



Ruth Ann Hall
Presiding Circuit Judge

TWENTY-THIRD JUDICIAL CIRCUIT

Madison County Courthouse
100 North Side Square
Huntsville, Alabama 35801
Phone (256) 532-3618

LeighAnne Patterson
Judicial Assistant

Ron Eady
Bailiff

Shannon Ball
Court Reporter

April 17, 2020
Madison County Bar Association
Huntsville, AL 35801

RE: 23rd Judicial Circuit Court Proceedings and Protocol

I hope that this finds you all doing well and protecting yourselves and family. I know that this has been a difficult period for most of us, requiring adjustments not only in our professional lives, but in our personal lives as well. I wanted to update you with some things that judges have been doing and what we anticipate the next few months will require of all of us.

The Courts are open despite reports to the contrary. However, we are not conducting face to face proceedings unless authorized by the Chief Justice. Every day a cover judge is assigned to be at the courthouse to handle Protection from Abuse petitions, warrants and any other emergency matters. A duty judge is on call on the weekends. Additionally, we are all working at home to stay as current as possible with the restrictions that are in place. We are available and most have conducted hearings, status conferences, pro ami settlements, worker's compensation settlements and short bench trials by virtual hearing. We will continue to do so and hope to expand our use of the virtual hearing continuously. Weekly conferences by zoom are being held with the Chief Justice and Presiding Judges and judges are conferring around the state.

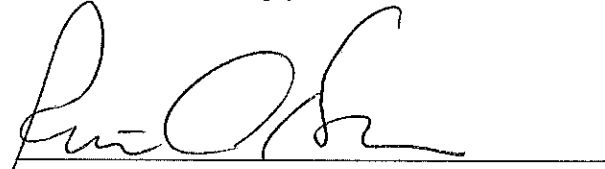
Because of the continued concerns for the health and safety of the citizens of Madison County, Court staff and attorneys, jury trials for May and June 2020 will be suspended and will be rescheduled as the Court's calendar allows. As soon as the Chief Justice informs us that face to face hearings and bench trials are allowed, we will do so.

Your safety and that of court personnel must be my top priority and procedures are being implemented in that regard. Part of that procedure includes wearing masks and maintaining proper distancing. All attorneys, parties and witnesses unless appearing by virtual hearing will be required to wear masks. I do not know how long this will be required. Most of our courtrooms are small and a 10-foot distance for prolonged contact i.e. more than 30 minutes, is difficult if not impossible to ensure. This decision is based upon advice from medical experts and discussion with the judges. If

there is something that prevents you from complying with this requirement, please contact me.

Change is hard for all of us, but I am confident that we can do this. If you would be interested in zoom conferences with a panel of judges, we are happy to do so. Most likely this would be best accomplished by bar sections. Please contact the Madison County Bar and/or Jeremiah Hodges, Bar President if interested.

Take care of yourselves and I look forward to seeing you soon.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ruth Ann Hall', written over a horizontal line.

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MEMORANDUM TO JUDICIAL EMPLOYEES

April 17, 2020

I hope that all of you and your families are doing well and that you are practicing social distancing. For the past month, the Courts have been operating under restrictions we could never have imagined. Thank you for your dedication and hard work in keeping the courts operational. The advances in technology, your hard work and commitment have made it possible. I'm happy to report that the employees infected with the virus are doing well and thank you for your prayers. As we move forward we must continue to be innovative and have a heightened awareness of safety. Your health and safety are our number one priority.

Toward that end I sought advice from a medical expert to guide us on maintaining a safe work environment while conducting court business. After discussing the recommendations with the Judges, it was determined that all personnel in the judicial system will be required to wear a mask in the courthouse. If you have an office that allows you to close your door, clearly you would be able to remove your mask at that time. We are working to reconfigure offices to allow employees to work at a minimum 6 feet apart. I realize this will be challenging. I do not like this, but if it is required to ensure your safety and that of your families the inconvenience is worth it. A letter to the Madison County Bar has been forwarded requiring attorneys, clients and witnesses to wear masks as well. I anticipate that the County Commission will require the same for their employees and all who enter the Courthouse.

Because of the continued concerns for the health and safety of the citizens of Madison County and Court staff, jury trials for May and June 2020 will be suspended and rescheduled. When Chief Justice Parker informs us that face to face hearings and/or trials are allowed, we will do so. As you can imagine jury trials are going to require changes in organization and selection. The current operating procedure with the clerk's office, court administrator's office and on call Judge will continue until further notice. A drop box for the clerk's office, probate judge and county commission finance are in the basement at the gate entrance. Keep in mind that the mail room closes at 2:00 p.m. Please continue to assist from a distance and use telephone conferencing or zoom conferencing as much as possible.

If you have any suggestions, I would be happy to hear them. If you experience any symptoms, please notify your supervisor immediately. Stay safe, be respectful of social distancing and thank you for all that you do every day.



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