

**APPALACHIAN JUDICIAL CIRCUIT  
MEMORANDUM**

TO: Judge John E. Worcester  
Judge Mary Elizabeth Priest  
Chief Juvenile Judge Jan A. Wheeler  
Juvenile Judge Keith Galligan  
District Attorney Alison B. Sosebee  
Fannin County Clerk of Superior Court Dana Chastain  
Pickens County Clerk of Superior Court Jennifer Jordan  
Gilmer County Clerk of Superior Court Amy Johnson  
Pickens County Sheriff Donald Craig  
Gilmer County Sheriff Stacy Nicholson  
Fannin County Sheriff Dane Kirby  
Pickens County Commission Chair Robert Jones  
Fannin County Commissioner Chair Stan Helton  
Gilmer County Commissioner Chair Charlie Paris  
Circuit Public Defender Clint Hooker  
Local Attorneys  
Court Personnel

FROM: Chief Judge Brenda S. Weaver 

RE: Protocol for Court Procedures During the Covid-19 Pandemic

DATE: May 13, 2020

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Please read the Second Order Extending Declaration of Statewide Emergency, entered on May 11, 2020, by the Honorable Harold D. Melton, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Georgia. Please also read the Second Order Extending Declaration of Judicial Emergency Until June 12, 2020, entered on May 13, 2020, by the Honorable Brenda S. Weaver, Chief Judge of the Appalachian Judicial Circuit.

During the pendency of the COVID-19 Judicial Emergency, the Superior Court Judges of the Appalachian Circuit will waive hearings on uncontested divorces with and without minor children, in addition to uncontested child custody actions. Please submit the orders to the assigned judge's office for consideration and entry, and the orders will be signed and returned to you for filing if approved. Additionally, the Parenting Seminar may be completed online during the pendency of the Judicial Emergency. Mediation is available remotely and remains a requirement per the Domestic Relations Standing Order entered December 30, 2016 prior to scheduling any case for a final hearing. Please make a good faith effort to resolve issues with the opposing party regarding child support, visitation, and custody.

For **contested civil cases**, a party or an attorney shall submit a blank Rule Nisi to the assigned judge. Please indicate the nature of the hearing (i.e., motion for summary judgment, temporary child support, etc.), the estimated length of the hearing, whether a court reporter is requested, and the preference for in-person or remote participation. The assigned judge will have the discretion to determine whether the hearing will be in-person or by remote participation. Most hearings will be by remote participation only.

Jury trials are continued until August, 2020, by prior order of this Court.

In-person court proceedings will be conducted in such a manner as to protect the health of the litigants, lawyers, judges, court personnel, and the public.

Guidelines for in-person proceedings are as follows:

- The assigned times for hearings will be staggered to minimize the number of individuals in the courtroom at any one time.
- Social distancing-persons in the courtroom shall observe a minimum distance of six (6) feet from each other except at counsel table and the witness stand for document exchanges.
- Occupancy in courtroom shall be 10 or less persons including the bailiff, court security officer, court reporter and judge.
- All Judges, courthouse employees, and visitors to the courthouse shall be screened upon entry using a touchless thermometer.
- All personnel and visitors shall be outfitted with protective masks before entering the courtroom. Masks may be removed only when counsel is making oral argument, questioning witnesses or otherwise addressing the court. Parties and witnesses may remove masks when testifying.
- Hand sanitizer shall be provided at various locations within the courthouse for frequent usage, especially after handling documents. Hand sanitizer is required prior to entering the courtroom.
- Cleaning and disinfection of tabletop surfaces, chairs, witness stand, lectern/podium, and any other common surface or area in frequent use shall be performed before and after each case.
- Attorneys should advise their clients and witnesses to notify them if they show any symptoms of illness, even mild symptoms, prior to or after court or have been exposed to a Coronavirus (COVID-19) positive individual. Attorneys should contact the assigned judge's office as soon as possible if they, their clients, or witnesses, are showing symptoms or have been exposed to someone who tested positive for a Coronavirus (COVID-19) and have recently been to court or have an upcoming hearing.