



# BASICS OF COURTROOM SECURITY

— A Bench Card for Judges —

Appropriate security is vital to ensuring that our courts are open and accessible to the public thereby promoting trust and confidence in a judicial system as a whole.

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## COURTROOM SECURITY GOALS

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1. Protect the judge and all those present from harm.
2. Maintain the safety and integrity of the jury.
3. Prevent the escape of an inmate.
4. Minimize the risk of disruption of court proceedings.
5. Respond to emergencies.

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## COURT DEPUTIES & BAILIFFS

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1. Before courtroom is unlocked and open to the public:
  - (a) Conduct security sweep of entire room, including bench, jury room, and underneath all tables, chairs, benches, above and underneath shelves of the podium, and trash cans (including between the can and liner).
  - (b) Confer with clerk and/or prosecutor about any cases that may require heightened security awareness and separated seating of parties, observers or families.
  - (c) **[Deputies Only]** Assign physical placement of deputies in courtroom to assure:
    - (i) observation of gallery and parties standing before bench and witnesses;
    - (ii) ability to intercept anyone approaching bench, if necessary, or attacking the defendant;
    - (iii) ability to stop in-custody defendant attempting to escape and otherwise control an in-custody defendant who becomes unruly; and
    - (iv) ability to intercede if a defendant or other litigant, witness or observer gets aggressive.
  - (d) Confer with presiding judge concerning his/her preferences, e.g., how to announce opening of court, how documents are to be presented to court (by attorney, deputy or bailiff), etc.
  - (e) Alert judge of potential security issues including any concerns with cases on the calendar and any plans to address the issues.
  - (f) Make sure you are clear on judge's position regarding headwear and prohibited items, including how you are to respond.
  - (g) Refer to the court security plan for additional security and emergency procedures.
2. After courtroom is unlocked and open to the public:
  - (a) Observe all persons entering courtroom to assure that security issues related to seating are addressed. *See 1(b) above.*
  - (b) Follow local policies regarding headwear and prohibited items. *See 1(f) above.*
  - (c) Take assigned positions in courtroom. *See also 1(c) above.*
3. During court:
  - (a) Do not lock, bar or block courtroom doors unless emergency arises such as a loose gunman or escaped prisoner, as directed by court security plan.
  - (b) Follow physical placement plan. *See also 1(c) above.*
4. Demeanor and professionalism:
  - (a) Be courteous.
  - (b) Consult with judge if unsure of response to an unexpected situation. *See also 1(d)-(e) above.*
  - (c) Pay attention.
  - (d) Maintain a professional image.

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## PRESIDING JUDGE

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1. Before courtroom is unlocked and open to the public:
  - (a) Discuss your preferences concerning interaction between attorneys, litigants and court. *See also 1(d) above.*
  - (b) Discuss any special security cases or concerns. *See also 1(b) above.*
2. During court:
  - (a) Upon taking bench, announce that proceedings are public and that the doors are not to be locked. *See also 3(a) above.*
  - (b) Know and practice your escape route and emergency evacuation procedures.
3. Demeanor and professionalism:
  - (a) Always be accessible to deputy, bailiffs and court staff to discuss/address unexpected situations.
  - (b) Pay attention.
  - (c) Maintain a professional image.

### LEADERSHIP ROLE OF THE JUDGE

Set the tone for the importance of security.  
Collaborate with county officials and Sheriff.  
Communicate and be open to suggestions.  
Be active in security and emergency planning and awareness.

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## IMPORTANT LEGAL AUTHORITY

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O.C.G.A. § 15-6-35: *Selection and appointment of bailiffs* – allows for the sheriff to select bailiffs with the court’s approval and for judges to appoint additional bailiffs

O.C.G.A. § 16-11-127: *Carrying weapons in unauthorized locations* – describes when it is not permissible to carry a weapon in a courthouse

O.C.G.A. § 15-16-10: *Duties of Sheriffs* – includes duty to be in court for Superior Court and Probate court and to develop a court security plan

O.C.G.A. § 16-11-130: *Exemptions to carrying weapons* – describes who is permitted to carry weapons by virtue of their current or former position

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## RESOURCES

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Georgia Standards for the Security of Courthouses and Other Court Facilities  
Judicial Council of Georgia Emergency Operations Plan  
[CCJ/COSCA Court Security Handbook](#) (NCSC)  
[Steps to Best Practices for Court Building Security](#) (NCSC)