



Cynthia G. Dillingham
Clerk of Superior & Juvenile Court
Atkinson County Georgia, Alapaha Judicial Circuit
19 Roberts Ave W.
PO Box 6
Pearson, GA 31642

Date: October 23, 2024

Re: Hurricane Helene

Dear Judges,

May this letter find you well. My name is Cynthia Dillingham, and I am the Clerk of Superior and Juvenile Court for the County of Atkinson, where I have been clerk since 2014.

On September 26, 2024 Hurricane Helene came through our County, leaving catastrophic destruction to homes, businesses and have taking a toll on our mental and physical well-being. Our Courthouse sustained severe damage to the roof, from very high winds from Helene. For this cause, I had to relocate our office just days after the storm.

On the third floor of our courthouse, I have a locked storage room for evidence that is surrendered, to me after trials, and this room was one of the hardest hit areas on the roof. Therefore, I had to physically move the debris that had fallen from the roof from the evidence boxes and relocate them to the 1st floor of my old office. We also, as previously stated, had to relocate all the offices, not only mine, but Probate/Magistrate, Tax Commissioner, and tax Assessor, which entailed dissembling three desks, five computers, phones, books, and moving anything that was needed to operate on a daily basis to the old Sheriff's office located behind the old courthouse. We've had to leave behind in the old office all of our dockets, cases and files, due the lack of adequate space.

I am now located in a smaller office that I am sharing with my two deputy clerks, in a confined space, as are the other elected officials, but, we are managing, as is expected of us.

We also had to cancel Grand Jury, Criminal Calendar Call and Pleas, Arraignments, Pre-Trials and Trial Week for the month of October, and don't know when or where court will resume, along with traveling to another county for Juvenile Court that was scheduled for October, for lack of location.

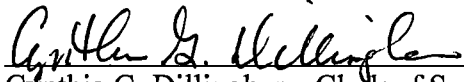
Our entire community suffered destruction and not one person was untouched from this hurricane. I did all this while my own home, farm, crops and mother's home had severe damage that needed immediate attention, but could not tend to it over the past three weeks. As the following days preceding the hurricane, I immediately called our Chairman and Sheriff to help procure my office a location to resume business of the courts in a timely manner, all the while, my own home, went without and endured 20 long days without electricity.

The devastation to my own property, along with my disabled mother's home, which she endured alone for two days, with a tree on her home, until I could get out of my own road from the fallen light poles and trees. After we cut our way out, we saw the extensive damage to our area and once I made it to her home, we had to move her to my house, leaving behind her belongings until I after I was able to get my office operational, again.

This hurricane was a record book storm that has taken everyone by surprise. We are slowly becoming normal, as our surroundings, and our landmarks, are changed forever. I have heard from our community about our old beloved Courthouse and how they are all so devastated from the loss. I reassure them, we will repair the building, but the long-term effects will last forever. We can all feel the emotional turmoil from our neighbors, overwhelming heartache, but we know at some point, we will regain our momentum, repair our landmarks, and reassemble as a community, and become whole again, in time.

The relocating of our Courthouse will be a step in the right direction, until our new Courthouse, which will take precedence over the old, is being finished. We ask this, of our Court, our esteemed Judges, to decide where that will be, and then we will begin the process of our regular court duties.

Best regards,



Cynthia G. Dillingham, Clerk of Superior Court
Atkinson County, Georgia

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