



## **Supreme Court of Georgia**

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## **JURY TRIALS TO RESUME IN GEORGIA, AGAIN**

**Atlanta, March 9, 2021** – Chief Justice Harold D. Melton today issued an order that lifts the suspension of jury trials in Georgia, “effective immediately.” With today’s order, which is the 12<sup>th</sup> he has signed extending the Statewide Judicial Emergency due to the COVID-19 pandemic, trial courts may resume jury trials, “if that can be done safely and in accordance with a final jury trial plan developed in collaboration with the local committee of judicial system participants and incorporated into the court’s written operating guidelines for in-person proceedings.”

Since the Chief Justice first announced the Statewide Judicial Emergency on March 14, 2020, nearly a year ago, Georgia courts have remained open, but jury trials were initially suspended due to the number of people required to gather at courthouses. In October 2020, Chief Justice Melton first lifted that suspension of jury trials. Then, due to a significant increase in coronavirus cases, he again prohibited them in a Dec. 23, 2020 order.

However, that dangerous surge in COVID-19 cases recently has declined. “Thus, pursuant to this order, the prohibition against conducting jury trials is lifted and trial courts, in their discretion, may resume jury trials as local conditions allow,” today’s order says.

A trial by a jury of one’s peers is “fundamental to the American justice system,” and “I’m asking for your help,” Chief Justice Melton says in a Public Service Announcement due to air soon in

which he appeals directly to citizens. “You and every citizen of Georgia are critical to this process because we cannot conduct a trial by jury without jurors, without you.” He assures prospective jurors that throughout the state, “We have put into place the most rigorous safety protocols available.” These protocols include pre-screening for health risks of all parties, temperature checks, masks, plexiglass barriers, touch-free evidence technology, constant surface cleaning, and the reconfiguration of courtrooms and jury spaces to ensure social distancing.

Today’s order is identical to the order he signed Feb. 7 with the exception of the section on jury trials. As with previous orders, this one urges all courts to use technology to conduct remote judicial proceedings as a safer alternative to in-person proceedings where practicable and lawful. The order extends the Statewide Judicial Emergency for 30 days, as state law authorizes. It is effective until April 8, 2021.