

**IN THE SUPERIOR COURT OF DECATUR COUNTY  
STATE OF GEORGIA**

**In Re: Declaration of Covid-19 Petit Jury Protocol**

**PETIT JURY GUIDELINES**

On September 30, 2020, the following individuals met to develop detailed guidelines for the safe resumption of grand jury proceedings: J. Kevin Chason, Chief Judge, Superior Courts of South Georgia Judicial Circuit; Heather H. Lanier, Judge, Superior Courts of South Georgia Judicial Circuit; David Kendrick, Judge of State Court of Decatur County; Mike Bankston, Assistant District Attorney of South Georgia Judicial Circuit; David Atwell, Assistant District Attorney of South Georgia Judicial Circuit; Ben Harrell, Solicitor General; Cecilia Willis, Decatur County Clerk of Superior Court; Wiley Griffin, Sheriff of Decatur County; Wendell Cofer of the Decatur County Sheriff's Department; Robert Humphries of the Decatur County Sheriff's Department; and Decatur County Administrator, Alan Thomas. Other non-committee members attending including but not limited to Chief Public Defender, Tre McLendon; Charisse Martin of the District Attorney's Office; and Attorney Gil Murrah. During such meeting the following guidelines were adopted:

1. Unless otherwise ordered by the Court, Petit Jurors will be summoned in 2021 by the Clerk of the Superior Court for
  - weeks of May 4 and May 10;
  - week of August 23; and
  - weeks of November 2 and 8.
2. Petit Jurors shall be summoned in a manner to ensure that an appropriate social distancing of six feet can be maintained at all times. This may result in potential Petit Jurors being summoned for multiple days at various times during the day during the week as opposed to all Petit Jurors being summoned once a day for a single day.
3. Potential Petit Jurors will be directed as ordered by the Court to the Decatur County Memorial Coliseum located at 600 South Wheat Avenue, Bainbridge, Georgia, or Decatur County Courthouse. Jury selection will be conducted at either one or both of these facilities.
4. Potential Petit Jurors, courthouse staff, attorneys and all other individuals

entering any part of the court facilities shall wear a face shield or face mask as may be directed by the Court, and maintain a social distance of six feet from each other at all times.

5. Hand Sanitizer will be available at the entrance door to all Court proceedings.
6. The Decatur County Sheriff's Department will provide extra security to ensure the safety of Petit Jurors and staff.
7. The Clerk of the Decatur County Superior Court shall excuse any Petit Juror who requests to be excused due to a statutory exemption and shall defer on a case by case basis Petit Jurors who have COVID-19 fears, are considered a "vulnerable person" as defined by the CDC, answer yes to any of the questions listed in paragraph 8 hereof and/or have child care/virtual learning concerns.
8. The staff members of the Decatur County Sheriff's office will screen each Petit Juror upon his or her arrival for Covid-19 symptoms using questions set forth by the CDC as follows:
  - a. Have you experienced any of the following symptoms in the past 48 hours?
    - Fever or chills
    - Cough
    - Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
    - Fatigue
    - Headache
    - New loss of taste or smell
    - Sore throat
    - Congestion or runny nose
    - Nausea or vomiting
    - Diarrhea
  - b. Within the past 14 days, have you been in close physical contact (6 feet or closer for at least 15 minutes) with a person who is known to have laboratory-confirmed COVID-19 or with anyone who has any symptoms consistent with COVID-19?
  - c. Are you isolating or quarantining because you may have been exposed to a person with COVID-19 or worried that you may be sick with COVID-19?
  - d. Are you currently waiting on the results of a COVID-19 test?

If the answer to any of these questions is "yes" the potential Petit Juror shall be

deferred to the next petit jury session and directed not to report.

9. Prior to entering each morning and after each lunch break, the temperature of each Petit Juror will be taken and the questions set out in the preceding paragraph shall be asked of each Petit Juror. If the Petit Juror has symptoms of a fever or answers “yes” to any of the questions the Petit Juror shall be excused if not serving on a case. If such Petit Juror has been selected to serve on a specific case, the Petit Juror shall be isolated away from the other Petit Jurors and any other individuals and the Judge presiding over the case shall be immediately notified.
10. Any area that a symptomatic individual has been in contact with shall be immediately sanitized thoroughly.
11. On the first day the Petit Jurors are summoned to appear, staff of the Decatur County Sheriff’s Office will be available in the parking lot to direct Petit Jurors to the correct location.
12. Face masks, face shields, hand sanitizer, and disposable gloves shall be made available.
13. Single-use notebooks and writing instruments will be on hand for Petit Jurors use.
14. Petit Juror voir dire shall take place in a facility that is large enough to allow for appropriate social distancing. If necessary, potential Petit Jurors shall be brought into the facility in small groups to allow for proper social distancing.
15. Jurors who are selected to hear a case shall be seated in the courtroom with at least six feet between each juror. Jurors shall be informed to return to their specific seat after any breaks in the proceedings.
16. If the jury room for the courtroom is not large enough to allow for proper social distancing, juror deliberations shall take place in the courtroom or other location that allows for proper social distancing of jurors. Such alternate area shall be closed to anyone but the jurors and all audio and video devices in such areas shall be turned off during juror deliberations.
17. On breaks, Petit Jurors shall be excused from the courtroom on a staggered basis to ensure social distancing can occur in the hallway and restroom facilities.
18. If the Court becomes aware that a Petit Juror, courthouse staff, witness or

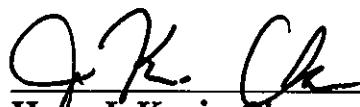
visitor has tested positive for COVID-19, the Court will notify all individuals who had close contact (as defined by the CDC) with such individual of their potential exposure by email or telephone. The name of the individual who tested positive for COVID-19 shall NOT be disclosed.

19. Courtroom proceedings shall remain open to the public at all times. Visitors shall have their temperature taken prior to their entry into the courthouse. Any visitor with an elevated temperature or symptoms of COVID-19 or other illness shall not be admitted.
20. Visitors in the courtroom shall be seated so that they have no contact with the jurors and shall maintain a six foot distance from each other at all times.
21. If there are more visitors than the courtroom can accommodate while enforcing appropriate social distancing guidelines, alternative viewing areas shall be designated that has video access to the courtroom proceedings.
22. Family members, alleged victims and their families shall be given priority to courtroom seating.
23. Individuals shall not be allowed to congregate in common areas while waiting to access the courtroom.
24. Witnesses should be staggered so that witnesses who are waiting to be called to testify can maintain six feet social distancing. While testifying, witnesses may remove their facial mask and wear a face shield so that the Petit Jurors can better evaluate demeanor.
25. Courtrooms and common areas in the courthouse shall be cleaned on a daily basis and during courtroom breaks.

These requirements may be modified, from time to time, to reflect the current directives of the CDC.

*The Clerk of this Court shall provide a copy of this order to all committee members.*

So ordered this 22 day of March, 2021.



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**Hon. J. Kevin Chason**  
**Chief Judge of Superior Courts**  
**South Georgia Judicial Circuit**

**Prepared by the Court**