



## PRESS RELEASE

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### **MEDIA CONTACT:**

WENDY HOWELL

DOUGHERTY COUNTY PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICER

229.854.0006

[whowell@dougherty.ga.us](mailto:whowell@dougherty.ga.us)

## **Dougherty County Emergency Management Agency Emergency Operations Center COVID-19 Update**

DOUGHERTY COUNTY, GA – On Tuesday, March 24th, members of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) Task Force held a news conference to provide updates and to reiterate the revised Shelter-In-Place order. **A press conference will be held today at 1 p.m. in Room 100 of the Government Center at 222 Pine Avenue. This conference will not be open to the public, however, a Live Stream will be provided via the Dougherty County Georgia Government Facebook page. For those not on social media, WALB will interrupt their regular broadcast at 1 p.m. to live stream the conference to viewers.**

Dougherty County Chairman Christopher S. Cohilas and Mayor of Albany, Bo Dorough, announced a revised Shelter-In-Place order for the City of Albany and Dougherty County on Sunday, March 22nd, which placed additional restrictions on area businesses, as well as those who have either tested positive for COVID-19 and are recovering at home, or those who are awaiting test results to adhere to the self-quarantine rule. The revised Shelter-In-Place order was released to media and the public at approximately 3 p.m. on Sunday. The order went into effect beginning at 6 p.m. Sunday and will continue through 11:59 p.m. on April 7th, unless it is extended, rescinded, superseded, or amended in writing by the Mayor and Chairman.

Prior to the daily press conference on Tuesday, Mayor Dorough, Chairman Cohilas, and Lee County Board of Commissioners Chair, Billy Mathis, held an 11:30 a.m. press conference in

front of the Government Center urging citizens to work together throughout our communities in Southwest Georgia in taking this pandemic seriously and following the orders set forth.

An official signed copy of the order addressing patients who have either tested positive for COVID-19 and are recovering at home, or those awaiting test results, will be provided to the patient upon discharge from Phoebe Putney Memorial Hospital.

The Emergency Operations (EOC) Center officially opened on Monday, March 16, 2020, and continues to be open seven days a week, until further notice, from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily. Updates will be provided each day from the EOC as details develop. Citizens can contact the EOC at 229.302.1900 for questions, concerns, and information on COVID-19.

Additional updates from Tuesday, March 24th, included the following:

**Albany Area Chamber of Commerce:** Albany is fundamentally open for business. Chamber President & CEO Barbara Rivera Holmes said many businesses are making the adjustments to follow CDC guidelines while still offering the community the services and products they need. Support small businesses through purchase of gift cards; utilization of online shopping; buy now-pick up later; drive-through/pick-up/delivery services from retailers; takeout and delivery services from food establishments. To aid in economic recovery, the Small Business Administration is offering small business loans. Register and apply at [disasterloan.sba.gov](https://disasterloan.sba.gov). The Georgia Department of Labor has enacted an emergency rule for filing unemployment. Visit [dol.georgia.gov](https://dol.georgia.gov). The Albany Area Chamber is committed to the support and success of businesses. Learn more about how the Albany Area Chamber is supporting businesses and the community, and how we can support each other, at [albanyga.com](https://albanyga.com) or Facebook/AlbanyAreaChamber.

**Albany State University:** Beginning at 8 p.m. on last Friday evening and due to the ordinance released by the City of Albany and Dougherty County, Albany State University delayed the move-out they had been holding earlier Friday. Campus Housing Move-Out resumed on Tuesday, March 24th beginning at 8 a.m. and will conclude on Sunday, March 29<sup>th</sup>. The last scheduled move-out reservation will be at 6 p.m. each day. If a student has already secured their reservation for March 24-29, it is not necessary to sign up again. However, students may modify move-out time, if needed. Additional move-outs will not be allowed after March 29<sup>th</sup>. ASU officials remind students to maintain safety and stressing that it will be critical that they do not arrive on campus before their scheduled time. If a student has an unresolvable scheduling problem or is sick, they should contact Housing & Residence Life at [asuhousing@asurams.edu](mailto:asuhousing@asurams.edu) from their ASU email with their name, residence hall and room number, along with the reason they are unable to make their reservation. For additional information on the move-out procedures, visit [asurams.edu](https://asurams.edu), Student Affairs, and follow the links to the Housing Move-Out Process.

**City of Albany:** City facilities are closed to the public, except for Albany Transit and the Southwest Georgia Regional Airport, with customers being assisted by phone and online at [albanyga.gov](https://albanyga.gov). Public Works customers that need WPC dump tickets will need to pay by check at the Joshua Street plant. Customers that need Solid Waste roll-off service will need to pay with a credit card by phone at 229-603-0177. License & Business Support customers can access Occupational Tax Certificates, Renewals, and other applications online at [www.albanyga.gov](https://www.albanyga.gov). Special Event Applications, payments for Excise Tax, and False Alarms must be mailed to the

City of Albany, P.O. Box 447 Albany, GA 31701. For more information, please contact the office at 229-302-1580. Non-essential meetings and gatherings (both public and internal) have been canceled. Recreational activities are suspended, including after-school and sports programs. A list is posted on the City of Albany website at [albanyga.gov](http://albanyga.gov). The City Commission meeting scheduled for March 24th will be held virtually utilizing video conferencing technology. All meetings are live streamed on Facebook, Channel 16, the City YouTube channel, and the City's website.

**City of Albany Transit System:** Effective on Tuesday, March 24<sup>th</sup>, Albany Transit System will only operate its fixed route services Monday through Friday from 5:30 a.m. to 8:15 p.m. until further notice. The Demand Response services (only for medical and grocery appointments) will continue to operate on Saturdays from 5 a.m. to 5 p.m. For more information, contact Albany Transit Dispatch Office at 229.302.1523.

**Albany Utilities:** The lobby at Albany Utilities (401 Pine Avenue) closed on Monday, March 16th. Customers can make utility payments at the drive-thru, night drop boxes, by phone, alternate sites, and online. The City of Albany has partnered with Western Union to provide remote locations for payment services. Locations available for remote payment include Ameris Bank, Regions Bank, Publix, Walgreen's, Harvey's, Speedy Cash, and Check Cashier. Customer Service Representatives will be taking calls during the regular business hours of 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. On Thursday, March 19th, the City of Albany Utilities Department, suspended residential disconnections of water, gas, and lights for the next 30 days. Albany Utilities' customers who can afford to pay their bills are encouraged to continue making payments to avoid falling in arrears. Customers may experience longer than usual wait times. For information and closure updates, customers can visit [albanyga.gov](http://albanyga.gov)., The City of Albany Facebook page, or call Customer Service at 229.883.8330.

**Southwest Georgia Regional Airport:** Delta Airlines flights at the Southwest Georgia Regional Airport were modified; two flight departures and arrivals were canceled. Delta has reduced flights to/from ABY March 20-22. For the list of flights that are modified, visit [albanyga.gov](http://albanyga.gov).

**Municipal Court:** Albany Municipal Court will not accept payments at the Judicial Building (225 Pine Avenue) until further notice. You can make payments online at [ticketfastpay.com](http://ticketfastpay.com), by phone (844) 317-8346, or mail-in money order. For more information, contact the office at (229) 431-2865.

**City of Albany License & Business Support:** The License and Business Support Department lobby began closure on March 18<sup>th</sup> until further notice. The Occupational Tax Certificates and Renewals and other applications are accessible online at [albanyga.gov](http://albanyga.gov). Special Event Applications, payments for Excise Tax, and False Alarms must be mailed to: City of Albany, P.O. Box 447, Albany, GA 31701. For more information, contact the License and Business Office at 229.302.1580.

**City of Albany/Dougherty County Planning & Development/Historic Preservation Commission:** The central office for Planning and Development at 240 Pine Avenue (Central Square Building) will be closed to the public, but will remain fully operational, with all services conducted by phone, email or video conference. Development review meetings will be conducted

via video conferencing. Planning Staff will continue to process applications for zoning and historic preservation matters, however, final approvals are postponed until meetings are resumed. Development Services (building inspection) will be available over the phone or email to assist with permitting and construction-related questions. All permit applications and plan reviews must be emailed to [jglass@albanyga.gov](mailto:jglass@albanyga.gov). Remote video inspections (RVI) will be conducted to limit personal contact, where practical. For additional information about this and other permitting procedures, access the Development Services page on the City of Albany's website at [albanyga.gov](http://albanyga.gov). On or before March 23<sup>rd</sup>, the Office of Planning and Development will have the ability to accept payments online. Once details are available, they will be posted to the City of Albany website at [albanyga.gov](http://albanyga.gov), or call the front desk at 229.438.3901.

**Dougherty County Coroner's Office:** The Dougherty County Coroner, Michael Fowler, is strongly urging funeral homes to immediately adhere to social distancing protocol for funerals, graveside services, and memorials to help control the spread of COVID-19. When it comes to graveside services, in general, if there's not a breeze blowing, being outdoors could be safer because exhaled air into the sunlight can help to deactivate the virus, so being outdoors could be safer than being indoors. Fowler advises that there are a number of precautions funeral homes can take to stop the spread of COVID-19, including graveside burial for family members only, with a memorial service held at a later date. He also suggests that funeral homes disinfect the car in between use for each family and that families arrange for a live screening of services for loved ones who cannot travel to the site, those who are sick and can't attend, and to just to keep the gathering number low in general. Fowler urges funeral homes to have someone at the door with hand gel or sanitized wipes for hands during visitation; they frequently clean door handles and other points of contact; and discourage anyone who is sick from attending the service.

**Dougherty County Police Department:** On the afternoon of March 17<sup>th</sup>, Dougherty County Police Department (DCPD) began closing their lobby to the public until further notice. In the event of an emergency, citizens are urged to call 911. If they need to contact DCPD staff, call 229.302.3101. To reach Keep Albany/Dougherty Beautiful (KADB) located in the same building as DCPD, call 229-302-3098.

**Dougherty County Jail:** Dougherty County Jail has cancelled visitation until further notice. An assessment is scheduled to be completed on April 5<sup>th</sup> to determine if visitation can reopen.

**Dougherty County Tax & Tag:** The Dougherty County Tax/Tag Department will began closure to the public on March 19<sup>th</sup> until further notice. Staff will be in the office to take phone calls at 229.431.3255 (tags), 229.431.3208 (property taxes), and 229.431.2130 (tax assessors). Payments can also be mailed or access the Dougherty County website at [Dougherty.ga.us](http://Dougherty.ga.us) to process payments. Dougherty County Tax and Tag department is urging citizens to pay taxes and renew tags online, if at all possible. Citizens can access the following page on the Dougherty County website to pay online and renew tags, along with other information: <http://www.dougherty.ga.us/content/2889/3021/default.aspx>.

**Dougherty County Library System:** All branches of the Dougherty County Library System closed to the public on Sunday, March 15<sup>th</sup>. Currently, all libraries are slated to reopen on April 6<sup>th</sup>, unless conditions change.

**Dougherty County Clerk of Court Office:** Dougherty County Clerk of Court offices closed at 1 p.m. on Monday, March 23<sup>rd</sup>. They will be closed all day on Tuesday, March 24<sup>th</sup>, and will reopen regular hours for the remainder of the week (March 25<sup>th</sup> – 27<sup>th</sup>).

**Dougherty County Emergency Medical Services (EMS):** Dougherty County Emergency Medical Services (EMS) has announced that any patients exhibiting symptoms of COVID-19 will be required to wear a surgical mask prior to being loaded into the ambulance. Paramedic staff will be required to wear N95 masks. Patients and families are urged to not be alarmed at the masks worn by EMS staff. The masks are for the protection of both patients and staff. In addition, additional passengers will be prohibited inside the ambulance with the patient while they are transported to the hospital. In the case of a minor child patient, one parent or guardian will be allowed to ride. Additional sanitation measures are also being utilized with all ambulance services to protect patients and first responder staff. Patients who need to be tested for COVID-19 are urged to not call EMS, but to call the Phoebe Hotline at 229.312.1919.

**Dougherty County Judicial:** Chief Superior Court Judge, Willie Lockette, extended the Judicial Declaration of Emergency to May 18<sup>th</sup>, with new information on possible exposed jurors during the State v. Jazzy Huff trial that occurred on March 2<sup>nd</sup>. Some of the proceedings that are suspended include not only trials, but grand jury sessions, arraignments, calendar calls, child support court, and others.

**Dougherty County Magistrate Court:** The Magistrate Court will close its operations until April 13<sup>th</sup>, or until further order from the Supreme Court of Georgia and the Chief Judge of the Superior Court of the Dougherty Judicial Circuit. The Magistrate Court will continue to perform essential operations to include first appearance hearings and acceptance of applications of Temporary Protective Orders, as well as issuing arrest and search warrants. A Magistrate Court Clerk will be present during business hours to answer phone calls.

**Dougherty County State Courts:** State Court will not be holding arraignments in Room 300 of the Dougherty County Judicial Building on March 27<sup>th</sup>, April 3<sup>rd</sup>, and April 10<sup>th</sup>. If an individual has received a traffic citation to be in the State Court for one of those Fridays or a notice from the State Court Division of the Office of the District Attorney to appear in State Court for arraignment, they are not to appear. For these individuals, a notice with a new court date will be mailed to your home address, if the State Court has a valid address for you. If an individual is unsure of when to report to Court, they can call the State Court Division of the Office of District Attorney at 229.431.3212. If an individual does not wish to challenge a traffic citation, they may waive the appearance bond by paying online at [doughertypay.com](http://doughertypay.com) or call to pay by phone at 1.855.255.5939.

For individuals who have received a summons for jury duty for Dougherty State Court or a notice for trial or trial subpoena for trials the weeks of April 6<sup>th</sup> or 13<sup>th</sup>, they may disregard those as trials will not occur those two weeks. A notice will be sent to these individuals from the Court or from the State Court Division of the Office of District Attorney as to when they should report for criminal calendar call or for their trial.

For hearing notices sent for civil matters which fall within the 30-day judicial emergency period, if the individual's hearing involves the presentation of evidence or the testimony of witnesses, the hearing will be reset for the date after the judicial emergency order has expired. If an individual's hearing notice is for oral argument on a pending motion or for a status conference/scheduling order hearing, those will be handled via telephone, if possible. If you have any questions about the status of any civil hearing, contact Judge Stephenson's Civil Case Coordinator, Amy Cox, at 229.431.2152 or [acox@dougherty.ga.us](mailto:acox@dougherty.ga.us).

The State Court will operate a skeletal staff during this period, but the phone for State Court will be manned at all times during regular business hours. Motions can continue to be filed via Peach-Court, however, Judge Stephenson requests litigants email these to his attention with copies of any motions or responses to motions at [jostephenson@dougherty.ga.us](mailto:jostephenson@dougherty.ga.us).

Victims of domestic violence who need to seek a Temporary Protective Order should not come to the Judicial Building without first contacting a representative of the Victim's Assistance Division of the Office of the District Attorney at 229.438.3985 or a representative of Liberty House at 229.439.7065. Representatives of those agencies will then contact the Magistrate on call to arrange for a time for consideration of any ex parte Temporary Protective Orders. Full hearings for TPO's will be set for a date after the judicial emergency has expired. Requests for dropping of special conditions of bond will be postponed until the Judicial Building has reopened to the public. Those requests will not be handled by mail or phone.

**Dougherty County Probate Court:** Effective immediately, Probate Court will not be taking applications or processing renewals for gun permits. The emergency period will TOLL EXPIRATION DATES on permits, so not to worry if your permit is expiring before April 13th. Marriage licenses will still be issued, but you are urged to start the process online at the county website ([Dougherty.ga.us](http://Dougherty.ga.us)). The court will still register deaths and issue cremation/disposition permits, but ALL birth and death certificate requests should be made BY MAIL. Include a copy of your driver's license or other official ID and \$25 money order or local check. Court filings will be accepted, but deadlines are on hold. The Probate Court is considering offering marriage licenses by appointment. Individuals can get more information by calling the Probate Court at 229.431.2102.

**Dougherty County Government/Board of Commissioners:** In an effort to decrease the spread of the COVID-19 coronavirus, Dougherty County Government officially closed the Government Center, Central Square Building, and Judicial Building to the public, **beginning at 5 p.m., March 18, 2020, and until further notice.** County staff departments will practice a combination of alternating schedules and telework to continue to serve the public via phone and online, but to limit employees in the workspace at one time. County officials will continue to monitor the situation regarding this public health crisis and will re-evaluate conditions, as necessary.

The Dougherty County Board of Commissioners received notice on March 21<sup>st</sup> that an employee working in the District Attorney's (DA's) office in the Judicial Building tested positive for the Coronavirus (COVID19). As a result, the DA's office will close down through March 27th, in compliance with the standard quarantine period ordered for the virus and any individuals coming into contact with someone testing positive, per the Center for Disease Control (CDC) guidelines.

The general public and any other individuals, including employees of the city and county, who may have visited the DA's office between March 9<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> for more than 10 minutes on any given day during the five-day period, should quarantine at home for 14 days, starting with the last day they were in this office. For example, if the last day visiting the office was March 10<sup>th</sup>, the individual would need to quarantine through March 24<sup>th</sup> (14 days). During the quarantine, these individuals should keep to themselves for the 14-day period. If they develop symptoms to include fever, cough, and shortness of breath, they should consult with their healthcare provider immediately for guidance on the next steps.

County employee confidentiality will be followed by Dougherty County, as required by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), which limits disclosure of information on employee medical problems, illnesses, and potential disabilities. In addition, HIPAA regulations will be followed to protect the identity and health information of the employee.

The Dougherty County DA's office is scheduled to reopen on Monday, March 30<sup>th</sup>.

Dougherty County Solid Waste Management will be open to the public, receiving waste during regular hours each day. Visitors to the landfill should expect somewhat of a delay due to limited staff in the weigh station and other areas of the landfill, as employee schedules are staggered to foster social distancing during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Below is a list of county services that are also available online at [Dougherty.ga.us](http://Dougherty.ga.us):

*Tax and Tag Office (Tag: 229.431.3255; Tax: 229.431.2130)*

**Property Tax Payments:**

Go to the Dougherty County's website click on "Search & Pay Taxes."

**Tag Renewal or Other Tag Services:**

Go to the Dougherty County Website or [Dor.ga.gov](http://Dor.ga.gov) to renew tags, pay insurance fines, change address cancel registration and other online services.

- Dougherty County Website- Select County Department-Tax/Tag- Click Here to access Georgia Department Motor Vehicle website
- GA DMV website-click on start DRIVES-Select the eservice(s) that you need.

**Tax Assessment Records:**

Go to Dougherty County Website-Select County Department-Tax/Tag-Click on Real Estate. If you have any other questions, please call the Tax Assessors' Office.

*Voter Registration Services (229.431.3247)*

- Absentee ballots for the General Primary Election
- Voter Registration Services
- Voting Questions

*Public Works (229.430.6120)*

- Engineering

- Parks and Gardens
- Environmental Control

*Human Resources (229.431.2122)*

- Applications and Vacancy Announcements
- Benefit Enrollment Documents or assistance with Core Benefits
- Retirement/FMLA/Leave
- Workers' Compensation
- Training and Development
- Other HR Related Requests

For a full list of county departments and services available online, visit [Dougherty.ga.us](http://Dougherty.ga.us).

**Voter Registration:** The March 24<sup>th</sup> Presidential Preference Primary (PPP) has been postponed to coincide with the May 19<sup>th</sup> General Primary Election (GPE). All in-person absentee voting ended on March 14<sup>th</sup>. In-person voting will resume on April 27<sup>th</sup> for the May 19<sup>th</sup> GPE. All absentee ballots that have been mailed for the PPP Election were accepted in the Dougherty County Elections Office through March 24<sup>th</sup>. Citizens may request absentee ballots for the PPP/GPE now. Ballots had to be received in the Elections office by 5 p.m. on March 24<sup>th</sup> in order to be counted. The last day the Elections office can mail a ballot for the PPP election by law was March 20<sup>th</sup>.

**Phoebe Putney Health Systems:** In an effort to screen more patients for COVID-19 symptoms, Phoebe is expanding its coronavirus hotline and opening a drive-through screening facility. Anyone who wants to be tested at the temporary screening site must first call the hotline. "COVID-19 test kits remain in limited supply, so only people who are experiencing symptoms should be tested. Symptomatic individuals who pass an initial phone screening will be given an appointment and instructed where to go for in-person screening," said Suresh Lakhnpal, MD, Phoebe Physicians Chief Executive Officer. The primary symptoms of COVID-19 are fever, cough and shortness of breath. The Phoebe Coronavirus Hotline is 229.312.1919 and is open seven days a week now from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. When a pre-screened patient drives up at the testing location, the patient will have to show identification, and then medical professionals wearing personal protective equipment will obtain the necessary swab. Older individuals and those with chronic medical conditions and compromised immune systems are at greater risk for severe complications from COVID-19, and they are at a higher priority for testing. People who are not exhibiting active symptoms are asked not to call the hotline so nurses are able to focus on higher risk individuals. For updated coronavirus information, visit [phoebehealth.com/coronavirus](http://phoebehealth.com/coronavirus) and [cdc.gov](http://cdc.gov).

**Dougherty County School System:** Schools will remain closed through April 6<sup>th</sup>, unless conditions change, to ensure the safety of students and staff. The district has also started delivering meals to children who are 18 and under. The district is delivering the meals by bus along a pre-determined set of routes that are based on a child's school zone cluster. For more information, visit [docoschools.org](http://docoschools.org).

As part of a comprehensive distance learning plan, beginning Tuesday, March 24th, the Dougherty County School System will begin distributing digital learning devices starting with high school seniors.

Principals at each high school have formed teams that will assist with drive-through device distribution. Prior to being assigned to assist, potential team members will be asked a series of screening questions regarding their potential exposure to COVID-19. If based on the responses to the questions, an employee is deemed to be at-risk, he or she will not serve on the distribution team. A walk-through will be held on Monday at each high school to ensure team members are provided with the distribution procedures and safety protocols we have put in place.

Beginning Friday, March 20th and continuing throughout the weekend, employees of each high school have been calling parents of seniors to determine if they need a Chromebook and/or an internet hotspot. Based on their responses, an individualized package with the needed device(s) will be available during a predetermined block of time. This plan has been discussed with the Dougherty County Emergency Management Task Force to ensure compliance with the current Shelter-in-Place order.

According to DCSS officials, both the Chromebooks and hotspots are equipped with tracking technology to assist in device recovery in the event they are lost or stolen. Also, students and their parents and/or guardians will be required to sign a user agreement detailing the acceptable use of the equipment and their personal financial responsibility for the device(s) if lost or damaged.

**Dougherty County Department of Public Health:** The Dougherty County Department of Public Health (DPH) has been awarded a grant for further testing for COVID-19. To qualify for the testing, individuals must fall into one of the following categories: 65 or older, exhibiting fever and respiratory issues, first responders, and healthcare professionals, who have come into direct contact with patients who tested positive for COVID-19. To schedule a testing, these individuals can call 229.352.6567, beginning Monday, March 23<sup>rd</sup>.

For the latest updates on the Coronavirus and its effects on Dougherty County, stay tuned to our Facebook page @DoughertyCountyGeorgiaGovernment, and our Twitter and Instagram pages @1doughertycoga. Or, call the EOC line at 229.302.1900, for more information. For national information, visit [cdc.gov](https://www.cdc.gov).

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**About Dougherty County, Georgia**

*Located in the heart of Southwest Georgia, Dougherty County is home to internationally recognized quail plantations, a university and technical institute. Our mission is to improve the quality of life for all citizens by being accessible and good stewards of our resources, delivering cost-effective, responsive services with integrity, fairness, and friendliness. For more information, visit [Dougherty.ga.us](http://Dougherty.ga.us). Or, find us on Facebook at [facebook.com/Dougherty.ga.us](https://facebook.com/Dougherty.ga.us) or on Twitter [@1doughertycoga](https://twitter.com/1doughertycoga).*