

Supplemental Operating Guidelines for the Probate Court of Cobb County during the COVID-19 Pandemic and Judicial Emergency, effective July 17, 2020

In order to conduct in-person proceedings during the statewide judicial emergency, courts have been required to develop, implement, and disseminate operating guidelines. As courts that share facilities and operate in the same county were encouraged to coordinate their guidelines, to date, the Probate Court of Cobb County has complied by operating pursuant to the mandatory “General Safety Guidelines Memorand[a]” issued by Cobb Judicial Circuit Chief Superior Court Judge Reuben M. Green on May 12th and June 16th, 2020.

Georgia Supreme Court Chief Justice Harold D. Melton’s Fourth Order Extending Declaration of Statewide Judicial Emergency issued on July 10, 2020 requires courts to use the “Georgia Court Reopening Guide” as a template for such operating guidelines which must include all subject matters contained therein, among other requirements. Therefore, the Probate Court of Cobb County hereby adopts the following operating guidelines to supplement the mandatory guidelines issued by the Chief Superior Court Judge of the Cobb Judicial Circuit. These supplemental operating guidelines shall be modified as public health guidance is modified, and shall remain in effect until public health guidance indicates that they are no longer required.

1. General Infection Control Measures

The Probate Court will follow applicable public health guidance from the CDC, DPH, and Cobb & Douglas Public Health. The Probate Court will comply with COVID-19 procedures, protocols, and policies developed and implemented by Cobb County government. The Probate Court shall continue to coordinate public health efforts with other courts in the Cobb Judicial Circuit.

Employees and the public are required to wear a mask or face covering when entering the courthouse. Masks have been provided to employees. The Court maintains the discretion to allow an individual to remove his/her face covering temporarily when it is safe and necessary.

2. Hearings

The Court shall continue to hold most hearings virtually in an open courtroom with public access whenever possible. Attorneys and parties will receive a notice with instructions for these hearings. Please submit all evidence you would like considered by noon the day prior to your hearing by emailing it to kristin.poland@cobbcounty.org and copying the opposing counsel/unrepresented parties. *The Judges will not review this evidence* unless it is properly tendered and admitted at the hearing. This will help minimize the handling and passing of paper between counsel, the parties and court staff.

For in person hearings, please adhere to the following safety guidelines:

Please minimize the inclusion of additional people at your hearing who are not parties to the case, witnesses, potential witnesses or counsel. Submit all evidence you would like considered by noon the day prior to your hearing by emailing it kristin.poland@cobbcounty.org and copying the opposing counsel/unrepresented parties. *The Judges will not review this evidence* unless it is

properly tendered and admitted at the hearing. This will help minimize the handling and passing of paper between counsel, the parties and court staff.

Some areas of the Courtroom are currently taped off to minimize contact between the parties, counsel and court staff. Please be mindful of these taped off areas. Also, please choose seating that maximizes distance between you and other individuals.

If you have a fever or symptoms of COVID-19 and have an upcoming hearing, please contact us at (770) 528-1990 or (770) 528-1900 as soon as possible. Please be aware that temperatures are being taken with thermal scanners upon your entry to the Courthouse.

Please enter the Courtroom when you arrive at the Courthouse and minimize any extended time in the lobbies, if possible. Once your hearing has concluded, please exit the Courthouse to protect the health of yourself and the public. Do not linger in the Courtroom, lobbies or hallways.

Hand sanitizer and public restrooms are available for the public to frequently wash and/or sanitize their hands and Courtrooms and public areas are cleaned and sanitized regularly.

2. Provide Notice to the Public of Increased Health and Safety Measures

The mandatory operating guidelines applicable to the Probate Court have been posted on-line, at the courthouse, and submitted to the Administrative Office of the Courts. These supplemental guidelines will be likewise posted. To further disseminate this information, some existing court notices have been modified and supplemental notices drafted to include COVID-19 screening procedures and court contact information for those that do not meet the criteria for courthouse entry. The Court will continue to develop such modified notices as necessary. Signage and floor decals have been installed to assist in screening and maintaining social distancing.

3. Provide Health and Safe Access to the Courtroom

The Probate Court will continue to adhere to the COVID-19 courthouse entry screening procedure required by the Chief Superior Court Judge of the Cobb Judicial Circuit and implemented by the Cobb County Sheriff's Office.

5. Healthy and Safe Court Employees

Probate Court staff are working in-person at the courthouse each day full time. However, please be aware that we have had some positive COVID-19 results, which have resulted in quarantining those individuals as well as those around them. Staff work and break areas have been modified as necessary to allow for better spacing and reduce sharing certain work equipment. Windows between the public and court staff in the Clerk's Office shall remain closed when possible.

Currently, Probate Court staff must use the employee/access card entrance on Lawrence Street or go through regular security procedures at the Waddell Street entrance. For security reasons, fulltime judges may continue to use their regular entrance. Regardless of which entry is used, all judges and staff may be temperature checked and provided a wristband indicating that they have passed temperature screening for the day.

Court staff have been provided hand sanitizer and masks. Court offices, work spaces, and public areas will be more frequently and deeply cleaned than before the pandemic.

Employees are frequently reminded to maintain social distancing, wear a face covering, wash their hands, and remain at home if sick or in contact with someone known or suspected to be positive for COVID-19. Court staff and judges shall be required to report such illness or contact, take a test if directed, and isolate and/or quarantine as required by the applicable DPH Administrative Order for Public Health Control Measures and Cobb County policies, procedures, and protocols.

When there is reason to believe that anyone who works at or has visited the Probate Court has been exposed to COVID-19, DPH and/or Cobb & Douglas Public Health shall be notified and notification of persons who may have been exposed shall occur as directed. This process shall occur according to policies, procedures, and/or protocols adopted by Cobb County government. To further keep the community informed, if there is a confirmed positive COVID-19 case at the Probate Court, we will continue to publicly release relevant, non-identifying information.

6. Healthy and Safe Jurors and Potential Jurors

The Probate Court of Cobb County will follow all written operating guidelines of the Supreme Court and Superior Court of Cobb County.