

FIRST CIRCUIT COURTROOM AND COURTHOUSE GENERAL
PROCEDURES TO RESUME IN-PERSON HEARINGS

The Supreme Court of Alabama has, by Order dated May 13, 2020, authorized in-person hearings beginning Monday, May 18, 2020. Said authorization is subject to the approval of the Presiding Circuit Judge of each circuit. Therefore, the undersigned Presiding Circuit Judge does hereby authorize the commencement of in-person hearings beginning Monday, May 18, 2020. Said hearings are subject to the “Safer at Home Order” of Governor Kay Ivey as well as the recommended safety guidelines described hereafter. These general procedures are intended to apply in all Circuit and District Courts in the First Judicial Circuit, so long as social distancing practices are mandated. While not to be considered as an administrative order, we will work within these guidelines, to the best of our ability, in order to provide some uniformity for the attorneys and the parties.

1. Dockets may be set at intervals throughout the day so please note the exact time on your notice as these times may not be the same docket times previously followed by the court. Each interval may vary depending on the facilities and the nature of a docket. Anyone arriving early for a hearing will not be admitted until their docket/hearing starts.
2. Retained attorneys will be asked to contact their clients the day before court or meet them outside the courthouse the day of court to confirm with them that neither they, nor any witnesses have symptoms such as fever or breathing issues or have been exposed to someone with symptoms or are in a high risk group. In the event these issues exist, the attorney shall notify security or the court immediately and the individual in question shall **not** enter the courthouse. This practice is also encouraged among appointed counsel where practical.

3. Signs will be posted at the courthouse entrances directing anyone who has tested positive, has symptoms, or has likely been exposed, to **not** enter the courthouse but, to immediately contact their attorney or if self-represented to contact their judge's offices for further instructions.
4. Court security will screen individuals waiting to get in. These procedures may vary from court to court depending on equipment and personnel available. Screening personnel will assess potential health concerns and priority of access to the courtroom. Face coverings will be required for entrance to any court hearings.
5. The total number of parties and attorneys in the courtroom will be determined by the seating capacity of each courtroom, allowing for a minimum of 6 ft. of separation between everyone in the courtroom. This may have to be monitored by security/court staff at the door to the courtroom. Once capacity is reached, no one gets in until someone leaves. Those individuals waiting outside the courtroom shall maintain at least 6 feet of separation. Court Security will make regular rounds to ensure compliance with separation.
6. In each courtroom, there will be designated areas for parties and attorneys to stand that allow for their separation from each other and from court personnel. Use of signage and/or high visibility tape is encouraged where available.
7. Witnesses may be on a 10-minute standby and the court will notify them by phone when to enter the courthouse. The witness procedure will be determined by each individual judge and will be communicated by that judge to all attorneys and pro se litigants.

8. Excess chairs shall be removed and those remaining will be spaced out to comply with social distancing. Benches will be marked off every other aisle and marked for seating separation.
9. Individuals who are over age 65 and individuals with serious underlying health conditions, such as high blood pressure, chronic lung disease, diabetes, obesity, asthma, and those whose immune systems are compromised such as by chemotherapy for cancer or other conditions requiring such therapy are considered vulnerable populations. Vulnerable populations who are scheduled for court will be accommodated by the court in a manner that will allow participation by virtual hearing.
10. Court building cleaning staff will clean the courtrooms between morning and afternoon proceedings, and at the end of each day the courtroom is used.
11. The Presiding Judge will enter an Administrative Order for the Circuit that requires compliance with separation (**this does not apply to small children or anyone needing assistance**). Anyone intentionally violating the separation order will be subject to the contempt powers of the court and at a minimum may be asked to leave the courthouse.

NOTE: This list does not contain all procedures for all courts and some courts may have additional procedures. This list is meant to give some general guidance to the attorneys and the parties in order to prepare for court in the weeks ahead.

DONE and ORDERED this the 14th day of May, 2020.

/s/ Gaines C. McCorquodale
GAINES C. McCORQUODALE
Presiding Circuit Judge