



COURTROOM ETIQUETTE & DECORUM



CELL PHONES OFF

All phones must be turned off or placed in silent mode so as to not disrupt the court.

BE PREPARED

Have all related documents ready – drivers license, current tag, registration, insurance, etc.

NO FOOD OR DRINKS

Food and drinks are prohibited in the courtroom.

WEAPONS & BACKPACKS PROHIBITED

No weapons of any kind or backpacks are allowed in the courtroom.

BE PATIENT

Please exercise patience. If you have questions feel free to ask any court staff.

DRESS APPROPRIATELY

Avoid clothing that is dirty, disheveled, ripped, tight, short or revealing.

ARRIVE EARLY

Court officially begins at 4pm but may begin seeing cases sooner. Early arrival may help expedite your time in court.

RECORDING PROHIBITED

Any recording of courtroom proceedings is strictly prohibited – including photography, videography and/or audio recording.

BE RESPECTFUL

Disruptive behavior, such as loud talking, laughing or raising your voice, will not be tolerated. Unless addressing the court, all other conversation must take place outside the courtroom.

LEAVE CHILDREN AT HOME

Whenever possible, children should not attend court proceedings. If you must bring children, please be courteous and step out if your child becomes disruptive. A member of the court staff will let you know when you are needed in the courtroom.

THE JUDGE'S ROLE

If called by the Judge, please stand in front of the podium. The Judge will verbally review your charges and ask if you would like to plead guilty or not guilty.

Pleading Not Guilty: Denies the charges against you and claims justification of the offense. If you choose to plead not guilty your case will be set for a trial docket and will be tried before the Judge in a bench trial on that date. You have the absolute right to plead not guilty without any prejudice against you; the City must prove that you committed the violation beyond a reasonable doubt. A defendant never has the burden of proof on the issue of the specific elements of each offense – that burden remains on the City of Vestavia Hills, who will be represented at trial by the prosecutor.

Pleading Guilty: The defendant admits to everything they are being charged with. If you plead guilty, the Judge will impose a sentence, which in most cases, will consist of fines and court costs only.

Pretrial Diversion: In some scenarios you may be eligible for a pretrial diversion program, such as driving school. If you are unsure if you qualify, be sure to ask prior to pleading guilty or not guilty.