grand Juries in Towns County. The first Grand Jury Session is scheduled for January 11, 2021. Presently the District Attorney’s office is reporting that they have 57 cases in Towns County to be presented to a Grand Jury.

1. The Courtroom will be prepared by TCSO – Court Security by marking designated seating in keeping with the CDC guidelines for social distancing
2. The Clerk of Court will send out jury summons no later than November 20, 2020. These summonses shall include an additional questionnaire regarding COVID. (see exhibit A attached).
3. The Clerk of Court and County Commissioner will endeavor to improve the sound system in the courtroom.
4. All Jurors, District Attorney & Staff, Bailiffs, the presiding Judge and the Clerk of Court and Staff shall be required to wear a mask at all times, while in the Courthouse. Those without a mask will be provided one.
5. Juror report will be staggered: 25 to report at 9am, 25 to report at 11am, 25 to report at 1pm and 25 to report at 3pm. If a full panel of 23 and 2 alternates (total 25) has not been seated then an additional 25 shall report at 4:30pm. The 4:30 group will be directed to call the jury information line to determine if their report is necessary. If not, they will be excused.
6. All summoned jurors will be instructed to call the jury information line at 5pm to determine if they have been selected to the Grand Jury panel. Those selected will

- report to the Towns County Courthouse at 9am on January 12, 2021 to begin their duties.
7. Juror Check-in: A designated Bailiff will be positioned at the security post at the front door. Said Bailiff shall have court authority to excuse any juror that presents with a fever of 100.4 or higher. Said Bailiff shall also complete a juror excusal form. (see exhibit B attached).
 8. Between the voire dire of each panel the courtroom will be fogged or wiped down with CDC approved disinfectant by Courthouse Staff and Bailiffs.
 9. Temperature screening, mask wearing, and social distancing shall be adhered to during the duration of Grand Jury appearance.
 10. The District Attorney's Office will keep witnesses in the hallway behind the courtroom. Upon completion of their testimony the witness will exit the courthouse via the side doorway near the main courtroom entrance.
 11. No facility inspections will be conducted during the January 2021 Grand Jury session.



Raymond E. George
Chief Judge

GRAND JURY QUESTIONNAIRE

Please provide your cell phone and an email address that you will receive updates from our office as needed while serving on the grand jury.

Name _____ (Please print)

Cell Number _____

Email address _____

Return At Least 7 days prior to your appearance on January 11 2021 you should contact the Towns County Superior Court Clerk's Office at the following number (706) 896-2130 to confirm you should appear to answer your summons and you will be told the exact time you will need to appear. When calling this number you will be required to confirm that you are not experiencing symptoms of COVID-19 and that you have had no known exposure to COVID-19.

If you are seeking to be excused as a vulnerable person or a person who cares for a vulnerable person as described below please call (706) 896-2130 the week prior to January 11 2021 to confirm that you have been excused from attending.

Vulnerable Persons has been defined by the Centers for Disease Control and Georgia Department of Health as the following:

- 1- Those individuals who are at increased risk for severe illness from the novel coronavirus as currently defined by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Georgia Department of Public Health as individuals who are over age 70 and individuals with serious underlying health conditions, such as high blood pressure, chronic lung disease, diabetes, obesity, asthma, and those whose immune systems are compromised by chemotherapy or other treatments for medical conditions.**
- 2- Those persons who live with or care for a vulnerable person may also need accommodations, including alternatives to in-person court appearances and avoiding the need to travel to the courthouse. The court should also post a notice with this information in conspicuous locations around the court building. Courts should work diligently to eliminate the need for vulnerable persons to attend court in-person. If the courts are unable to make such accommodations, vulnerable persons scheduled for court must be provided masks if they do not have their own, and courts must take additional efforts to reduce their exposure to communicable diseases to the greatest extent possible. If a continuance is necessary to effectuate such accommodations, courts should grant such a continuance for good cause shown.**

EXHIBIT A

Please indicate if you are a vulnerable person which requires you to be excused from serving on this grand jury. Please check all that apply as the basis for you wanting to be excused. Please understand the decision as to whether you want to be excused from the grand jury for these reasons is your decision. **If you choose to serve on the JURY when you meet the definition of a vulnerable person, you assume the risk of performing this duty and risking exposure to Covid-19 and any health complications that may arise from contracting the virus while being a vulnerable person.**

Please check all that apply.

- 1- Over age 70
- 2- High blood pressure
- 3- Chronic lung disease
- 4- Diabetes
- 5- Obesity
- 6- Living with a vulnerable person (If this one is checked please also check the categories that the person you care for suffer(s) from.)
- 7- I am a vulnerable person or care for a vulnerable but wish to serve on the Grand Jury if chosen.

Signature

After completing this form you should return the questionnaire in the enclosed envelope as soon as possible. But not later than January 4, 2021.

Cecil Dye
Towns County Clerk
of Superior Court

_____ County Superior Court
State of Georgia

RE: _____, Summoned juror

On _____ (Date) at
_____ (Time) the above named juror entered the Courthouse.

In accordance with set procedure, said juror was temperature screened.

A reading of _____ degrees was shown.

Based on the temperature reading. The juror was excused from service by

_____ The Court designated Baliff _____

Name

And Or (Circle one or Both)

_____ The presiding Superior Court Judge. _____

Name

Exhibit B