

## **SOUTHERN JUDICIAL CIRCUIT COVID-19 COURT OPERATING GUIDELINES**

Due to the ongoing public health state of emergency declared by the Governor and a Statewide Judicial Emergency declared by the Chief Justice of the Georgia Supreme Court, the Superior Courts of the Southern Judicial Circuit will conduct in person hearings, grand jury proceedings and jury trials subject to the following guidelines.

- Face Coverings/ Masks – All prospective jurors, parties, and attorneys are required to wear masks upon entering the building, and they must remain in proper position over nose and mouth, unless instructed by a judge to remove them. All courthouse deputies, bailiffs, and other staff will remain vigilant and politely ask anybody in the court area without a mask to put it back on. Any jurors that arrive without a mask will be provided one at the checkpoint. (Note that the courthouses also house other departments, which do not require visitors to wear face masks.)
- Screenings: Everyone entering the courthouse is screened for illness and COVID-19 exposure.
- Not Permitted to Enter:
  - Any person falling into the following categories shall be denied admittance into any Courthouse within the Southern Judicial Circuit:
    - Anyone who is experiencing any of the most common COVID-19 symptoms: fever, shortness of breath, sore throat and persistent cough, loss of taste or smell.
    - Anyone who has been asked to self-quarantine by any healthcare provider or who lives with someone who has been asked to self-quarantine.
    - Anyone diagnosed with COVID-19 or has been in contact with a COVID -19 positive individual in the last 14 days.
  - Any prospective juror prohibited from entering on the date of their service will be instructed to fill out an information form that includes their name, address, phone number, and juror number. The form will be given to the Clerk and Judge so that service can be deferred. If any 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. If any 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.
  - Any other person not admitted to the Courthouse for the foregoing reasons will be given a form to fill out with their name, phone number, and pertinent

case number. They will be contacted later by a Court official regarding alternative means of pursuing critical judicial matters.

- Social Distancing:
  - Each person admitted to the Courthouse will be required to observe social distancing, while in courthouse, entering the courthouse, or exiting the courthouse.
  - Courtrooms will have designated seating in order to enforce social distancing.
  
- Sanitation:
  - Hand sanitizer and handwashing stations shall be available throughout the Courthouse and Courtrooms. All persons are encouraged to wash their hands or sanitize their hands immediately upon coming into the Courthouse and immediately upon leaving the Courthouse.
  - Courtrooms will be sanitized daily.
  - If microphones are passed between citizens, microphone covers will be utilized and/or the microphones will be sanitized between uses.
  
- Courthouse Personnel:
  - Any person working in a court facility with known or suspected COVID-19 shall be required to isolate himself or herself at home or at another location approved by the Georgia Department of Health until a negative test result is obtained. Any person with COVID-19 exposure shall be required to self-quarantine at home for 14 days from the date of exposure and shall return if no symptoms are present.
  - Such person shall notify the Clerk and/or the Judge so that all persons who may have been in contact with such person shall be notified and take necessary precautions.
  
- Medically Vulnerable
  - Any person who meets the criteria for being medically fragile or being at a higher risk of severe illness will be excused from any court proceedings.