

BALDWIN COUNTY COURTROOM AND COURTHOUSE GENERAL PROCEDURES TO RESUME IN-PERSON HEARINGS

These general procedures are intended to apply in all Circuit, District, Probate and Municipal Courts in Baldwin County, AL, so long as social distancing practices are mandated. While not to be considered as an administrative order, our judges have all agreed to work within these perimeters, to the best of our ability, in order to have 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 dockets 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 witness has symptoms (fever, breathing issues, etc...), has 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 office 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 any potential health concerns (symptomatic, exposure, etc.), priority of access, etc. Anyone may use appropriate Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) in the courtroom. Anyone wearing a mask that is inappropriate may be denied access.
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 hi visibility tape is encouraged where available.
7. **In some courthouses, witnesses may be on a 10 minute standby and the court will notify them by phone when to enter the courthouse.** Where individuals are required to prescreen the day of court, the parties and the witnesses will go through the screening together upon arrival at the courthouse. The attorneys or pro se litigants with witnesses will be instructed to take down the witnesses' phone number to provide to the court. The witness will then return to their car or a location not more than 10 minutes away, until called in by the court. Where possible stickers or some other type of identifier will be issued to those individuals who have been screened that day, so they can skip the screening process when it is time for them to be called. Some courts may allow witnesses to testify through virtual testimony where the capability to do so exists and the court approves the same prior to the court date.
8. Excess chairs shall be removed and those remaining will be spaced out to comply with social distancing. Benches will be roped off every other isle and marked for seating separation.
9. Presiding Judge will enter an Administrative Order for the County 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.