

IN THE MUNICIPAL COURT OF THE CITY OF GUYTON

STATE OF GEORGIA

IN RE: GUIDELINES FOR USE IN MUNICIPAL COURT PROCEEDINGS

Background

The Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Georgia issued an order suspending trials and court proceedings for Georgia earlier this year, in light of the Covid-19 crisis.

Over time the restrictions were relaxed to allow for in-person proceedings on a limited basis.

This Court did “reopen” court but adhered to guidelines that staggered the court calendar in hour or half-hour increments to limit the number of people in the courtroom at one time.

Court attendees were encouraged to socially distance themselves, mask coverings were allowed and face to face contact was discouraged.

Recently the Supreme Court of Georgia issued an order for the resumption of Jury Trials and Grand Jury proceedings. Although Municipal Courts do not have Jury Trials or Grand Juries, all Courts were to adopt certain procedures to follow to prevent the spread of Covid-19 and to avoid an atmosphere that would expose court personnel and attendees to a risk of contracting Covid-19.

Therefore this Court, after consulting with other court personnel, adopts the following guidelines to be used, effective when signed by the presiding judge and the city attorney.

Basic Guidelines and Procedures:

(1)

Court dockets will be staggered in 30 minute increments. No more than ten cases will be scheduled per 30 minute sessions.

(2)

Bailiffs will assist in limiting the next group of court attendees from entering the courtroom unless and until there is adequate seating to ensure proper spacing.

(3)

The bailiffs will direct all attendees to maintain six feet distance between themselves and other court attendees. Exceptions will be made when there are family members who can remain seated closer than six feet.

(4)

Face coverings and or masks will be required and provided by the court for those who do not have one. Face coverings or masks will remain in place at all times unless speech and hearing difficulties arise. Exceptions to this rule will be made for those who have physical problems that prevent the wearing of a face covering or mask.

(5)

Bailiffs will screen all attendees with general questions about their current health – fever, cough, loss of smell or taste, or the exposure to someone diagnosed with Covid-19, or if they have tested positive for Covid-19.

(6)

Any attendees who answer in the affirmative will be asked to wait outside of the courtroom and away from other attendees. Their names will be reported to the Solicitor who will consult with the Court. The Court would excuse that attendee and their case would be rescheduled no sooner than 14 days.

(7)

Court personnel will be expected to wear masks and or face coverings. The Court recognizes that the presiding judge may be situated in such place whereby social distancing can be observed without the benefit of a face covering. In other cases the Court should use one unless speech becomes an issue.

(8)

Temperature devices will be encouraged but not required. If used, all with a temperature of 100.4 degrees or higher will be denied entry and their case will be rescheduled.

(9)

Sanitary wipes/ sprays/sanitizers will be on the Clerk's table, the podium and tables where the attendees sit or stand. The podium should be wiped down after each attendee completes their appearance. Court personnel, or a bailiff, may be needed and asked to perform this task. The wearing of hand protective gloves is encouraged.

(10)

Social contact between court personnel, attendees, attorneys, etc. will be limited to gestures and nods, no hand shaking, hugging, or elbow bumps allowed.

(11)

To the extent permissible visitors will be encouraged to wait outside. The Court understands that Courts are open to the public and no one can be excluded from attendance. No one will be excluded from attendance, but this is just a reminder to them of the need for special precautions during the Covid-19 crisis.

(12)

Two containers of writing utensils will be provided, one with writing utensils and one empty container to place the writing utensils in after use. Only one writing utensil per person will be used, and then placed in the empty container, to be sanitized at the end of court.

(13)

Those at risk for Covid-19 as defined by the C.D.C. (over 65, severe underlying health issues, cancer, kidney disease, heart disease, diabetes, sickle cell anemia, or other immune problems, or those who care for persons who are high risk for Covid-19) shall be accommodated by a continuance of their case or be allowed to handle their case when the courtroom is cleared by all but essential court personnel.

(14)

Inmates will not be transported to and from court. Videos and electronic means will be used in order to handle their case. Exceptions may be made for good cause.

(15)

All visitors must disclose their physical symptoms to the bailiffs or other court personnel, and if they are at risk of transmitting Covid-19 they shall contact court personnel to have their case rescheduled.

(16)

These rules may be altered, amended or changed as conditions dictate.

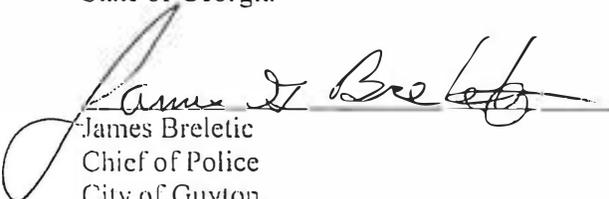
(17)

The Clerk of Court is directed to post this document at the entrance to the Courtroom and applicable website.

SO ORDERED, this 7th day of December, 2020.


12/7/2020
Grady K. Reddick
Judge, Municipal Court
City of Guyton
State of Georgia


Ben Perkins
City Attorney
City of Guyton
State of Georgia


James Breletic
Chief of Police
City of Guyton
State of Georgia