

Associate Magistrates  
DONNA PARKER  
TAMMY BURNETTE  
KEVIN MORRIS

**Walton County Magistrate Court**  
Chief Magistrate Mike Burke

Deputy Clerks  
TONYA NOLAN  
ANDREA SARGENT  
MAGGIE BARTON  
KATY GIBSON

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June 15, 2020

**THIRD ORDER EXTENDING DECLARATION OF  
STATEWIDE JUDICIAL EMERGENCY**

On March 14, 2020, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Honorable Harold D. Melton, as the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Georgia, issued an Order Declaring Statewide Judicial Emergency pursuant to OCGA § 38-3-61. That Order has been extended twice, with modifications, by orders issued on April 6 and May 11, 2020. After consulting with the Judicial Council of Georgia, the Judicial COVID-19 Task Force, and other judicial partners, and recognizing again that most in-court proceedings compel the attendance of various individuals rather than allowing them to decide how best to protect their own health, it is hereby determined that the Order should be extended again, but with significant modifications.

I understand the frustration and desire to move forward with civil cases and dispossessory cases, but the Order must be followed. The Magistrate Court is actively working to prepare for the large numbers of cases that will be filed and that have been filed since the first Judicial Emergency Order on March 14, 2020.

The work of the courts in Georgia has diligently gone forward on essential and critical matters, and most courts have continued some nonessential court operations, in particular by using technology to conduct proceedings remotely, but more must be done. Therefore, as detailed below, with the exception of jury trial proceedings and most grand jury proceedings, this extension order announces a plan to reimpose as of July 14, 2020, many of the deadlines imposed by law on litigants in civil and criminal cases that have been suspended, tolled, or extended since the initial Order on March 14, in order to allow more pending cases and newly filed cases to move forward in the judicial process again. All Georgia courts must continue, however, to conduct proceedings, remotely or in-person, in compliance with public health guidance, applicable statutes and court rules, and the requirements of the United States and Georgia Constitutions, including the public's right of access to judicial proceedings and a criminal defendant's rights to confrontation and an open courtroom.

The Magistrate Court is dedicated to returning back to normal business upon these restrictions being lifted. Like our citizens who utilize the Court, we too are frustrated, but understand that we are committed to the safety and well-being of all who come to the Magistrate Court. The technology that exists is being used as much as we can. Each person has a constitutional right to be heard on any matter and sometimes that is not always possible when attempting to implement technology. Each party has to have the ability to use this technology, not just one party. Steps are in place to get back on track as soon as possible.

I want to thank each of you for your patience and understanding during this pandemic. We are in uncharted waters and we have to try and wade through everything in order to continue to provide the most effective and efficient court possible. We will get back to normal, it just won't be as quickly as we all want. Again, please bear with us and know that we are working to our capacity under the circumstances.

Lastly, when we do have restrictions lifted, the volumes of civil matters will be overwhelming, not just for the Magistrate Court, but the Civil Division of the Walton County Sheriff's Office. Please remember they will serve the papers as fast as possible.

Respectfully Submitted,

Mike Burke  
Chief Magistrate Judge  
Walton County, State of Georgia