

Superior Court of the State of Georgia

Cobb Judicial Circuit

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JUDGE S. LARK INGRAM
JUDGE ROBERT E. FLOURNOY, III
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JUDGE REUBEN M. GREEN
CHIEF JUDGE
JUDGE ROBERT D. LEONARD, II
JUDGE A. GREGORY POOLE
JUDGE ANN B. HARRIS
JUDGE KIMBERLY A. CHILDS



JUDGE MICHAEL STODDARD
JUDGE G. GRANT BRANTLEY
JUDGE GEORGE H. KREEGER
JUDGE JAMES G. BODIFORD
JUDGE ADELE P. GRUBBS
SENIOR JUDGES
COURT ADMINISTRATOR
TOM CHARRON

ADR OFFICE
10 E. PARK SQUARE
MARIETTA, GA 30090
(770) 528-1812

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In accordance with the statewide judicial emergency extension order from Georgia Supreme Court Chief Justice Harold Melton, all Cobb Superior Court mediations scheduled to take place at the Cobb ADR Office shall be suspended through May 13, 2020, or through the expiration of the Judicial Emergency Order if extended. Mediation deadlines in which to comply with selecting a date, time and mediator as well as the date to complete mediation by will be extended through the judicial emergency without penalty.

Further, Chief Justice Melton specifically encourages courts to consider alternatives for non-essential matters:

With regard to matters not deemed essential functions under the Statewide Judicial Emergency Order, courts and litigants are encouraged to proceed to the extent feasible and consistent with public health guidance, for example through the use of teleconferences and videoconferences, to reduce backlogs when the judicial emergency ends.

Therefore, if you are not already doing so, please consider the use of video-conferencing for mediation sessions. Not only will this give parties an option to resolve their disputes, but it will also aid in reducing the anticipated backlog of cases when normal operations resume, particularly for domestic relations matters. Upon agreement of all parties and if an assigned/chosen mediator offers online dispute resolution (ODR) during this period of social distancing, this method of mediation will satisfy Cobb County's mediation requirement. Some popular platforms for ODR are Zoom, Skype, and GoToMeeting. Please visit GODR for more resources and helpful information: www.godr.org.

Cobb County's mediation guidelines and report should still be completed and returned to Cobb ADR once the mediation is completed. Guidelines may be signed for all participating parties by the mediator with express permission. During the judicial emergency, the \$25.00 administrative fee remitted to Cobb ADR is waived, but will resume once the emergency has expired. Mediation forms can be downloaded from our website: <https://cobbcounty.org/adr>.

Please make sure to notate on your guidelines and report that this was a virtual mediation during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Here are a few tips and tricks for using ODR:

- Zoom allows for placing parties in “waiting room” while caucusing with one party.
- Ensure that parties have minimal distractions in their own locations and are mentally prepared to mediate.
- Emphasize how confidentiality will be maintained.
- Remind parties of privacy requirements: No recording, no third parties, secure WiFi.
- The screen-sharing functions allows everyone to see documents, drafted agreements, etc., at the same time.
- Share plan for technological hiccups – what to do if a party gets disconnected/internet issues.

This is uncharted waters for many of us. Please know that we're here to assist as much as possible. We appreciate all that you do and hope you and your families are safe and healthy. If you should have any questions, please contact our office at (770) 528-1812 or email your assigned coordinator.

Thank you,
Superior Court Administration and the ADR staff