



CHATTAHOOCHEE JUDICIAL CIRCUIT

HARRIS COUNTY GUIDE FOR RESUMING JURY PROCEEDINGS

December 10, 2020

COMMITTEE MEMBERS:

Hon. Maureen Gottfried, Superior Court Judge, Chair
Chief Superior Court Judge, Bemon G. McBride, Ex officio Member
Hon. Thomas Lakes, Probate Court Judge
Ms. Julia Slater, District Attorney
Mr. William Lizenby, Assistant District Attorney
Mr. Moffett Flournoy, Circuit Public Defender
Mr. Eric Webb, Assistant Circuit Public Defender Ms.
Stacy Haralson, Clerk Superior Court
Sheriff Mike Jolley, Harris County Sheriff's Office
Lt. Glenn Pressley, Harris County Sheriff's Office
Mr. Cody Jolley, Harris County Court Services
Ms. Kathy Bostic, Court Reporter
Mr. Alex Santiago, Information Technology
Ms. Quinnara Terry, Nurse Manager, Georgia Dept. of Public Health
Ms. Karen Norman, Georgia Dept. of Public Health
Ms. Josephine Gosa, Epidemiologist, Georgia Dept. of Public Health
Ms. Brandi Nelson, Epidemiologist, Georgia Dept. of Public Health
Ms. Julie Sizemore, Georgia Dept. of Public Health
Mr. Mark Jones, District Attorney Elect
Mr. Chris Breault, Attorney
Mr. Robert Watkins, Attorney
Mr. Steve Hodges, Attorney
Mr. Edward F. Berry, Court Administrator

By Order entered September 10, 2020, Chief Supreme Court Judge Harold Melton, in his Sixth Order Extending Statewide Judicial Order, directed the Chief Judge of each Judicial Circuit to convene for each county in their circuit, a local committee of judicial system participants to develop a plan for safely resuming jury trials in the county, as further specified in the “Guidance for Local Committees on Resuming Jury Trials” included in the Appendix to this order. Guidance for safely conducting jury trials is being developed by the Judicial COVID-19 Task Force and will be provided to local committees. Court operating guidelines for in-person proceedings incorporating final jury trial plans shall be submitted to the Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) as soon as possible and before the jury trial process begins.

These plans seek to apply previously adopted “COVID-19 Safe Operating Guidelines” to the specific context of jury proceedings.

The Committee met as a whole on three occasions, October 5, 2020, October 19, 2020, and November 16, 2020. This report was adopted by email consent of all committee members.

GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

Summoning the Jury Pool

This Plan contemplates the summoning of prospective jurors for one civil or criminal jury trial. The designated prospective Jury Pool Assembly Area (JPAA) will be the Harris County Community Center, located at 7509 GA Hwy 116, Hamilton, GA 31811. Pretrial proceedings will take place at the Harris County Courthouse the morning prior to the Jury Pool reporting times. The trial participants will then transport themselves to the JPAA.

A Public Service video will be linked to the Superior Court Clerk’s website featuring Chief Justice Harold Melton of the Georgia Supreme Court. When jurors are initially summoned, the Clerk will create a Summons Packet that will be mailed to prospective jurors as follows:

- The Summons shall direct jurors to report to the Harris County Community Center at the appointed day and time. It will also provide contact information for jurors to call with health-related questions or concerns. A web address will be made available where they can view a health and safety video and a contact person to call with further questions or concerns. Information will also be posted on the Superior Court Clerk’s website at www.harrisclerkofcourt.com.
- The Summons Packet will contain information expressing the Court’s appreciation for the jurors’ service, assuring those jurors of the Court’s concerns for their safety, informing those jurors in summary form of the steps that will be taken to protect them while serving as jurors.
- The Summons Packet will contain a questionnaire asking for the jurors’ contact information (name, address, cell phone number, and email), other questions designed to reduce the time required by jury selection, and a series of questions to determine whether they are in a category of persons identified by the CDC as being at an increased risk for severe illness from COVID-19.

- Jurors will be sent an Excusal Request Form that temporarily waives the requirement that it be notarized before submission.

Jury Pool Assembly Area (JPAA) and Courthouse Physical Space Preparation

- In addition to the on-going extra-ordinary sanitizing and cleaning of the interior space of the JPAA and the Harris County Courthouse prior to the arrival of summoned jurors, those areas that jurors will come in contact with, will be sanitized and cleaned adequately.
- HVAC and air handling components – The JPAA and the courthouse HVAC system will be monitored by facilities maintenance. The filters will be checked and changed regularly based on current recommended intervals.
- Hand Sanitizing Stations – Automatic no touch or limited touch hand sanitizer dispensers will be available prior to and after security check-in, as well as throughout the buildings and outside the courtrooms.
- Protocols for Masks and Face Coverings – All entrants to the buildings are required to wear masks or other face coverings prior to entry. Masks and face coverings must remain in proper position over nose and mouth, unless instructed by the judge to remove them. Any person that arrives without a mask will be provided one at the checkpoint. Any visitor that refuses to wear a mask will be prohibited from entering the courthouse. Signs outside the courthouse will inform entrants of mask and face covering requirements.
- Protocols for Social Distancing – Outside and inside the buildings, signs and notices are posted in prominent places to remind visitors to socially distance. Proper socially distanced seating will be clearly delineated.

Security at Check-In

On the day of service, jurors will report to the JPAA and will encounter the following safety precautions:

- Controlled check-in – Because of the potential bottlenecks and long lines at security and check-in, juror summons will include staggered report times. Jurors reporting before their summoned time will not be checked in and directed to wait outside until their report time arrives. Appropriate signage will be properly placed to guide prospective jurors to the correct entrance of the Community Center
- Health Screenings. Everyone entering the courthouse is screened for illness and COVID-19 exposure and will sign in with their name, address, and phone number for the purpose of contact tracing.
- If any prospective juror reports having been diagnosed with COVID-19 in the previous 14 days, or in contact over the previous 14 days with someone who has been diagnosed with COVID-19, or that they are concerned they may have been exposed or infected, they will not be permitted to enter and will be instructed to report to an area designated for isolation and the trial judge and the Superior Court Clerk will be immediately notified to consider releasing the prospective juror from service.
- If any prospective juror reports having experienced a persistent cough, difficulty breathing or fever above 100.4 degrees within the previous three days, they will not be permitted to enter and will be instructed to report to an area designated for isolation and the trial judge

and the Superior Court Clerk will be immediately notified to consider releasing the prospective juror from service.

- Social Distancing – The Jury Pool Assembly Areas (JPAA) have been set up with chairs properly social distanced according to CDC guidelines.
- Physical Barriers – The staff of the Superior Court Clerk and the Harris County Sheriff's Office will check in prospective jurors in the JPAA and jurors the courthouse, keeping distance in 6 ft and also wearing masks or face coverings.
- Badges – Jurors will proceed to the table outside the jury room to pick up their juror badge off the table instead of staff handing it to them. The badges will be placed in single rows across the table.
- Clear Masks/Face shields – Court personnel will use transparent face shields or clear masks to accommodate hearing-impaired or language-challenged jurors.
- Nightly Deep Cleaning – Building Maintenance will sanitize the JAA and other publicly used areas each evening.

Excusals and/or Deferrals

Prior to jurors reporting on the date of their service, the Court and Clerk's office will work cooperatively to determine whether any prospective juror should be excused or have their service deferred due to medical concerns. Any deferral or excusal will be solely at the discretion of and upon approval of the assigned judge and/or the Superior Court Clerk.

The Summons Packet to be mailed will instruct prospective jurors to call a phone number if they have COVID-19 related questions and/or are seeking an excusal for COVID-19 related reasons. They will also instruct prospective jurors that in order to be considered for a deferral or excusal, the form must be returned as soon as they are aware of any COVID-19 related concerns.

The Harris County Superior Court Clerk's Office will receive phone calls, answer any questions, and vet any request before sending the person's contact information to the assigned judge's office.

Staff will be available by phone on the day of the reporting as well, so that prospective jurors who wake up feeling ill can receive instructions before coming to the courthouse.

Impaneling Process

The Clerk will summon the appropriate number of prospective jurors to make up the jury pool.

- Expected reporting percentages are unknown at this time, but the reporting times below will allow for an orderly check-in.
- 1:00 pm – Jurors 1-50
- 1:30 pm – Jurors 51-100
- 2:00pm – Jurors 101-150

Seating of the Jury Pool

- All prospective jurors that make up the jury pool will be seated in an appropriately socially distanced area of the JPAA.

After Check-In of Jury Pool

- After all jurors of the jury pool are checked-in, The Superior Court Clerk will notify the assigned judge.
- Non-qualified jurors will be excused, and their service concluded.
- Remaining jurors will be sworn in and given further instruction from the Superior Court Clerk regarding when and where to report.

Seating of Qualified Prospective Jurors

- The first panel of qualified prospective jurors will be escorted to the appropriately prepared room or area of the Community Center for Jury Selection (voir dire).
- The room or area will be laid out in courtroom fashion. There will be a bench for the judge, tables for the participants of the trial and seating for the panel. All will follow CDC guidelines.
- An appropriate number of Deputy Sheriffs and bailiffs will provide support in all of the procedures outlined.

Jury Selection

Jury Selection (voir dire) will take place in area designated to accommodate voir dire. However, procedures may be modified by the Judge and the clerk's office, with appropriate communication to the jurors.

OCGA § 15-12-131 requires that the court place a panel of 12 in the jury box "upon the request of either party." The "jury box" will be an area designated by the court that will adhere to CDC guidelines of social distancing. Chairs or other appropriate seats will be socially distanced.

Once the Jury has been chosen by voir dire, the prospective jurors that were not chosen to serve on the jury, will be instructed to return to the initial jury pool area and the Superior Court Clerk for further instructions.

The Jury will be impaneled at the JPAA and the Court will instruct the Jury to report to the appropriate Courtroom in The Harris County Courthouse. The Court, the trial participants and the jurors will transport themselves from the JPAA to the courthouse.

Upon arriving at the courthouse, the jury will be met by bailiffs and/or sheriff's deputies that will instruct them where to be seated to await further instructions from the court.

Jurors selected will be seated in the "jury box" and given further instructions for service. The jury box, under this plan, will be the traditional gallery.

Courtroom Layout

The courtroom gallery will be converted into the jury box, and jurors placed at seats marked every 6 feet in order to comply with social distancing requirements.

- Court Personnel will be stationed in accordance with CDC guidelines.
- The court reporter will be located in an area of the court that allows the court reporter to see and hear any participant of the trial that is speaking.

- Witnesses will be placed in the witness box, the traditional jury box or any other place the court feels necessary for the jury and participants to be able to see and hear the witness without impediment.
- Tables will be arranged so that the jury will be able to see and hear the parties and counsel.
- Witnesses will be positioned such that counsel, the parties, and Jurors will be able to see and hear the witness. Jurors will be instructed to let the Judge know if they are having any difficulty hearing or seeing.
- Attorneys will be asked to speak so that everyone in the courtroom is able to hear the proceedings. If available, attorneys will use wireless microphones that can be attached in a way as to not require them to hold the microphone. If not available, all participants will use wired microphones to ensure that the jury will be able to hear the proceedings.

TRIAL

General Protocols

The assigned trial judge will conduct proceedings in accordance with all constitutional and statutory requirements, seeking to ensure a fair and impartial trial while doing so within the confines of public health guidelines.

- Masks are generally required.
 - Judges, court staff, bailiffs, lawyers, and jurors will all wear masks during the trial unless otherwise instructed by the judge.
 - At the sole discretion and judgment of the presiding Judge; trial participants, attorneys, and jurors may be permitted to remove their masks while speaking.
 - Witnesses will testify while wearing a clear face mask.
- Due to difficulties guiding the jurors throughout the courthouse, it is anticipated that trials will necessitate the use of more than the usual number of bailiffs.
 - Bailiffs will meet the jurors just past security, at the designated time, and escort them to the courtroom. Due to limited elevator capacity, it will require the use of two bailiffs—one on the 3rd floor with the jurors getting off the elevator, and one on the ground floor with the jurors waiting to board.
 - Any juror capable of taking the stairs who desires to do so, will be directed to the stairwell and they may take the stairs to the 3rd floor.
- The judge shall provide jurors with a point of contact if potentially exposed to COVID-19 or experiencing symptoms of COVID-19. They should not be required to report.
- Any juror who does not pass the temperature check or COVID screening questions will be brought to the Judge's attention immediate

Presentation and Handling of Evidence

Courtroom evidence should be displayed to the jurors in a digital format whenever possible, making use of appropriately sized television monitors or other media to be able to be seen by participants.

- Witnesses will testify wearing a clear face mask.
- The lectern will be easily moved in the event trial participants are unable to see and hear. Attorneys will be asked to display PDFs, digital photos, and PowerPoint presentations on television monitors mounted in the courtroom. A document camera may also be used display images of any paper document evidence.

- There will be certain items that cannot be displayed in a digital format and the attorneys will be directed to seek guidance from the Court. Handling of evidence will be limited to comply with CDC guidelines while respecting the Constitutional rights of the defendant. The Parties shall raise any issues they may have concerning the handling of evidence for a ruling from the Court.
- Attorneys will present their case from the lectern and seek permission from the Court before moving freely about the courtroom. Otherwise, they will remain at counsel table and the lectern.
- Attorneys will be provided wipes and will be responsible for wiping down the lectern and anything else they touched, before returning to their table. They will also be asked to wipe down their table at the end of the day.

Jury Deliberation Room and Break Room

Existing jury deliberation rooms will not be utilized due to the space restrictions. Instead, jurors will use the neighboring courtroom as a jury deliberation and break room.

- The Jury Deliberation Room and Break Room (neighboring courtroom) will be rearranged so that jurors are seated at tables in the well facing the gallery and the remaining jurors seated in the first two rows of the gallery.
- The bailiff will have a supply table with extra disposable masks, hand sanitizer, paper towels, gloves, tissues, juror pads and pencils, bottled water, and disinfecting spray. Jurors should keep up with their own items, so as to prevent sharing.
- Jurors will be assigned a seat by the bailiffs and should use the same seating area for the duration of the trial.
- Jurors will be permitted to leave at lunchtime and return, or the judge may decide to bring in meals for the Jurors. Jurors will be permitted to bring in their own food, however there will be no community refrigerator available.
- Jurors with dietary restrictions, or who prefer to bring their own food, should do so in a personal size cooler bag which will remain in the jury room.
- Jurors will abide by social distancing guidelines when consuming food.
- Bailiffs will be stationed outside of each door to the jury room and shall keep the area secure. Bailiffs will escort jurors to the closest restrooms. Jury rooms will be cleaned and disinfected nightly.

Public Viewing Rooms

Due to the jury being seated in the traditional gallery, the public will not be able to attend and view the proceedings in person.

- A closed-circuit video stream will be set up so that a camera will be aimed at the well of the courtroom.
- The stream will be displayed in rooms to be identified, where members of the public and participants' families can sit and view the trial.
- Seating in the viewing rooms will be clearly marked 6 feet apart, unless attendees are from the same household. All persons in the room must keep their masks on at all times. A deputy will be stationed in the viewing rooms.



A SAFE JURY DUTY EXPERIENCE... IS OUR TOP PRIORITY.

- **Health Measures at the Harris County Courthouse**

The Chattahoochee Judicial Circuit is dedicated to protecting your health and the health of our employees, visitors, and community. As we begin to resume jury proceedings, our commitment to fighting the spread of COVID-19 has not changed. We are adhering to public health guidelines, modifying check in procedures, reconfiguring courtrooms, and educating you, a prospective juror, about the measures taken. Thank you for your commitment to our community and county.

For more detailed information, please visit www.harrisclerkofcourt.com.

We thank you for your service and look forward to having you at the Harris County Courthouse!

HAVE COVID-19 QUESTIONS?

Please don't hesitate to contact us! 706-628-4944 or www.harrisclerkofcourt.com

What We're Doing:

Health Screenings

Face Coverings

Social Distancing

Cleaning

Disinfecting

Staggered Report Times

Smaller Jury Pools

COVID-19 Juror Questionnaire

Name:	
Phone:	
Email:	
1. Are you over the age of 65?	
2. Do you have any serious underlying medical conditions such as high blood pressure, chronic lung disease, diabetes, severe obesity, severe asthma, severe heart disease, or cancer?	
3. Are you or have you recently undergone chemotherapy or another medical treatment that has caused your immune system to be compromised?	
4. Do you live with or care for someone considered to be at an increased risk of severe illness from COVID-19? Anyone who would answer “yes” to questions 1-3 above might be at increased risk.	
5. Are you requesting to defer your jury service to a later date because of answering “yes” to any of the above questions?	

Additionally, on the day of service, you will be screened at the courthouse entrance and asked the following questions:

1. Have you been diagnosed with COVID-19, or been in contact over the last 14 days with anyone who has been diagnosed with COVID-19, or been concerned for any reason that you may have been exposed or infected with COVID-19?
2. Are you currently experiencing any cough, difficulty breathing, or fever above 100.4 degrees, or have you experienced any such symptoms in the last three days?

If your answer is yes to either question *on the day of your service*, you should call the Clerk of Courts office immediately to request a deferral. Failing to appear without justifiable cause may place you in contempt of court.

Questions?

Call the Harris County Superior Court Clerk’s Office at 706-628-4944.

Juror Questionnaire

Please complete this Questionnaire online at www.harrisclerkofcourt.com . If you are unable to complete it online, please complete it by hand and return to: Harris County Superior Court Clerk's Office, P.O. Box 528, Hamilton, GA 31811. Jurors without online access should call the Superior Court Clerk's office at 706-628-4944.

PART ONE: TO BE SHARED WITH THE COURT ONLY

Name:
Telephone:
Email Address:
Date of Birth:
1. Have you ever been diagnosed with COVID-19, tested positive for COVID-19, been in contact during the last 14 days with someone who has been diagnosed with or tested positive for COVID-19, or been concerned for any reason that you may have been exposed to or infected with COVID-19? If so, please explain.
2. Have you been asked to self-quarantine by any healthcare provider within the last 14 days? If so, please explain.
3. Have you within the last 14 days been on a cruise, traveled outside the United States, or traveled to any area where a coronavirus quarantine was in effect? If so, please explain.
4. Have you had any of the following symptoms within the last 14 days: fever, chills, cough, shortness of breath, new loss of taste or smell, nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea? If so, please explain.

<p>5. Voluntary Response: Do you have any serious underlying medical conditions such as cancer, chronic kidney disease, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, obesity, serious heart conditions, sickle cell disease, or type 2 diabetes mellitus? If so, please explain.</p>
<p>6. Voluntary Response: Is your immune system compromised for any reason, including a prior organ transplant, chemotherapy, other medical treatment, or any other reason? If so, please explain.</p>
<p>7. Do you live with or care for someone considered to be at an increased risk of severe illness from COVID-19? Anyone who would answer “yes” to questions 1-6 or who is above the age of 65 might be at increased risk. If so, please explain.</p>
<p>8. Are you a healthcare worker or employed in any other occupation that places you in direct contact with COVID-19 patients or places you at higher risk of possible exposure to COVID-19? If so, please explain.</p>
<p>9. Are you requesting to defer your jury service to a later date because of answering “yes” to any of the above questions?</p>

Additionally, on the day of service, you will be screened at the entrance and asked the following questions:

1. Have you been diagnosed with COVID-19, or been in contact over the last 14 days with anyone who has been diagnosed with COVID-19, or been concerned for any reason that you may have been exposed or infected with COVID-19?
2. Have you had any of the following symptoms within the last 14 days: fever, chills, cough, shortness of breath, new loss of taste or smell, nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea?

If your answer is yes to either question *on the day of your service*, you should call the Superior Court Clerk’s office immediately to request a deferral. Failing to appear without justifiable cause may place you in contempt of court, so please call with any health concerns you may have.

PART TWO: TO BE SHARED WITH ATTORNEYS FOR THE PURPOSE OF EXPEDITING THE JURY SELECTION PROCESS

Name:
What is your gender? What is your age? Do you consider yourself (Circle One): Caucasian African American Asian Hispanic American Indian Other
What was the last year of school that you finished? Circle one. Elementary Junior High High School Vocational/Technical Junior College College Graduate School Post-Graduate Studies Other If your education is above high school, list the major area of study and/or degree(s) earned:
Are you currently attending school? If so, what course of study?
Have you ever had any legal education, training, or experience?
While in school, did you attend (Circle One): Public Private Home School
Do you have plans to continue your education? If so, what are those plans?

Have you or any member of your immediate family ever received training or education in any of the sciences, e.g., medicine, physics, engineering, etc.? If so, please explain.

Are you currently employed? If so, please provide the following information:

Your occupation and a brief description of your job: _____

Name of your employer: _____

Length of time you have been at your current job: _____

Number of hours you work per week: _____

Do you supervise others at your job? Yes or No. If yes, how many? _____

Are you supervised by others? _____

Do you have a second job? Yes or No. If yes, please give the name of your employer:

Have you ever owned or operated a business?

If so, when and what kind of business?

List all jobs, other than your current job, you have had as an adult:

Are you retired?

If so, from where are you retired?

Have you ever served in the military?

If so, what branch, when did you serve, and what was your highest rank?

What is your current marital status (Circle One): Single Married Widowed Separated
Divorced

If you are currently married, how many years?

If you are currently married, where is your spouse employed and what is his/her occupation?

If you are divorced or widowed, what was your spouse's occupation?

Do you have children?

If so, how many and what are their ages?

If you have children that are currently in school, do they attend (Circle One): Public Private
Home School

If your children work, what are their occupations?

Have you or any member of your immediate family ever been employed in law enforcement or prosecutorial work? (e.g., sheriff's office, police, district attorney, corrections)?

If so, what type of work and for what agency?

Have you or any member of your family ever been employed in the healthcare field?

Have you or any member of your immediate family ever been the victim of a crime?

If so, please give a brief description.

Does any member of your immediate family suffer from any disability, handicap, or other infirmity?

If so, please explain.

Do you have any physical problems that might interfere with your service as a juror?

If so, please explain.

If you would like to request to be excused based on any health issue, please submit a written request accompanied by a doctor's letter and mail it to Harris County Superior Court Clerk, Hamilton, GA 31811

Have you ever been convicted or pled guilty or nolo contendere to a felony charge?
If so, please explain.

If convicted of a felony, were your civil rights restored? If so, when?
Do you have a felony charge pending against you now?

Have you ever been a party to a lawsuit?
If so, please describe the lawsuit and the outcome:

Have you ever had a claim asserted against you?
If so, please describe the claim.

Have you ever asserted a claim against someone for personal injuries or property damage?
If so, please describe the claim you asserted.

Have you testified as a witness in any case?
If so, please state when and where.

Have you ever served on a trial jury?
If so, please answer the following:

Where, when, and how many times?

Did you reach a verdict?

Was your service (Circle One): Civil Criminal Both

List any organizational, religious, civic, community, professional, special interest, or political groups of which you are a member:

List any hobbies, spare-time activities, and outside interests:

List all newspapers, magazines, TV, and radio programs, including talk shows, or any computer-based media that you regularly rely on for news:

How do you feel about the prospect of serving as a juror?

This Questionnaire should be answered online. Look for the Juror Questionnaire link at www.harrisclerkofcourt.com. If you do not have online access, you may mail the completed Questionnaire to Harris County Superior Court Clerk, P.O. Box 528, Hamilton, GA 31811.

**Questions or no online access?
Call the Superior Court Clerk's Office at 706-628-4944
THANK YOU FOR YOUR SERVICE!**