

# DECATUR COUNTY MAGISTRATE COURT

## GUIDELINES FOR IN-COURT PROCEEDINGS

Pursuant to the direction of the Second and Third Orders Extending Declaration of Statewide Judicial Emergency signed by the Honorable Harold D. Melton, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Georgia, and in order to protect the health of litigants, lawyers, judges, court personnel, and the public, the following Guidelines have been developed and must be adhered to by all participants in in-court proceedings for the Magistrate Court of Decatur County, Georgia, effective immediately:

1. **SCREENING.** Prior to an individual being admitted to the courtroom in which a matter is being heard, the screening procedures described on the court's Screening Protocol must be conducted. This involves having temperatures taken and answering a series of questions.
2. **DISTANCING.** All persons entering the courtroom must maintain at least 6 feet of distance from other persons at all times. Distancing will be strictly enforced.
3. **OCCUPANCY.** There shall be admitted to the courtroom at the Decatur County Jail no more than 16 persons (excluding court personnel) at one time in order to ensure appropriate distancing of persons. Please consider staying outside of the courtroom and building unless you are a party to the case or a witness.
4. **PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT (PPE).** All parties should wear a mask inside the courtroom and should come to court prepared with a mask.
5. **SANITIZATION.** All persons should sanitize their hands prior to entering the courtroom. Hand sanitizer dispensers will be available at various locations including at the entry to the courtroom and the building.
6. **CLEANING.** The courtroom, including surfaces of tables and chairs and door handles, must be cleaned and sanitized between proceedings during which time the courtroom will be closed to the public.
7. **EVIDENCE HANDLING.** All persons must use the provided evidence viewing camera for the provision of evidence and viewing of evidence by other persons in the courtroom. Under no circumstances should items or papers be handled by more than one person.
8. **HIGH RISK INDIVIDUALS.** At risk individuals, which include those over 65 years of age and those with serious underlying medical conditions, may request a continuance or other accommodations of any court proceeding by contacting the Magistrate Court.

# **DECATUR COUNTY MAGISTRATE COURT**

## **SCREENING PROTOCOL FOR VISITORS ENTERING THE COURTROOM**

The following screening protocol has been developed at the direction of the Second Order Extending Declaration of Statewide Judicial Emergency, and in accordance with the guidelines suggested by public health experts at the Georgia Department of Public Health and published by the Georgia Administrative Office of the Courts.

- Screening of courtroom visitors must take place outside of the building or in another designated area outside of the courtroom.
- The screener should ask if the visitor is experiencing fever, any shortness of breath, persistent cough or sore throat, or any other symptoms of respiratory infection, or has experienced such symptoms and is currently subject to Georgia Department of Public Health's Isolation Protocol;
- The screener should ask whether the visitor has traveled to an area or location with widespread, ongoing transmission of Coronavirus (COVID-19) within the last 14 days, per CDC guidelines, or has been exposed to COVID-19 within the last 14 days;
- Take each person's temperature using a no-touch thermometer;
  - The persons taking visitors' temperatures should wear gloves and a mask;
- Prohibit entrance by anyone with a temperature of 100.4 or higher;
  - Note that, as the weather grows increasingly warm, screening will produce increased false results unless individuals are allowed to cool down first;
- Prohibit any person meeting either the respiratory infection symptoms, travel or exposure criteria, or the temperature criteria from entering the courtroom;
- Provide hand sanitizer and face masks for those entering the courtroom.

Persons prohibited from entering the courtroom should be given the Magistrate Court's telephone number, 229-248-3014, for contact regarding alternative means of pursuing critical judicial matters and/or a rescheduling of their judicial matter. Screening personnel should also immediately notify the Clerk of Magistrate Court as to the identity of any person prohibited from entering the courtroom.

## **VIDEOCONFERENCING**

In accordance with the directive of the Georgia Supreme Court, the court is offering videoconferencing as a preferred alternative to in-person proceedings, to allow the resolution of your matter without the need to appear in court.

Please notify the Court if you have the ability to proceed in this way, and we will make arrangements to schedule your case for disposition by videoconference.

### **CONTACT:**

Decatur County Magistrate Court  
(229)-248-3014

**COVID-19 NOTICE**  
**RE: DOING BUSINESS IN MAGISTRATE COURT**

**PLEASE CONSIDER CONDUCTING ALL POSSIBLE MAGISTRATE COURT BUSINESS OVER THE PHONE OR BY MAIL.**

**ONLY TWO PERSONS ARE ALLOWED TO ENTER THE MAGISTRATE COURT LOBBY AT A TIME.**

**PLEASE DO NOT BRING OTHERS WITH YOU TO CONDUCT BUSINESS IN OUR OFFICE UNLESS YOU NEED PHYSICAL ASSISTANCE OR AN INTERPRETER.**

**VISITORS SHOULD WEAR A FACE MASK OR OTHER FACE COVERING AS RECOMMENDED BY THE CDC AND THE GEORGIA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH.**

**PERSONS WAITING TO CONDUCT MAGISTRATE COURT BUSINESS SHOULD WAIT OUTSIDE IN THE MAIN SHERIFF'S OFFICE LOBBY OR OUTSIDE.**

**AT ALL TIMES, VISITORS SHOULD MAINTAIN AT LEAST 6 FEET BETWEEN THEMSELVES AND ANY OTHER VISITOR.**