



# COUNCIL OF ACCOUNTABILITY COURT JUDGES OF GEORGIA

MARCH 2020

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## COUNCIL OF ACCOUNTABILITY COURT JUDGES NEWS

### COVID-19 Special Edition

Memo from Chair of the Council of Accountability Court Judges:

Chief Judge Kathlene F. Gosselin  
*Executive Committee*  
*Chair Northeastern Judicial Circuit*

Taylor Jones  
*Executive Director*

TO: Accountability Courts

FROM: Council of Accountability Court Judges

RE: Statewide Judicial Emergency and Accountability Court Operations

DATE: March 17, 2020

Please allow this memorandum to serve as a follow-up to the March 13, 2020 memorandum released to accountability courts from the Council of Accountability Court Judges (CACJ).

On March 14, 2020, Chief Justice Melton issued an order calling for a Statewide Judicial Emergency due to COVID-19 until April 13, 2020. Additional information related to the Statewide Judicial Emergency can be found here: [https://www.gasupreme.us/court-information/court\\_corona\\_info/](https://www.gasupreme.us/court-information/court_corona_info/).

Pursuant to this order, Georgia's courts are able to continue essential functions necessary to protect the health, safety, and liberty of our state's citizens. Further, the order calls for non-essential functions of the court to be postponed and/or cancelled to prevent the infection of court employees and general public attending court. CACJ recognizes the need to prevent the spread of infection and encourages each accountability court to work locally to develop protocols and procedures to continue the essential functions of the program while taking into account stringent safety precautions. Courts may choose to use information found within the sites below when developing protocols and procedures.

- AOC COVID-19 Preparedness webpage: <https://georgiacourts.gov/covid-19-preparedness/>
- CDC COVID-19 Resource: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>
- Georgia Department of Public Health: <https://dph.georgia.gov/novelcoronavirus>

While there is no clear roadmap for us in these times, this a very serious time. We have grouped the guidance below in two groups - guidelines and suggestions. Guidelines are akin to best practices that balance the safety of the community, including staff, participants and all who touch each of their lives, and the need to make sure our participants are taken care of and provided resources so as not to veer off their path to recovery/mental health. Suggestions are intended to be ideas collected

from around the state to help each program decide how best to address these issues. We will be adding to the suggestions as we get more in from each of you.

Jurisdictions with multiple accountability court programs should consider implementing uniform protocols and procedures while operating under the Statewide Judicial Emergency Order.

#### Guidelines

- Accountability court staff should work remotely when possible.
- Case management and individual treatment sessions should be conducted via phone and/or by other electronic means. All participant case management sessions, individual treatment sessions, and overall contacts should be documented in the court's case management system.
- Consider using telehealth options for participant treatment sessions. Please check with your treatment providers to learn about options for your court. Additionally, if in-person groups are conducted during this time, the court should reconfigure the room to allow for sufficient space between group session attendees, as well as keep the groups to a small size (maybe 10 or less, see CDC guidelines).
- Court sessions should include only those participants the team determines need contact with the judge. These sessions should be conducted with a small number of participants at a time with plenty of physical distance from one another. See suggestions below.
- Accountability court staff and/or participants that have a fever or symptoms should not participate in program activities. The court may consider requiring appropriate participant medical documentation of reported symptoms when possible.
- Accountability court staff and/or participants that have come into contact with someone with COVID-19 must self-quarantine.
- Any confirmed cases of COVID-19 should be reported to accountability court program leadership as soon as possible.
- Address the issue of drug testing lines. Reducing the number of tests, using a longer window of time to test, social distancing, use of gloves and other protective items are possibilities.

#### Suggestions

- Drug testing may occur during surveillance visits. Gloves and other protective items should be used by staff.
- The use of Google Voice numbers may allow staff to use their phones and contact participants.
- Staffing sessions may be conducted via phone conference.
- Courts may choose to suspend participant referrals and evaluations until the end of the Order.
- Courts may choose to postpone graduation ceremonies until the end of the Order.
- Courts may choose to only conduct court sessions for participants being sanctioned for new charges. Video conferencing may be used for lesser sanctions (community service, admonishment, etc.) or for those in the early phases of the program. Consider whether you really want someone performing community service at this time.
- Court programs should work to regularly sanitize accountability court facilities and workspace.
- Community support meetings may be completed via online offerings. A list is available from CACJ.
- Social distancing should be practiced during surveillance visits, when interacting with participants, and amongst accountability court staff.

Should any court have other suggestions related to accountability court operations during this time please contact CACJ staff. We will work to make the information available to all accountability courts. CACJ staff is available for questions and support. As new information is made available CACJ will provide additional updates as needed. Please do not hesitate to contact staff should you have any questions or concerns.

Please see the list below of online community support options for your court to use during this uncharted time.

<http://www.virtual-na.org>

<http://www.intherooms.com>

[http://www.aa.org/pages/en\\_US/online-intergroup](http://www.aa.org/pages/en_US/online-intergroup)

<https://www.12step.org/social/online-meetings/>

Special thanks to the Northeastern Circuit for pulling this list together!

Should your court develop any COVID-19 related procedures, protocols, or resources, please email them to Ms. Taylor Jones

([taylor.jones@georgiacourts.gov](mailto:taylor.jones@georgiacourts.gov)). CACJ staff will work to make them available to all of Georgia's accountability court programs.

**Let's work together and help each other during this time.**

### Director's Corner

CACJ is committed to providing support to the courts during this time. Please see a list of resources, updates, and information below.

- Attached is a sample COVID-19 policy (Appendix A). Special thanks to the Appalachian Circuit for sharing their policy! Should any other court have policies, procedures, or resources to share, please email Ms. Taylor Jones ([taylor.jones@georgiacourts.gov](mailto:taylor.jones@georgiacourts.gov)).
- This is a wonderful time for accountability court staff (salaried or contracted) to participate in some online training opportunities. Certificates of completion should be collected by the court.
  - National Drug Court Institute E-Learning - <https://www.ndci.org/resource/training/e-learning/>
  - Center of Court Innovation – Treatment Court Online - <http://treatmentcourts.org/>
  - Cultural Intelligence for Justice Professionals Webinar – planned for Tuesday, 3/24 - <https://justiceclearinghouse.com/webinar/cultural-intelligence-for-justice-professionals/>
- News and Information
  - National Institute of Drug Abuse article – COVID-19: Potential Implications of Individuals with Substance Use Disorders
    - <https://www.drugabuse.gov/about-nida/noras-blog/2020/03/covid-19-potential-implications-individuals-substance-use-disorders>

- U.S. Department of Health & Humans Services – COVID-19 and HIPPA – Important update from 3/17/20
  - <https://www.hhs.gov/hipaa/for-professionals/special-topics/emergency-preparedness/index.html>
- Telemedicine Platform – HIPPA compliant - <https://vsee.com/>
- Updates
  - As of this morning, CACJ/CJCC has received 62 funding applications for FY21. There are 163 certified and/or funded accountability courts in Georgia. Please do not wait until the final hour before the due date of *THIS* Friday, 3/20 to submit your application. The submission platform is subject to overload if there is too much traffic at one time. The grant application was released on Tuesday, 2/18.
  - CJCC will be in contact with courts in the coming days to discuss FY20 fourth quarter spending. Please be responsive to their email or phone call.

Please let CACJ staff know how we can be helpful to your court during this time.

Continue to wash your hands and stay healthy!

*Taylor Jones*

CACJ Executive Director

## APPENDIX A

### COVID-19 POLICY SAMPLE

#### CASE MANAGEMENT:

- Case manager (CM) sessions with participants will be held via phone (phone call, FaceTime, RingCentral app).
- Phases 1 & 2 will be required to check in at least 3x a week.
- Phases 3 & 4 will be required to check in at least 2x a week.
- Phase 5 will be required to check in at least 1x a week.
- Phases 1 & 2 will be on house arrest- other than going to work, attending meetings and attending court.
- All participants will have a 7pm curfew.
- Participants must let their CM know if they have any symptoms.
- If a participant is presenting symptoms, especially shortness of breath and/or fever, CM will encourage the participant to call their primary care doctor, urgent care or the ER. If they test negative for the flu but still have symptoms they will be treated as though they have COVID-19 and will be quarantined in their homes for 14 days. They will be required to notify their employer, family and friends in which they have had close contact in the last two weeks.

#### COMPLIANCE:

- Compliance will be increased, especially for lower phases.
- Compliance officers will not enter the participant's house unless absolutely necessary. They will observe the participant and document whether or not they appear to be under the influence of drugs and/or alcohol.
- House arrest for phases 1&2, all other phases will have a 7pm curfew (unless at work and/or a meeting.)

#### TREATMENT:

- Classes will be in an online format using the RingCentral app.
- If a participant does not have the equipment or ability to participate in online classes, they will be given a workbook with assignments which they will review with their treatment counselor over the phone.

#### EG/DEPOT (HOUSE) RESIDENTS:

- Participants shall go to work, doctor and/or therapist and once completed shall return immediately back to their house.
- No adult or children visitation allowed at the house. If residents are scheduled to visit with their children as approved by their case plan or the presiding Judge they may do so at another approved location. No visitation will be allowed if foster parents and/or family members showing any symptoms of COVID-19.
- Participants will not be allowed home passes until further notice or as ordered by the Judge.

- Each time a participant enters or leaves the house, he/she shall use hand sanitizer and have their temperature taken by the house manager. If any symptoms are apparent, the program coordinator and the Judge are to be immediately notified.

#### **DRUG SCREENS:**

- For the next two weeks, Case managers will directly notify the participant if they are to be tested on that day using a random method.
- Participants will be subject to random testing for the next 30 days with Phase 1 being tested more frequently.
- Participants in Phases 4 & 5 who have positive tests will be given greater sanctions.
- Staff shall wear gloves while testing
- Drug screens will be scheduled between 7:30am – 8:30am or as directed by staff.
- Staff who have children, pregnant, have health issues or live with elderly family members shall have the option to not assist with drug screening.

#### **JAIL:**

- Jail sanctions shall not be imposed unless absolutely necessary for the safety of the participant or the public.

#### **MEETINGS:**

- No mandatory community support meetings for 2 weeks.
- AFTER 2 weeks, participants must attend 2 APPROVED online meetings and turn in the mandatory report.

#### **THERAPY:**

- Will be held via phone.
- If the therapist and participant feel comfortable meeting in person they may do so.

#### **ORIENTATION:**

- Sessions will be suspended for next 30 days. The treatment provider/CM will review the manual and participant handbook individually with each new participant.

#### **CSW:**

- Each participant will be given additional time to complete sanction community service hours.

#### **COURT:**

- Participants will be reviewed in court, only if they have serious violations which must be addressed by the Judge. The Judge may also use the RingCentral app to conduct court reviews.

**GYM:**

- Case Managers will discourage participants from entering exercise gyms due to health concerns and the court will not pay membership fees as an incentive for any participant until further notice.