3/12/2020 – COURTS MAY SUSPEND JURY TRIALS IF NECESSARY

Atlanta, March 12, 2020 – Chief Justice Harold D. Melton today directed Georgia's judges to consider limiting all non-essential functions in courthouses across the state for at least two weeks. In an emergency telephone meeting with judges representing all classes of courts, the Chief Justice informed the judicial leaders that under state law, the Chief Judge of each judicial circuit has the authority to declare a local judicial emergency and suspend jury trials, postpone the court calendar, or take other actions to protect people from coming into contact with the coronavirus.

Chief Justice Melton said he has not yet declared a statewide judicial emergency but that a number of superior court judges have asked about suspending jury service, jury trials, and other matters in their circuits. Those actions, the Chief Justice said, would be consistent with Governor Brian Kemp's directives today to local governments, giving them the authority to close offices, schools, and take other actions they deem necessary to protect their communities.

Based on Georgia statutory law, the judges have drafted a template of an order that would allow the Chief Judge of a judicial circuit to take action to protect the public and court

employees. Chief Justice Melton and Presiding Justice David E. Nahmias told the judges that if they decide to declare local judicial emergencies, they should alert local officials about their plans. Georgia Code § 38-3-63 requires that if a judicial circuit does declare such an emergency, it must notify the state's Chief Justice that it has done so.

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