

MAGISTRATE COURT OF LOWNDES COUNTY

P.O. BOX 1349
VALDOSTA, GEORGIA 31603-1349

JONI B. PARKER
CHIEF JUDGE

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July 15, 2020

PROCEDURES FOR THE SAFE RESUMPTION OF IN PERSON AND VIRTUAL COURT APPEARANCES

In accordance with the *Fourth Order Extending Declaration of Statewide Judicial Emergency* (hereafter Fourth Order) signed by Justice Harold D. Melton on July 10, 2020, the Magistrate of Lowndes County will adhere to the following guidelines for conducting business and attending in person proceedings with the Court.

For the protection of all participants and court personnel, the Court will follow the latest Centers for Disease Control (CDC) recommendations. The Court will make adjustments to these guidelines as needed. We must all cooperate and work together to keep our community safe.

Justice Melton's Fourth Order lifted all deadlines previously stayed, tolled, extended, or delayed by the March 14, 2020 Order. Parties must now adhere to all time periods provided by law, to include filing answers or other responses with the Court. The Court will hear cases in person and by virtual video through WebEx software using the following guidelines.

GENERAL GUIDELINES

- If you feel sick, are running a fever, or if you have been exposed to the COVID-19 virus, PLEASE DO NOT COME TO THE COURTHOUSE. Immediately contact the Court by calling (229)671-2610 and request a continuance of your case.
- If you are in the age category or health category that is required to shelter in place, please notify the Court and you will be given a new court date.
- Everyone must wear a mask to enter the courthouse (judicial complex). The mask must stay in place at all times while in the building. Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth while at the courthouse.
- Everyone will be asked a series of health related questions prior to entering the courthouse. Please allow extra time for this to be completed.
- All court personnel shall wear a mask when conducting court business. Further, they are required to check their temperatures 2 times per day. Court personnel are required to stay home if they do not feel well, have a fever, if exhibiting any signs of COVID-19 or if they have been exposed to someone who has tested positive for COVID-19. All court personnel have been trained on best practices to prevent transmission of the virus, including frequent hand washing for at 20 seconds with soap and water.
- Sanitization of the court shall be routinely and regularly performed throughout the workday.

CONDUCTING BUSINESS WITH THE COURT

- Please strongly consider using telephone calls, mail, email or the online portal as an alternative to coming to the court in person.
- If you must conduct business in person, a mask must be worn at all times.
- As the lobby is very small, please schedule an appointment prior to coming to the court. Scheduled appointments will assist in all persons remaining 6 feet apart. If you come to the court without an appointment, court personnel will schedule you an appointment at the next available time and you will be asked to come back at that time. Only one person is allowed in the lobby. Please do not enter the lobby if another person is at the window being assisted by staff.
- Everyone must keep 6 feet apart at all times. No one will shake hands or otherwise have direct contact with another individual. This provision does not apply to law enforcement when performing their official duties.
- Hand sanitizer dispensers are located in the lobby and courtroom.
- Please exit the court when your business is concluded. Do not loiter in the common areas.

CONDUCTING IN PERSON CIVIL PROCEEDINGS

- For cases requiring a hearing or trial, the Court offers virtual video proceedings as an alternative to conducting proceedings in person. Participants are strongly encouraged to utilize virtual video proceedings when possible. Please contact the court if you wish to attend your court proceeding by video.
- All participants and court personnel shall maintain a minimum of 6 feet between each other at all times.
- All court personnel shall wear a mask and gloves while in the courtroom.
- For everyone's safety, participants are encouraged to bring only those persons essential to the presentation of your case to Court.
- All parties and witnesses shall wear masks while in the courtroom. Each party is responsible for ensuring that they and their witnesses have masks.
- All persons should sanitize their hands prior to entering the courtroom. Hand sanitizer is provided in the courtroom. Bathrooms are located on the 1st and 2nd floor for participants to wash their hands. The CDC guidelines recommend that hands be washed with soap and water a minimum of 20 seconds.
- All persons entering the courtroom must maintain a minimum of six feet from other persons at all times.

- Please comply with directions given by courtroom personnel with respect to seating and social distancing. All courtroom visitors must sit at designated pre-marked seats to ensure proper social distancing.
- Court personnel will sanitize the courtroom before each hearing.
- Only one case will be scheduled and heard per time period.
- The court encourages all participants to minimize the amount of tangible evidence to be submitted. Please consider electronic presentation of evidence when possible. Any evidence presented will be sanitized prior to acceptance.

CONDUCTING CRIMINAL PROCEEDINGS

- The Court will conduct all criminal proceedings through video conferencing applications. The palatine system will be used to review and sign arrest warrants and search warrants. WebEx will be used to conduct preliminary and bond hearings.

This 17th day of July, 2020

Chief Judge