

COWETA JUDICIAL CIRCUIT SUPERIOR COURT  
HONORABLE DUSTIN W. HIGHTOWER

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CARROLL COUNTY COURTHOUSE  
P.O. BOX 338  
CARROLLTON, GEORGIA 30112

Carroll  
Coweta  
Heard  
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Troup



April 8, 2020

Re: Chief Justice Melton’s “Order Extending Declaration of Statewide Judicial Emergency”, “Order Declaring Statewide Judicial Emergency” & Chief Judge John Simpson’s “Order Declaring Judicial Emergency”

To those practicing in the Coweta Circuit before Judge Dustin W. Hightower:

I know that this is a stressful time for everyone. It is a stressful time for attorneys and the client’s they represent, and it is a stressful time for the pro se litigants that might have already been scared or confused by the legal process. I want to assure each of you that the goal of my office is not to compound the stress that you may already be dealing with. Instead, the goal of my office is to help alleviate *some* stress – if possible. The only way I know how to potentially alleviate stress is to provide you with information on how my court will proceed moving forward. As we all know – with knowledge comes understanding, and with understanding comes the power to change (for our purpose we could substitute “change” for “plan ahead”).

Let me once again express my appreciation and gratitude to the local bar. Your understanding and willingness to be flexible as we navigate uncharted waters does not go unnoticed. In an effort to do our part, as responsible citizens, to diminish the spread of the Coronavirus/COVID-19 our normal routines will cease to be normal for a period of time. The following is an excerpt from Justice Melton’s order:

“Now therefore, pursuant to OCGA § 38-3-61, The Honorable Harold D. Melton, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Georgia, DOES HEREBY ORDER AND DECLARE a Statewide Judicial Emergency in the State of Georgia. The nature of this emergency is the continued transmission of Coronavirus/COVID-19 throughout the State and the potential infection of those who work in or are required to appear in our courts.”

“To the extent feasible, courts should remain open to address essential functions, and in particular courts should give priority to matters necessary to protect health, safety, and liberty of individuals. Essential functions are subject to interpretation; however, some matters that fall into the essential category are: (1) where an immediate liberty or safety concern is present requiring the attention of the court as soon as the court is available; (2) criminal court search warrants, arrest warrants, initial appearances, and bond reviews; (3) domestic abuse temporary protective orders and restraining orders; (4) juvenile court delinquency detention hearings and emergency removal matters; and (5) mental health commitment hearings.” (Full Order is attached below).

The “Order Extending Declaration of Statewide Judicial Emergency” states:

“Pursuant to OCGA § 38-3-61, and due to the continuing statewide emergency involving the transmission of Coronavirus/COVID 19, the Honorable Harold D. Melton, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Georgia, does hereby extend the March 14, 2020 (amanded) Order Declaring Statewide Judicial Emergency, which would have expired on April 13, 2020 at 11:59 p.m., until **Wednesday, May 13, 2020 at 11:59 p.m.**, unless otherwise further modified or extended.”

### **My Court dates moving forward**

I will attempt to address all scheduled court dates from March 23, 2020 – May 13, 2020 and how these dates have changed. I pray that we can

get back to our regularly scheduled programming soon. In the meantime, I ask for your patience and understanding. I know that this is a lengthy letter, but I am attempting to give everyone as much information as possible when it comes to my future court dates.

**March 23, 2020**, jury trial week in Troup County Georgia was canceled and originally moved to May 11, 2020; however, these cases shall be set for Calendar Call on **July 13, 2020** and set for trial on **August 10, 2020**. In an effort to address any case that falls within the “Essential Functions” category – I will hold court on Monday May 11, 2020 to address these cases. If you have a case that you believe falls into the “Essential Functions” category please contact my assistant Mrs. Julia Harris at [jharris@carrollcountyga.com](mailto:jharris@carrollcountyga.com) (before May 7, 2020) and she will forward your request to me. If I deem your case to fall within the “Essential Functions” category, I will have Mrs. Harris contact you to setup a conference call or Zoom meeting/hearing.

**March 30, 2020** Carroll County Calendar Call (for trials on April 20, 2020) was moved to April 16, 2020; however, these cases shall be set for Calendar Call on **May 27, 2020** (the April 20, 2020 trial week will be addressed below). In an effort to address any case that falls within the “Essential Functions” category – I will hold court on April 16, 2020 to address these cases. If you have a case that you believe falls into the “Essential Functions” category please contact my assistant Mrs. Julia Harris at [jharris@carrollcountyga.com](mailto:jharris@carrollcountyga.com) (before April 13, 2020) and she will forward your request to me. If I deem your case to fall within the “Essential Functions” category, I will have Mrs. Harris contact you to setup a conference call or Zoom meeting/hearing.

**March 31, 2020** Troup County, Criminal Non-Jury was moved to April 17, 2020; however, these cases shall be set for **May 15, 2020**. In an effort to address any case that falls within the “Essential Functions” category – I will hold court on April 17, 2020 to address these cases. If you have a case that you believe falls into the “Essential Functions” category please contact my assistant Mrs. Julia Harris at [jharris@carrollcountyga.com](mailto:jharris@carrollcountyga.com) (before April 13, 2020) and she will forward your request to me. If I deem your case to fall within the “Essential Functions” category, I will have Mrs. Harris contact you to setup a conference call or Zoom meeting/hearing.

**April 2, 2020** Carroll County Civil Non-Jury was moved to May 6, 2020; however, these cases shall be set for **May 18, 2020**. In an effort to address any case that falls within the “Essential Functions” category – I will hold court on May 6, 2020 to address these cases. If you have a case that you believe falls into the “Essential Functions” category please contact my assistant Mrs. Julia Harris at [jharris@carrollcountyga.com](mailto:jharris@carrollcountyga.com) (before May 1, 2020) and she will forward your request to me. If I deem your case to fall within the “Essential Functions” category, I will have Mrs. Harris contact you to setup a conference call or Zoom meeting/hearing.

**April 13, 2020** Troup County Civil Non-Jury was moved to May 5, 2020; however, these cases shall be set for **May 28, 2020**. In an effort to address any case that falls within the “Essential Functions” category – I will hold court on May 5, 2020 to address these cases. If you have a case that you believe falls into the “Essential Functions” category please contact my assistant Mrs. Julia Harris at [jharris@carrollcountyga.com](mailto:jharris@carrollcountyga.com) (before May 1, 2020) and she will forward your request to me. If I deem your case to fall within the “Essential Functions” category, I will have Mrs. Harris contact you to setup a conference call or Zoom meeting/hearing.

**April 14, 2020** Troup County Civil Jury Trial. All cases on this calendar will be moved to the trial week of **August 3, 2020**. \*\*\*If you wish to have your case tried on August 3, 2020 both parties shall submit a consolidated pretrial order before July 23, 2020.\*\*\* In an effort to address any case that falls within the “Essential Functions” category – I will hold court on Monday April 14, 2020 to address these cases. If you have a case that you believe falls into the “Essential Functions” category please contact my assistant Mrs. Julia Harris at [jharris@carrollcountyga.com](mailto:jharris@carrollcountyga.com) (before April 10, 2020) and she will forward your request to me. If I deem your case to fall within the “Essential Functions” category, I will have Mrs. Harris contact you to setup a conference call or Zoom meeting/hearing.

**April 20, 2020** jury trial week in Carroll is canceled; however, these cases shall be set for Calendar Call on **May 27, 2020** and set for trial on **June 8, 2020**. In an effort to address any case that falls within the “Essential Functions” category – I will hold court on Monday April 20, 2020 to address these cases. If you have a case that you believe falls into the “Essential Functions” category please contact my assistant Mrs. Julia Harris at [jharris@carrollcountyga.com](mailto:jharris@carrollcountyga.com) (before April 16, 2020) and she will forward your request to me. If I deem your case to fall within the “Essential

Functions” category, I will have Mrs. Harris contact you to setup a conference call or Zoom meeting/hearing.

**April 27, 2020** Carroll County Arraignment shall be moved to **May 19, 2020**. In an effort to address any case that falls within the “Essential Functions” category – I will hold court on April 27, 2020 to address these cases. If you have a case that you believe falls into the “Essential Functions” category please contact my assistant Mrs. Julia Harris at [jharris@carrollcountyga.com](mailto:jharris@carrollcountyga.com) (before April 23, 2020) and she will forward your request to me. If I deem your case to fall within the “Essential Functions” category, I will have Mrs. Harris contact you to setup a conference call or Zoom meeting/hearing.

**April 28, 2020** Troup County Criminal Non-Jury shall be moved to **May 14, 2020**. In an effort to address any case that falls within the “Essential Functions” category – I will hold court on April 28, 2020 to address these cases. If you have a case that you believe falls into the “Essential Functions” category please contact my assistant Mrs. Julia Harris at [jharris@carrollcountyga.com](mailto:jharris@carrollcountyga.com) (before April 23, 2020) and she will forward your request to me. If I deem your case to fall within the “Essential Functions” category, I will have Mrs. Harris contact you to setup a conference call or Zoom meeting/hearing.

**April 29, 2020** Carroll County Criminal Non-Jury shall be moved to **May 21, 2020**. In an effort to address any case that falls within the “Essential Functions” category – I will hold court on April 29, 2020 to address these cases. If you have a case that you believe falls into the “Essential Functions” category please contact my assistant Mrs. Julia Harris at [jharris@carrollcountyga.com](mailto:jharris@carrollcountyga.com) (before April 23, 2020) and she will forward your request to me. If I deem your case to fall within the “Essential Functions” category, I will have Mrs. Harris contact you to setup a conference call or Zoom meeting/hearing.

**May 4, 2020** Troup County Calendar Call (for trials on May 11, 2020) shall be set for Calendar Call on **July 13, 2020** (the May 11, 2020 trial week will be addressed below). In an effort to address any case that falls within the “Essential Functions” category – I will hold court on May 4, 2020 to address these cases. If you have a case that you believe falls into the “Essential Functions” category please contact my assistant Mrs. Julia Harris at [jharris@carrollcountyga.com](mailto:jharris@carrollcountyga.com) (before April 29, 2020) and she will forward

your request to me. If I deem your case to fall within the “Essential Functions” category, I will have Mrs. Harris contact you to setup a conference call or Zoom meeting/hearing.

**May 5, 2020** Troup County Civil Non-Jury shall be moved to **May 28, 2020**. In an effort to address any case that falls within the “Essential Functions” category – I will hold court on May 5, 2020 to address these cases. If you have a case that you believe falls into the “Essential Functions” category please contact my assistant Mrs. Julia Harris at [jharris@carrollcountyga.com](mailto:jharris@carrollcountyga.com) (before April 29, 2020) and she will forward your request to me. If I deem your case to fall within the “Essential Functions” category, I will have Mrs. Harris contact you to setup a conference call or Zoom meeting/hearing.

**May 6, 2020** Carroll County Civil Non-Jury shall be moved to **May 18, 2020**. The May 18, 2020 calendar will likely be a lengthy calendar because I am placing two prior civil calendars on this day. In an effort to address any case that falls within the “Essential Functions” category – I will hold court on May 6, 2020 to address these cases. If you have a case that you believe falls into the “Essential Functions” category please contact my assistant Mrs. Julia Harris at [jharris@carrollcountyga.com](mailto:jharris@carrollcountyga.com) (before April 30, 2020) and she will forward your request to me. If I deem your case to fall within the “Essential Functions” category, I will have Mrs. Harris contact you to setup a conference call or Zoom meeting/hearing.

**May 7, 2020** Carroll County Criminal Non-Jury shall be moved to **May 26, 2020**. In an effort to address any case that falls within the “Essential Functions” category – I will hold court on May 7, 2020 to address these cases. If you have a case that you believe falls into the “Essential Functions” category please contact my assistant Mrs. Julia Harris at [jharris@carrollcountyga.com](mailto:jharris@carrollcountyga.com) (before May 4, 2020) and she will forward your request to me. If I deem your case to fall within the “Essential Functions” category, I will have Mrs. Harris contact you to setup a conference call or Zoom meeting/hearing.

**May 11, 2020** jury trial week in Troup County is canceled; however, these cases shall be set for Calendar Call on **July 13, 2020** and set for trial on **August 10, 2020**. In an effort to address any case that falls within the “Essential Functions” category – I will hold court on May 11, 2020 to address these cases. If you have a case that you believe falls into the

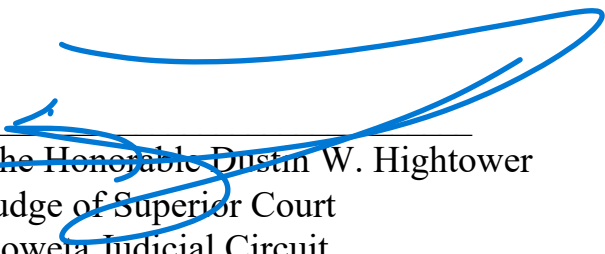
“Essential Functions” category please contact my assistant Mrs. Julia Harris at [jharris@carrollcountyga.com](mailto:jharris@carrollcountyga.com) (before May 8, 2020) and she will forward your request to me. If I deem your case to fall within the “Essential Functions” category, I will have Mrs. Harris contact you to setup a conference call or Zoom meeting/hearing.

**My Carroll County Adult Drug Court** dates scheduled for **April 17<sup>th</sup>, May 1<sup>st</sup>, and May 22<sup>nd</sup>** shall remain unchanged. My drug court team and I will continue having our staff meeting through Zoom prior to court dates, and I will have our director, Susan Davenport, inform our participants if they are required to report to court.

If you have a case that can be resolved by a conference call with my office (including bond issues), or by Zoom - please do not hesitate to contact Mrs. Julia Harris and she will facilitate scheduling.

I pray that everyone stays safe, and again I appreciate everyone’s understanding and flexibility during this time. If you have any other concerns, do not hesitate to contact my office.

Sincerely,



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The Honorable Dustin W. Hightower  
Judge of Superior Court  
Coweta Judicial Circuit