

information posted at the Courtroom entrance and contact the appropriate court to request further instructions regarding future court attendance.

If an individual with a scheduled court date has other health limitations which make them especially vulnerable to COVID-19 or have other concerns with entering the Courtroom, he or she should contact the appropriate court to request that their case be rescheduled.

Pursuant to CDC guidance², all persons admitted to the Courtroom may be required to wear face masks while in the public areas of the Courthouse. Masks may be available at the entrance for individuals who do not have a mask. Individual offices within each courthouse may implement mandatory wearing of masks due to space and high-volume contact with the public.

DEFENSE COUNSEL IN CRIMINAL MATTERS: With social distancing protocols in mind, defense counsel should make every attempt reasonable to meet with their client(s) prior to court. The Sheriff's Offices should work cooperatively to allow defense counsel to privately meet with their clients in the jail or via remote video while protecting all persons from potential exposure to COVID-19.

VIRTUAL COURT PROCEEDINGS: All judges will continue to use technology to provide an alternative to in-person proceedings. Participating remotely by video conference may be an option in many courts but may differ from court to court and hearing to hearing. Individuals should contact their specified court ahead of time to find out more details. Such virtual court proceedings will follow open court requirements.

IN-PERSON COURT PROCEEDINGS: The Court is employing special procedures to minimize the risk to everyone's health. To accommodate for social distancing and cleaning, court sessions may be staggered with fewer cases scheduled per session. Additionally, seating in the courtroom will be limited to designated seats. Some court sessions may be temporarily relocated to other rooms or buildings not typically used in order to accommodate social distancing. Handling of paperwork will be kept to a minimum.

Persons entering courtrooms must comply with directions given by Courthouse security and/or staff with respect to seating and social distancing.

In the event that a courtroom is at capacity and an individual who is not a party to the case being heard requests entry, notice shall be given to the presiding judge. Accommodation may be provided to include, but not limited to: entry, viewing remotely, etc.

CLEANING & DISINFECTING: All efforts will be made to have court or county personnel clean and disinfect areas of the courtroom between users per recommended guidance.³ All staff and the public are encouraged to follow best practices to prevent infection, including frequent hand washing for at least 20 seconds with soap and water. Hand sanitizer will be available in high use areas along with cleaning supplies for use by staff.⁴

INHERENT POWER: Nothing in this proposed plan shall be construed to limit the inherent power of the court. Each assigned judge may direct and control their respective cases and those persons before them in their courtroom as they deem necessary for the administration of justice. This order shall be in effect until further modification, extension or termination.

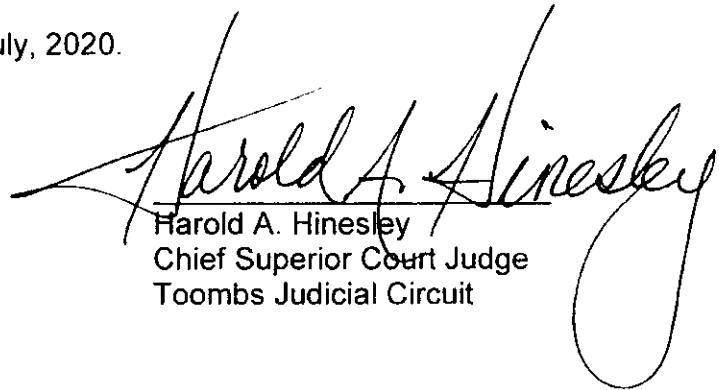
² <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/cloth-face-cover.html>

³ <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/clean-disinfect/index.html> & <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/reopen-guidance.html>

⁴ <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/hand-hygiene.html>

PUBLIC NOTICE: A copy of this Standing Order shall be available in each Clerk of Court office, posted at or near the Courthouse entrance, posted on the Clerk of Court website, and a copy sent to the Clerk of Supreme Court and the Administrative Office of the Courts.

SO ORDERED, this 10th day of July, 2020.



Harold A. Hinesley
Chief Superior Court Judge
Toombs Judicial Circuit