

**IN THE MAGISTRATE COURT OF CAMDEN COUNTY  
STATE OF GEORGIA**

**Operating Guidelines for the Magistrate Court of Camden County during  
the COVID-19 Pandemic and Judicial Emergency, effective July 23, 2020**

In order to conduct in-person proceedings during the statewide judicial emergency, courts have been required to develop, implement and disseminate operating guidelines. 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 utilize the "Georgia Court Reopening Guide" as a template for creating court operating guidelines. Accordingly, the Magistrate Court of Camden County enters the within Health & Safety Guidelines which 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.

The Court strongly encourages the usage of technology for conducting court business during the COVID-19 pandemic and judicial emergency. Court forms and general information can be located on the Camden County website at: <https://www.camdencountyga.gov/73/Magistrate-Court> or the Council of Magistrate Court Judges website at: <https://georgiamagistratecouncil.com/>. All forms can be printed out, signed, notarized and mailed to the Camden County Magistrate Court with the appropriate filing fee for processing. Answers to common questions or case inquiries can be handled by contacting the court by phone at 912-576-5658. All correspondence and filings can be mailed directly to the court at P.O. Box 386, Woodbine, Georgia 31569.

**1. General Infection Control Measures**

The Magistrate Court will follow all applicable public health guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Georgia Department of Public Health. Employees and the public are required to wear a face mask when entering the courthouse, while conducting business in the Magistrate Court lobby and while conducting business in the Magistrate Court courtroom. The court maintains discretion to allow an individual to remove his/her face covering temporarily when it is deemed to be safe and necessary.

Courtroom capacity is limited so as to allow all people physically present in the courtroom that do not reside in the same household to maintain six (6) feet of social distancing. Individuals are permitted to wait in the lobby of the courthouse at their discretion and will be required to do so once courtroom capacity is reached.

Hand sanitizer and public restrooms are available for the public to frequently wash and/or sanitize their hands.

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

The operating guidelines applicable to the Magistrate Court of Camden County have been posted on-line on the Camden County website, at the courthouse and have been submitted to the Administrative Office of the Courts. Signage and floor decals have been installed to assist in screening and maintaining appropriate social distancing.

## **3. Provide Healthy and Safe Access to the Courtroom**

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

## **4. Maintain a Healthy and Safe Courtroom**

Everyone that is physically present in the Magistrate Court courtroom that does not physically reside together shall maintain six (6) feet of social distancing. The Court has discretion to allow individuals to be temporarily within six (6) feet of one another for limited purposes, including but not limited to: confidential attorney-client communications, foreign and sign language interpretation, handling evidence and security reasons.

For in-person hearings, all cases shall be special-set to ensure that the Magistrate Court courtroom can safely accommodate those present and allow for social distancing. This will allow for individuals to rotate in and out of the courtroom as quickly as possible and to limit contact. The courtroom will be cleaned between each case. All parties, attorneys and attendees shall remain outside of the courtroom until a bailiff or court clerk instructs them to enter the courtroom. The courtroom is open to the general public at all times. However, members of the general public who are not participants in the judicial proceeding will only be admitted to the courtroom as social distancing capacity limits allow.

**If any person has an objection to attendance or participation in an in-person court proceeding, then such objection shall be made known to the court at least three (3) days prior to the scheduled court proceeding, or as soon as is practicable, and shall include a proposed reasonable accommodation to such attendance. The court will consider the request, and in its discretion will rule as to which accommodation, if any, is appropriate.**

The Court shall continue to conduct first appearance and criminal bond hearings virtually by video conference. Arrest warrants will also continue to be issued virtually by video conference.

The Court is committed to procuring more technology to allow more virtual and hybrid proceedings to occur. All such hearings shall be conducted in an open courtroom with public access and/or be livestreamed.

## **5. Healthy and Safe Court Employees**

Judges, court employees and all individuals conducting in-person business will be required to follow strict health and safety guidelines. A glass window has been installed in the Magistrate Court lobby between the public and court staff.

Court staff have been provided with hand sanitizer, cleaning supplies and masks. All must wear a mask while in the courtroom, public areas of the courthouse, while working with the public at the front counter, or when in any other area or county building in which social distancing cannot be maintained. The court maintains the discretion to allow an individual to remove his/her face mask temporarily when it is deemed to be safe and necessary.

Court offices, work spaces and public areas will be more frequently cleaned than before the pandemic. Staff members shall practice healthy habits in maintaining a safe and clean working environment. Employees are encouraged to wash their hands frequently and use hand sanitizer in between hand washing. Staff members must sanitize their work area including desks, phones, doorknobs, light switches and other office equipment daily. Staff members shall only use their assigned computer and telephone.

In the event that a staff member becomes symptomatic, is directly exposed to someone that is symptomatic, or tests positive for COVID-19, the staff member will be required to self-isolate and may not return to work until cleared by a physician.

## **6. Healthy and Safe Jurors and Potential Jurors**

The Magistrate Court of Camden County will follow all written operating guidelines of the Superior Court of Camden County relating to all jurors.

## **7. Healthy and Safe Inmates and Detainees**

The Court will continue to work closely with the Camden County Sheriff's Office to implement recommendations from the Georgia Court Reopening Guide for safe inmates and detainees that will appear for hearings in the Magistrate Court. The Court will continue to utilize virtual hearings for inmates whenever possible. In the event that an inmate or detainee appears for an in-person hearing, all inmates and detainees will wear a mask as long as the wearing of such mask does not impact an inmate's or detainee's right to a fair hearing. Alternative measures will be taken to ensure those rights when necessary. Each inmate or detainee appearing in the Magistrate Court will be safely socially distanced from other individuals, attorneys, court staff and deputies.

This operating guide may be amended and modified as necessary under the guidance of the Supreme Court of Georgia, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Georgia Department of Public Health.

**SO ORDERED** this 23rd day of July, 2020.



**JENNIFER E. LEWIS, Chief Judge**  
**Magistrate Court**  
**Camden County, Georgia**