

White County Magistrate Court

General Guidelines

November 1, 2005

NOTICE: *This information is only for the purpose of explaining the general processes of actions in Magistrate Court. It is not exhaustive and is not to be substituted for competent legal counsel. If you are in doubt or unsure how to proceed or respond, you should consult an attorney.*

Court personnel are NOT authorized to provide legal advice. The Clerks will be happy to explain the various procedures if you do not understand the information in this pamphlet. **Judges CANNOT discuss a case unless both parties are present.**

CRIMINAL WARRANTS

Warrant application hearings may be utilized by individuals who have reason to believe that a person has committed a crime against you or a minor in your custody. Questions you may want to ask yourself prior to making application for an arrest warrant:

- Is the act committed a crime in violation of the Official Code of Georgia?
- Did the crime occur in White County?
- Have you reported the crime to the Sheriff's Dept. or Police Dept.?
- Do you have any evidence that this person committed the crime?
- Do you have information on where this person may be located?

Once the application has been completed, a hearing date will be scheduled approximately three weeks from the date of application (in some special circumstances, under statutory guidelines, warrants may be issued immediately). Notice of the hearing with a copy of your application will be sent to the person being accused of committing a crime. It is important to supply our office with a current mailing or physical address of the accused person. If at the hearing the Court finds probable cause to issue a warrant, the Accused would go to jail, post a bond, and if the District Attorney's Office chooses to prosecute the charge, the Accused will appear in the trial court at a later date to enter a plea of guilty or not guilty.

IT IS YOUR OR YOUR HIRED ATTORNEY'S RESPONSIBILITY TO PRESENT YOUR CASE IN COURT. THE DISTRICT ATTORNEY'S OFFICE WILL NOT BE PROSECUTING YOUR CASE AT THE PRE-WARRANT HEARING. AT THE PRE-WARRANT HEARING THE JUDGE HAS NO AUTHORITY TO ORDER ITEMS RETURNED OR MONEY JUDGMENTS ISSUED. THE HEARING IS FOR THE SOLE PURPOSE OF ISSUING OR NOT ISSUING A CRIMINAL WARRANT.

Arrest Warrant Code Section Reference:**O.C.G.A. 17-4-40**

- (a) Any judge of a superior, city, state, or magistrate court or any municipal officer clothed by law with the powers of a magistrate may issue a warrant for the arrest of any offender against the penal laws, based on probable cause either on the judge's or officer's own knowledge or on the information of others given to the judge or officer under oath. Any retired judge or judge emeritus of a state court may likewise issue arrest warrants if authorized in writing to do so by an active judge of the state court of the county wherein the warrants are to be issued.
- (b)(1) If application is made for a warrant by a person other than a peace officer or law enforcement officer and the application alleges the commission of an offense against the penal laws, the judge or other officer shall schedule a warrant application hearing as provided in this subsection unless the person accused has been taken into custody by a peace officer or law enforcement officer or except as provided in paragraph (6) of this subsection.
- (2) Except as otherwise provided in paragraph (6) of this subsection, a warrant application hearing shall be conducted only after attempting to notify the person whose arrest is sought by any means approved by the judge or other officer which is reasonably calculated to apprise such person of the date, time, and location of the hearing.
- (3) If the person whose arrest is sought does not appear for the warrant application hearing, the judge or other officer shall proceed to hear the application and shall note on the warrant application that such person is not present.
- (4) At the warrant application hearing, the rules regarding admission of evidence at a commitment hearing shall apply. The person seeking the warrant shall have the customary rights of presentation of evidence and cross-examination of witnesses. The person whose arrest is sought may cross-examine the person or persons applying for the warrant and any other witnesses testifying in support of the application at the hearing. The person whose arrest is sought may present evidence that probable cause does not exist for his or her arrest. The judge or other officer shall have the right to limit the presentation of evidence and the cross-examination of witnesses to the issue of probable cause.
- (5) At the warrant application hearing, a determination shall be made whether or not probable cause exists for the issuance of a warrant for the arrest of the person whose arrest is sought. If the judge or other officer finds that probable cause exists, the warrant may issue *instanter*.
- (6) Nothing in this subsection shall be construed as prohibiting a judge or other officer from immediately issuing a warrant for the arrest of a person upon application of a person other than a peace officer or law enforcement officer if the judge or other officer determines from the application or other information available to the judge or other officer that:
- (A) An immediate or continuing threat exists to the safety or well-being of the affiant or a third party;
 - (B) The person whose arrest is sought will attempt to evade arrest or otherwise obstruct justice if notice is given;
 - (C) The person whose arrest is sought is incarcerated or otherwise in the custody of a local, state, or federal law enforcement agency;
 - (D) The person whose arrest is sought is a fugitive from justice;
 - (E) The offense for which application for a warrant is made is deposit account fraud under Code Section 16-9-20, and the person whose arrest is sought has previously been served with the ten-day notice as provided in paragraph (2) of subsection (a) of Code Section 16-9-20; or
 - (F) The offense for which application for the warrant is made consists of an act of family violence as defined in Code Section 19-13-1.
- In the event that the judge or officer finds such circumstances justifying dispensing with the requirement of a warrant application hearing, the judge or officer shall note such circumstances on the face of the warrant application.
- (7) No warrant shall be quashed nor evidence suppressed because of any irregularity in proceedings conducted pursuant to this subsection not affecting the substantial rights of the accused under the Constitution of this state or of the United States.
- (c) Any warrant for the arrest of a peace officer, law enforcement officer, teacher, or school administrator for any offense alleged to have been committed while in the performance of his or her duties may be issued only by a judge of a superior court, a judge of a state court, or a judge of a probate court.