



**State of South Carolina**  
**The Family Court of the Thirteenth Judicial Circuit**

**Karen S. Roper**  
Judge

Post Office Box 215  
214 East Main Street  
Pickens, SC 29671-0215  
Phone: (864) 898-5860  
Fax: (864) 878-5398  
kroperj@sccourts.org

**MEMORANDUM**

To: Family Court Practitioners of the Pickens County Bar  
From: Karen S. Roper, Chief Administrative Judge for Pickens County Family Court  
Subject: Order of Chief Justice Beatty RE: In-Person Proceedings in Family Court, issued February 26, 2021  
Date: March 3, 2021

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Pursuant to the above order of Chief Justice Beatty, in-person hearings may resume beginning Monday, March 15, 2021; however, we must still comply with the Supreme Court's directives in the Order Regarding Operation of the Trial Courts During the Coronavirus Emergency (As Amended December 16, 2020) and Order Regarding Required Use of Protective Masks in County and Municipal Courthouses (July 30, 2020). Therefore, in Pickens County Family Court, we will essentially return to the procedures outlined in my previous Memorandum dated December 29, 2020, modified as follows:

1. For all matters currently noticed as a virtual courtroom hearing, it shall remain docketed as a virtual courtroom hearing.
2. For all other hearings to be scheduled, please designate on your hearing request whether you want an in-person or virtual hearing.
  - a. Before requesting an in-person hearing, consider the factors set forth in #3 below and only request in-person if you believe it meets these requirements. If you are not sure, or if you have a currently scheduled in-person hearing that you believe no longer meets these requirements, please request a pretrial conference.
  - b. Because we are required to stagger in-person hearings 20 minutes apart, please continue to utilize the virtual courtroom whenever possible, as it allows us to fill more time slots on the docket each day.
3. Hearings may be held in person as long as the judge determines they can be appropriately and safely conducted. Generally, I consider the following:<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See the KAREN rule, *Memorandum to Family Court Practitioners of the Pickens County Bar*, (Dec. 29, 2020).

- a. No more than 10 participants will be present at any given time, including the judge and courthouse personnel<sup>2</sup>
  - b. No participant has any known COVID exposure, positive test, or symptoms
  - c. No participant has any significantly heightened risk factor, such as advanced age or serious underlying medical condition
  - d. All participants will wear face masks at all times inside the courthouse, covering both the nose and mouth. Face Shields alone are not sufficient.
  - e. All participants will maintain 6 feet of distance except as necessary for attorney/client communication or courtroom security
  - f. The ability to open courtroom windows for improved air circulation, as weather may permit
  - g. The availability of a medical-grade air purifier or humidifier in the courtroom
  - h. The availability of plexiglass shields to reduce large droplet transmission
  - i. The ability to sanitize courtroom surfaces
  - j. The infeasibility of conducting a remote hearing (e.g., lack of internet access, nature of the hearing, or voluminous exhibits)
4. Thanks to our Clerk of Court Pat Welborn and the assistance of the Pickens County IT Department, we now have a smart TV connected in Courtroom 3 which may allow for hybrid hearings (one or more participants appearing virtually, with the other participants appearing in person). If you need a hybrid hearing, please note this on your hearing request, and a pretrial conference may be necessary to discuss logistics.
5. For virtual hearings:
- a. To use the Virtual Courtroom link, you must use Google Chrome.
  - b. You are responsible for sending the Notice of Virtual Courtroom Hearing to all parties in accordance with Rule 17.
  - c. To access the Virtual Courtroom, go to <https://www.sccourts.org>, select “Calendar” and then “Monthly View” from the drop-down menu. Go to your court date and select “Family,” and a list of all Family Court judges holding court that day will appear. Find your judge and click on the Virtual Courtroom link under that judge’s name.
  - d. Please see the attached Virtual Courtroom Guidelines, intended to help your virtual hearing proceed more smoothly. Please note that these are my preferences only, and any other judge presiding over your hearing may have different requests. I may deviate from these guidelines depending on the circumstances, and will probably modify them from time to time as I continue to learn what works best in the virtual setting.
  - e. For call-in users, see the attached Virtual Courtroom Guidelines for the WebEx phone number, my meeting number, and my password.

Hopefully our declining COVID numbers will allow us to resume something closer to normal court operations in the near future, but regardless, I believe the Virtual Courtrooms are here to stay. As always, I am impressed by your ability to quickly adapt your law practices to these changing circumstances, and thank you for your continued efforts.

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<sup>2</sup> This is the maximum number for Courtroom 3 according to the Supreme Court’s square footage restrictions; however, larger courtrooms may accommodate more participants.