

**IN THE SUPERIOR COURTS OF APPALACHIAN JUDICIAL CIRCUIT  
STATE OF GEORGIA**

IN RE: COVID-19 Pandemic \*

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Date: October 29, 2021 \*

**TEMPORARY SAFETY MEASURES REGARDING OPERATIONS  
FOR ALL CLASSES OF COURT**

Court operations during the COVID-19 pandemic have been ongoing, albeit with defined limitations and restrictions. These restrictions have included safety measures outlined in each local emergency order, as well as the “Guidelines for Resuming Grand Jury and Jury Trial Proceedings,” adopted by this circuit’s COVID-19 Jury Committee on February 26, 2021, and amended on April 5, 2021.

The COVID-19 virus continues to pose great risk to public health. Therefore, the Appalachian Judicial Circuit will continue to take precautions in order to protect the health of litigants, lawyers, judges, court personnel, and the public.

Accordingly, IT IS THE ORDER of the Court:

**I. Stay Home if You Are Sick or Have Been Exposed**

COVID-19 is a respiratory illness that spreads primarily by breathing in air when close to an infected person who is exhaling droplets and particles that contain the virus, or by such droplets contacting a person’s eyes, nose, or mouth. Common symptoms of the disease include fever or chills, cough, shortness of breath, fatigue, aches, loss of taste or smell, sore throat, and runny nose. In order to prevent disease transmission from occurring, no person should come to any judicial facility if they are experiencing such symptoms. Nor should any person come if they have been around anyone they believe may have been positive for COVID-19 in the previous 10 days.

Any person compelled to appear at the courthouse who is nevertheless prohibited from entering by this policy should leave their name, contact information, and reason for appearing with the front door deputies. Additionally, jury division staff within the Clerk of Court’s Office shall advise all jurors of this

policy prior to the day of their summons, and provide a mechanism for tracking and reporting any juror who indicates that they are unable to appear due to illness or exposure.

## **II. Virtual Proceedings Strongly Encouraged**

All classes of court are encouraged to continue to use remote video technology wherever feasible, as a safer alternative to in-person proceedings. **On June 22, 2021, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Georgia, Harold D. Melton, issued an order extending the use of videoconferencing for the next year, until June 30, 2022. A copy of the applicable Supreme Court Orders are attached as Exhibit "A."** Such hearings in this circuit are conducted using either the Zoom, Microsoft Teams or WebEx video platforms, all of which have mobile and desktop software applications available to use free of charge and coordinated by court staff. Courts should give appropriate consideration and deference to the requests of attorneys and parties wishing to appear virtually. Any virtual proceeding that is not open to the public in person shall satisfy constitutional open court requirements or by posting notice of the hearing to the circuit's website or within the hearing notice, with instructions given on how to view it.

## **III. Masks are Strongly Encouraged for All Persons**

Current guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that unvaccinated people wear masks in public settings or wherever they may be around other people. The individual vaccine status of the hundreds of monthly visitors to the courthouses is impossible to know, and many judicial participants attend under compulsion. Thus, clearly-observable signs **encouraging** the wearing of masks shall be posted at all entrances.

Additionally, judges of all classes of court are authorized at any time to require any and all courtroom participants to wear masks for the duration of any proceeding.

Specifically, it is ordered that all participants in Superior and Juvenile Courts shall continue to wear a mask during all court proceedings.

## **IV. Large Calendars to be Avoided**

While this Order relaxes some social distancing requirements, thereby permitting larger groups of people to attend in person proceedings, all classes of court should avoid any scheduling practice that is

likely to result in a large number of participants appearing at the same time. In general, no more than 24 persons should be expected to appear at any one time, which is the maximum capacity of the Jury Assembly Room.

#### **V. Jury Trials**

Jury trials shall continue to follow the “Revised Guidelines for Resuming Grand Jury and Jury Trial Proceedings.” based upon current CDC guidelines and local COVID-19 statistics. Furthermore, a presiding judge should give close attention at the outset of any jury proceeding to ensuring that all jurors are safe, protected, and adequately informed about the precautions taken. *Any presiding judge is authorized to put in place more restrictive measures than are required pursuant to this order.*

This provision will continue to be reviewed as more health information becomes available.

#### **VI. Grand Jury Proceedings.**

The grand jury shall continue to follow the procedures as described in the “Revised Guidelines for Resuming Grand Jury and Jury Trial Proceedings.”

#### **VII. Other Basic Measures**

Other preventative measures should continue to be taken by all classes of court, including but not limited to:

- Making hand sanitizer stations widely available;
- Disinfecting high-volume public areas daily, which can be arranged through county maintenance personnel;
- Displaying signs in the restrooms encouraging good hygiene and the washing of hands;
- Requiring sick or exposed employees to take time off or work remotely.

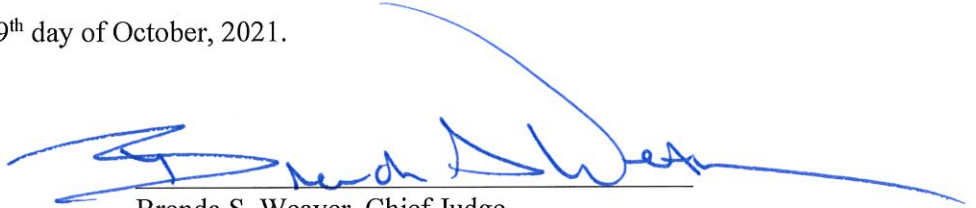
#### **VIII. Duration**

The terms of this Order shall terminate on December 31, 2021, at 11:59 p.m., unless otherwise extended, rescinded, amended, or superseded.

IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that the Sheriffs of each county shall post this Order on their public notification site and in the courthouses;

IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that the undersigned shall immediately notify and serve a copy of the order on the judges and clerks of all courts sitting within the jurisdictions affected.

IT IS SO ORDERED this 29<sup>th</sup> day of October, 2021.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Brenda S. Weaver", is written over a horizontal line. The signature is stylized and extends to the right of the line.

Brenda S. Weaver, Chief Judge  
Appalachian Judicial Circuit