

MEMORANDUM

To: Clients of The Law Offices of McGuire & Bullard

From: Obréziah L. Bullard, Managing Attorney

Date: March 16, 2020

Re: COVID-19

Dear Valued Clients:

Like many of you, we have been diligently monitoring the rapid spread of COVID-19 and the resulting sadden impact on our communities.

Following the Governor's press conference on Thursday, March 12th, on Friday, March 13th, many courts made the difficult decision to begin limiting court proceedings in an effort to reduce general socialization and help flat line the increase of the rapid spread of COVID-19. While many metro-Atlanta counties began to close the courthouse doors for 14-30 days, other counties did not. We updated our clients on Friday of which counties chose to implement emergency judicial orders.

On Saturday, March 14, 2020, Georgia's Supreme Court Chief Justice Harold D. Melton issued an *Order Declaring Statewide Judicial Emergency*. Essentially, this Order trumps every local order and controls every state courthouse. Per the order,

“[t]o 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 function 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.”

What Does this Mean? Unless otherwise deemed an “essential function”, all domestic cases will more than likely be put on hold until after April 13, 2020. The court gave guidance as to what may be an essential function for domestic cases—only temporary protective/restraining petitions. “To the extent court proceedings are held, they should be done in a manner to limit the risk of exposure, such as by videoconferencing, where possible.”

What about Mediation? We are still working with local ADR offices to determine whether mediations will be held during this time.

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How Does This Affect My Case? All litigation, including court hearings, may be postponed but does not cause any other adverse effect. It is no different from a case being placed on a calendar and then removed due to an attorney's legal conflict, or the court rescheduling the matter for some other "cause".

How Long Will This Take? Right now, the order extends to April 13, 2020. If anything extends beyond that time, we will immediately notify our clients.

Where Do We Go from Here? Don't panic! At this time, we fully expect to continue conducting business in a manner that will have minimal to no impact on our clients. This includes client meetings via telephone and/or video conferencing. Unless otherwise updated, we will maintain our regular scheduled hours, prep cases, prepare for trial (to be ready to hit the ground running when court resumes), be available for your questions and concerns, and conduct consultations. Please bear with us as we receive new updates on a daily basis during this time of uncertainty and concern.

Tips to Help Keep Your Family Safe

- Wash your hands often with antibacterial soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water is unavailable, use an alcohol-based sanitizer.
- Avoid touching your eyes, mouth, and nose with unwashed hands
- Avoid close contact with sick people (including handshaking).
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces.

You can find more tips on how to prepare your family here:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prepare/index.html>.

Chief Judge Melton's order can be found here: <https://www.gasupreme.us/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/CJ-Melton-amended-Statewide-Jud-Emergency-order.pdf>

We understand how disappointing this is for our clients and their families. I'm sure this decision was difficult but made with the best interest of public health. As this unprecedented event begins to unfold, our hearts, thoughts, and prayers go out to the families that have been affected by this event. If you have any questions or concerns please do not hesitate to contact our office.

Sincerely,

Attorney Bullard