

**PRESIDING JUDGE'S ORDER  
SIXTEENTH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT  
STATE OF ALABAMA**

STATE OF ALABAMA)  
ETOWAH COUNTY)

**ADMINISTRATIVE ORDER FOR JUDICIAL BUILDING AND  
COURTROOM PROCEDURES AND SECURITY BEGINNING MAY 18, 2020**

WHEREAS, the Alabama Supreme Court on April 30, 2020 entered Administrative Order No. 6: Extending Orders and Deadlines Concerning the Suspension of In-Person Proceedings through May 15, 2020, wherein all Supreme Court administrative orders relating to the COVID-19 pandemic were extended through May 15, 2020;

WHEREAS, the 16<sup>th</sup> Judicial Circuit entered its April 30, 2020 Amended Administrative Order Effective May 1, 2020, ratifying and adopting the Alabama Supreme Court's Administrative Order No. 6; and

WHEREAS, suspension of in-person proceedings are being lifted beginning May 18, 2020; therefore, beginning May 18, 2020 through July 31, 2020, certain protocols will be in effect at the William H. Rhea III Judicial Building (hereinafter "Judicial Building") to reduce the risk of infection while conducting business, including in-person hearings within the Judicial Building; and

WHEREAS, all judges, lawyers and parties are **STRONGLY URGED** to continue using videoconferencing through the secure AlaCourt Virtual Hearing ("Zoom") Application whenever same can be accomplished, in lieu of in-person hearings.

It is therefore ORDERED that the following procedures shall be implemented at the Judicial Building beginning May 18, 2020, for the safety and well-being of our citizens who have business at the Judicial Building and for all Judicial Building staff:

**I. Entrances to the Judicial Building:**

**A. Front Door Entrance:**

The front door entrance to the Judicial Building (Forrest Avenue Entrance) shall be available to parties and necessary witnesses for scheduled hearings and for individuals who have business with the Clerk's Office.

To ensure everyone's safety, only a limited number of individuals will be allowed in the Judicial Building at any specific time to ensure six foot (6')

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CIRCUIT COURT CLERK

social distancing can be practiced at all times. When Individuals arrive, they shall provide their names and cellphone numbers to Deputies. Individuals may be asked to remain in their vehicles or outside the Judicial Building until they can safely enter. Once individuals enter the Judicial Building they shall proceed directly to the Courtroom or Clerk's Office.

Where hearings are being held with a Circuit Judge on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor of the Judicial Building, all individuals with no physical limitations shall use the stairwell for access to the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor. Individuals with physical limitations shall use the elevator for access to the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor.

To maintain six foot (6') social distancing, only 2 individuals at a time may use the elevator.

**B. Back Door Entrance:**

The back door entrance to the Judicial Building (1<sup>st</sup> Avenue Entrance) shall be available to judicial building staff, lawyers and staff, law enforcement, scheduled visitors to the District Attorney's Office and state/federal probationers/parolees.

**C. Clerk's Office Walk-Up Window:**

The Clerk's Office Walk-Up Window (8<sup>th</sup> Street Side of Judicial Building) shall be available for payment of court costs, restitution and fines associated with Circuit Criminal, District Criminal & Traffic Court cases. In the event of inclement weather, the front door entrance will be available for the Clerk's Office to receive payments and provide other assistance in those related matters.

**D. Signs:**

Signs will be placed in key areas outside the Judicial Building entrances to assist the public.

**E. Limited Access:**

Due to the current state of the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic and for the health, safety and well-being of all individuals, access to the Judicial Building shall be limited to the Judicial Building officials and staff, security, parties to a proceeding, attorneys and staff, witnesses to a court proceeding, law enforcement, and individuals needing access to the Clerk's Office.

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**II. Judicial Building Security & Health Safety Protocols:**

Etowah County Sheriff Office Deputies ("Deputies"), as always, will continue to provide security at all entrances and when necessary the Clerk's Office walk-up window. Deputies will also be placed in key areas outside and inside the Judicial Building to assist the public and to ensure all citizens are practicing social distancing and other preventive measures related to the COVID-19 pandemic as stated herein.

Consistent with the COVID-19 guidelines published by the Alabama Department of Public Health (See [alabamadepartmentofpublichealth.gov](http://alabamadepartmentofpublichealth.gov)), for the health, safety and well-being of all citizens, Deputies at each Judicial Building entrance will be screening individuals as follows:

- (a) Temperature checked with a no-touch thermometer (temperature shall not exceed 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit);
- (b) Have you been in close contact with a confirmed case of COVID-19?
- (c) Are you experiencing any coughing, shortness of breath or sore throat?
- (d) Have you had a fever in the last 48-hours?
- (e) Have you experienced new loss of taste or smell?
- (f) Have you experienced vomiting or diarrhea in the last 24 hours?

**Any individual who exhibits COVID-19 symptoms or answer yes to any of the questions or who is running a fever exceeding 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit will be denied entrance and should immediately seek medical care or COVID-19 testing or both. In addition, if a party is unable to enter the Judicial Building they need to contact their lawyer's office so they can contact the Court's Judicial Assistant and advise them of same.**

After entering the Judicial Building all personnel, law enforcement, lawyers and staff, parties, witnesses and individuals with business at the Clerk's Office shall practice the following protocols recommended by the Alabama Department of Public Health:

- (a) It is highly recommended that anyone who enters the Judicial Building shall wear a face mask over the nose and mouth to help protect against the spread of the virus (not an N-95 or medical mask, which should be reserved for healthcare workers). While appearing in Court a participant to a hearing may be asked to remove their mask while testifying;
- (b) Practice increased hygiene practices, including but not limited to washing hands frequently, avoid touching your face, practice good etiquette when coughing or sneezing. Hand sanitizer will be provided

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at each Judicial Building entrance and will be available within each courtroom; and

- (c) Practice recommended social distancing, at least six feet (6") between people of different households, to the greatest extent possible

It is strongly recommended that people 65 or older and others especially at risk due to an underlying health condition request through their attorney (or individually if a pro se litigant) that the hearing be held through videoconferencing using the secure AlaCourt Virtual Hearing ("Zoom") Application, in lieu of appearing in-person and the Court will accommodate same.

The Judicial Building will comply with recommended health protocols suggested by the Alabama Department of Public Health to maintain a clean and disinfected building throughout the Judicial Building's hours of operation.

**III. Maintaining Dockets and Hearing Schedules:**

Beginning Monday, May 18, 2020, through Friday, July 31, 2020, all Circuit Judges, District Judges and Domestic Referee shall manage their individual dockets and cases to ensure that the Judicial Building common areas and all courtrooms can practice six foot (6") social distancing.

**All judges, lawyers and parties are STRONGLY URGED once again to continue using videoconferencing through the secure AlaCourt Virtual Hearing ("Zoom") Application whenever same can be accomplished, in lieu of in-person hearings.**

**IV. COURTROOM AND COURTHOUSE SPACING:**

Markings with hi-visibility tape will be clearly denoted for parties and attorneys to stand during all courtroom proceedings to provide for applicable six foot (6') social distancing with each other and courtroom personnel (Judge, Official Court Reporter, Courtroom Attendant and where applicable Judicial Assistant). This will include marking parties assigned tables with their respective counsel as well. Finally, seating for the gallery within the courtroom will also be clearly denoted with hi-visibility tape to ensure applicable six foot (6') social distancing.

Waiting areas for the Clerk's Office (Circuit Criminal, District Criminal and District Traffic Section; and Circuit Civil and Domestic, and District Civil and Juvenile Division) will also be denoted by hi-visibility tape so citizens waiting for Clerk's Office services can practice six foot (6') social distancing while they wait their turn with the office personnel.

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V. **Judicial Building Employees:**

All Judicial Building Employees shall practice the following safe practices:

- (a) All employees within the Judicial Building will be required to wear a mask over their nose and mouth when entering and leaving the Judicial Building and when walking in hallways and common areas of the Judicial Building. While at their respective work stations employees may wear their mask. Remember, an N-95 or medical mask should not be used so same can be reserved for health care workers;
- (b) All employees shall wash their hands frequently, avoid touching their face and practice good etiquette when coughing or sneezing;
- (c) Practice recommended six foot (6') social distancing from other employees within their office; and
- (d) Each Official and Department Head are encouraged to develop protocols within each office that comply with the "best practices" as set out by the CDC, Governor Kay Ivey and the Alabama Department of Public Health.

VI. **In Conclusion:**

The 16<sup>th</sup> Judicial Circuit will comply with the requirements as outlined above in a cooperative effort and spirit to help reduce the spread of COVID-19 (coronavirus). However, despite the best efforts of the officials, deputies, and court staff, there is no guarantee that persons will not come into contact with the virus while conducting business at the William H. Rhea III Judicial Building.

DONE and ORDERED this 13<sup>th</sup> day of May, 2020.



WILLIAM B. OGLETREE  
PRESIDING JUDGE

Via email Distribution:

Hon. Tom Parker, Chief Justice  
Hon. Rich Hobson, Administrative Director of Courts

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Hon. Steve Marshall, Attorney General  
Etowah County Circuit Judges  
Etowah County District Judges  
Hon. Cassandra Johnson, Circuit Clerk  
Hon. Jody Willoughby, District Attorney  
Hon. Jonathan Horton, Sheriff  
Domestic Referee  
Etowah County Bar Association  
Etowah County State Probation Office  
Federal Probation Office  
Etowah County Community Corrections  
Etowah County Court Referral Office  
All Municipal Clerks

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