

ANNUAL

REPORT

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JUDICIAL COUNCIL OF GEORGIA

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ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE OF THE COURTS

The **JUDICIAL COUNCIL of GEORGIA** and its committees meet throughout the year to address specific aspects of court administration and improvement. As staff of the Judicial Council, the Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) provides subject-matter expertise on policy, court innovation, legislation, and court administration to all Georgia courts.

This report is published by the Judicial Council of Georgia and the Administrative Office of the Courts by Order of the Supreme Court of Georgia dated June 12, 1978.

Chair, Chief Justice Nels S.D. Peterson

Director, Cynthia H. Clanton

Judicial Council of Georgia/AOC

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Atlanta, GA 30334

This report covers Fiscal Year 2025 (July 1, 2024 - June 30, 2025)

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2025 State of the Judiciary



“I’m honored to represent the nearly 1,600 judges who are committed to upholding our oaths of office to: ‘administer justice without respect to person, and do equal rights to the poor and the rich, and to faithfully and impartially discharge our duties agreeably to the laws and Constitution of this State, and the Constitution of the United States, So Help Us God!’”

On January 28, 2025, Chief Justice Michael P. Boggs gave his final State of the Judiciary to a joint session of the Georgia General Assembly. Chief Justice Boggs would later announce his retirement from the Supreme Court of Georgia, effective March 31, 2025.

Highlights from the remarks:

“I talked to you last year about the shortage of court reporters across our state. . . . Now, the Judicial Council is coming to you with a balanced proposal that will give trial judges the option of having many, but not all, court proceedings taken down by a digital recording system.”

“For the last two years, I’ve told you all that there were seven counties—all rural—with zero licensed attorneys. Sadly, that number has not changed, leaving more than 30,000 Georgians without access to legal representation in their home counties. . . . I believe that Georgia should be a national thought leader on this issue. . . . To accomplish this, I created the Supreme Court Study Committee on Legal Regulatory Reform, led by Justice Carla Wong McMillian and Court of Appeals Judge Stephen Dillard, that will work in collaboration with the State Bar of Georgia, judges from various classes of state courts, and attorneys from diverse practice areas.”



“I’m pleased to report on a landmark initiative that holds the potential to fundamentally improve our justice system. With the support of Governor Kemp, Georgia judicial system leaders are moving forward on a generationally transformative tool for collecting, using, and reporting real-time case information. This effort—a statewide case management system for Georgia Superior and State Courts—is critical to improving the work of our judicial system. Currently, trial court case management and data are siloed in more than 159 individual and disparate case management systems. . . . They may not know, for example, whether the defendants standing before them have previous criminal histories in other counties, whether they have ongoing criminal matters in other jurisdictions, whether they have prior mental health civil commitments, or even whether prior arrests and dispositions are accurately and timely reflected in their criminal histories. . . . And, of course, bad, missing, inaccurate or incomplete data available to our state’s judges clearly has real and frightening public safety implications, for every Georgian.”

“...trial courts on the local level are also making great progress fulfilling their oath to the citizens of Georgia. A shining example is Cobb County’s Veterans Accountability and Treatment Court program started in 2014. . . . Veterans Accountability and Treatment Court’s mission is to work to change these dire statistics while also increasing public safety by reducing recidivism, and they are succeeding! In Cobb, 64 veterans have successfully graduated from this 18-month program and the average recidivism rate is an astounding seven percent. These veterans have faithfully served our country, and we owe it to them to see that our justice system addresses their service-related needs appropriately.”

“For the last several years, we have all noticed an alarming increase in attacks on our court – both attacks on decisions and even physical attacks on judges. . . . Now more than ever, the safety of our state’s 1,600 judges—as well as court personnel and the general public who still enter our hallways and courtrooms each day—has become a pronounced concern. . . . Last summer, we created and implemented training sessions that may be used by judges AND lawmakers across our state to

understand how to better protect themselves and their families at home or out in their communities. I would like to thank Justice Shawn Ellen LaGrua and the committee she chairs for their ongoing efforts.”

“Equally as concerning as the attacks and threats of physical violence on our judges are the purposeful and widespread efforts to transform the courts into partisan political actors. . . . One way our judiciary is making good on upholding our oaths and doing what we can to further instill public trust in our institution is by supporting legislation that will end partisan elections for the remaining few probate and magistrate court judgeships not yet nonpartisan. With the full support of these local courts, we are coming to you this year, asking for your support and assistance in rectifying this issue”

“Our State’s courts are made up of impartial arbiters of the law who have taken sacred oaths to uphold the Constitution and defend the rule of law. And our limited role as judges is to interpret the law as it is written and apply it to resolve the disputes of the parties before us, not to serve as a super legislature.”

Investiture of Chief Justice Nels S.D. Peterson



On April 1, 2025, Justice Nels S.D. Peterson was sworn in as the 35th Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Georgia. Justice Sarah Hawkins Warren was sworn in as the Presiding Justice.

In his remarks, he emphasized the vital importance of an independent judiciary and the rule of law.

Highlights from the remarks:

“...the rule of law means that no person is above the law’s requirements or below its protections. I would also add two other elements. First, the law must be public and made by proper authorities, and second, cases should

be decided by an independent judiciary, not by officials under the control of others.”

“Policymaking and politics are often team sports, but judges don’t play for a team. We wear robes, not jerseys. The rule of law depends on judges being independent, and judicial independence that advances rather than undermines the rule of law is possible only when judges understand and respect the limits of their role.”

“The judicial oath calls Georgia judges to do equal rights for the poor and rich. In other words, for the weak and the powerful. Of





“There is no higher responsibility in public life than living up to the trust that the people have placed in you.”

course, the rule of law is rarely tested when the powerful win in court. Outcomes that go the other way can sometimes be a different matter. The rule of law has always been fragile because by its very nature, it requires the strong and the rich to accept outcomes in favor of the weak and the poor. It requires popular majorities of all kinds to accept outcomes in favor of small, unpopular, or minority groups, and it requires the most powerful of all, the government, to accept and obey limits on government power. This has rarely happened throughout human history. What we have had in this country for the last 250 years, as imperfect as it has been, especially here in the South, is so rare, and yet we often take it for granted. If we are to continue to enjoy the many

blessings that flow from the rule of law, we cannot continue taking it for granted.”

“Court is a place for everyone. People of all faiths and no faith are equal under the law, have equal access to the courts, and should enjoy equal success or failure in their case without regard to their religion. . . . but my explanation of how I view my role would be incomplete without explaining the role that my faith plays in how I do my job. . . . First, Christianity teaches that all people are made in the image of God, and so they have inherent worth and dignity. Regardless of their position in life or what they have done. And because all people have inherent worth and dignity, I must treat everyone who

comes before me according to that inherent worth and dignity they have. Second, I must tell the truth. I must work hard, and I must obey lawful authority. Finally, and most critical to judicial independence, my tradition teaches that an oath is a promise to God. Accordingly, I understand that my obligation to fulfill my oath to uphold the rule of law is a duty I owe not merely to my fellow man, but also to the creator of heaven and earth who will hold me accountable if I breach that duty. That prospect of divine accountability is far weightier than any other.”

From the Director



On behalf of the Judicial Council of Georgia and the Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC), I am pleased to share our 52nd Annual Report encompassing services provided during Fiscal Year 2025. The Judicial Council is composed of 27 judges representing every class of court across the state. The only non-judge member is the President of the State Bar of Georgia, who serves by virtue of the office as a non-voting member, bringing the total membership to 28. As the statewide policy-making body for Georgia's judicial branch, the Judicial Council directs the work of the AOC, its dedicated support and service agency.

This year marked a period of transition for the Judicial Council, as Chief Justice Michael P. Boggs stepped down shortly after delivering his State of the Judiciary address. On April 1, 2025, Chief Justice Nels S.D. Peterson and Presiding Justice Sarah Hawkins Warren were sworn in to their new roles on the Supreme Court of Georgia and, accordingly, assumed their new leadership positions as Chair and Vice Chair of the Judicial Council. Our new Chair and Vice Chair presided over the Judicial Council for the first time at the April 11, 2025 meeting and worked seamlessly together to guide the Judicial Council through the remainder of the year.

Answering the call of former Chief Justice Boggs for the judicial branch to lead in advancing access to justice and the efficient administration of justice, we remained focused on staffing all of the Judicial Council standing and ad hoc committees. Several of those committees were especially active. Responding to the shortage of court reporters across our state, the Judicial Council's Standing Committee on Court Reporting Matters met with key stakeholders to address this growing crisis and diligently worked to advance legislation to provide trial judges with the option to have court proceedings taken down by digital recording. We continued our work in support of the Ad Hoc Committee on American Rescue Plan Act Funding to provide courts with resources to overcome the lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Under the guidance of the Ad Hoc Committee for Georgia Case Management System, we placed substantial energy into working collaboratively with judicial system partners on the development of Georgia's Court Case Management System (GA CMS), a generationally transformative tool for collecting, using, and reporting real-time case information that is critical to the improvement of our statewide justice system. To address the ongoing issue of legal deserts, our judicial leaders and staff remained steadfast in examining potential solutions to lessen our state's civil justice gap. Emerging issues around artificial intelligence became a focus of our work as we supported the new Ad Hoc Committee on Artificial Intelligence and the Courts, which was charged with assessing the risks and benefits of that new technology,

while ensuring the use of AI does not erode public trust and confidence in the judicial system.

We also embraced Chief Justice Peterson's call to prioritize building and sustaining public trust and confidence in our judicial branch as well as taking steps to improve the safety and security of Georgia's judges. By working to improve judicial security, we ensure that threats to judges' personal security do not undermine the judicial independence on which the rule of law depends. This entails not only upgrading physical security measures but also implementing new protocols and providing comprehensive training, so that safety issues may be handled effectively or prevented.

It is indeed a privilege to continue this mission-driven work, and we remain grateful for the opportunity to assist in improving the administration of justice. Our circle of judicial clients grew again this year, and we look forward to further collaboration with our judicial branch partners. With unwavering dedication, we proudly stand in service to the judicial branch and remain committed to supporting our leadership as we work together to uphold justice and strengthen public trust in Georgia's judiciary.

With appreciation and respect,

Cynthia H. Clanton
Director, Administrative Office of the Courts

Partner Organizations

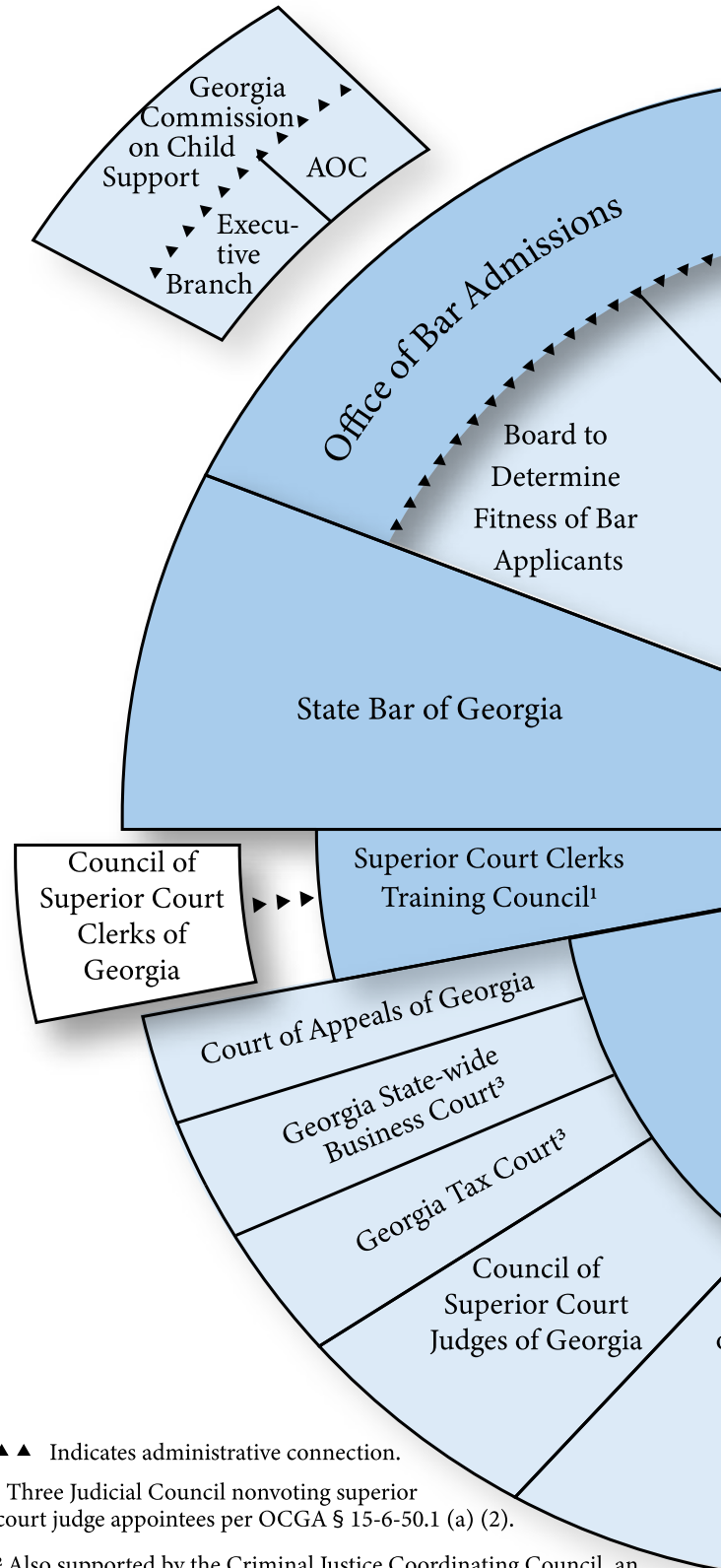
Thanks to our valued partner organizations, whose expertise, collaboration, and ongoing support strengthen Georgia's judicial branch.



Administering Justice In Georgia

Georgia’s justice system has grown and adapted continuously over nearly three centuries, evolving alongside the needs of its diverse and expanding population. What began as a framework for resolving fundamental legal disputes has developed into a robust, modern judiciary with specialized courts, data-driven administration, and statewide support services. Today, the Judicial Branch remains committed to delivering justice that is efficient, fair, and accessible to every Georgian.

- SUPREME COURT** of Georgia is our state’s highest court of review and exercises exclusive appellate jurisdiction in certain, enumerated cases.
- JUDICIAL COUNCIL** develops policies, proposes legislative changes, and fosters improvements across the judicial system, ensuring efficiency, fairness, and accessibility in Georgia’s courts.
- PROFESSIONAL SERVICES** provided by the Administrative Office of the Courts coordinates with all courts and councils to support essential training, licensing, and services to judicial personnel, enhancing the competency and effectiveness of Georgia’s court system operations.
- COURTS AND COUNCILS** have advanced significantly as Georgia’s judiciary has evolved. Increased specialization within the courts has promoted higher levels of professional competence and case throughput, while also necessitating continual policy evaluation to uphold fairness and balance.



▲ ▲ Indicates administrative connection.

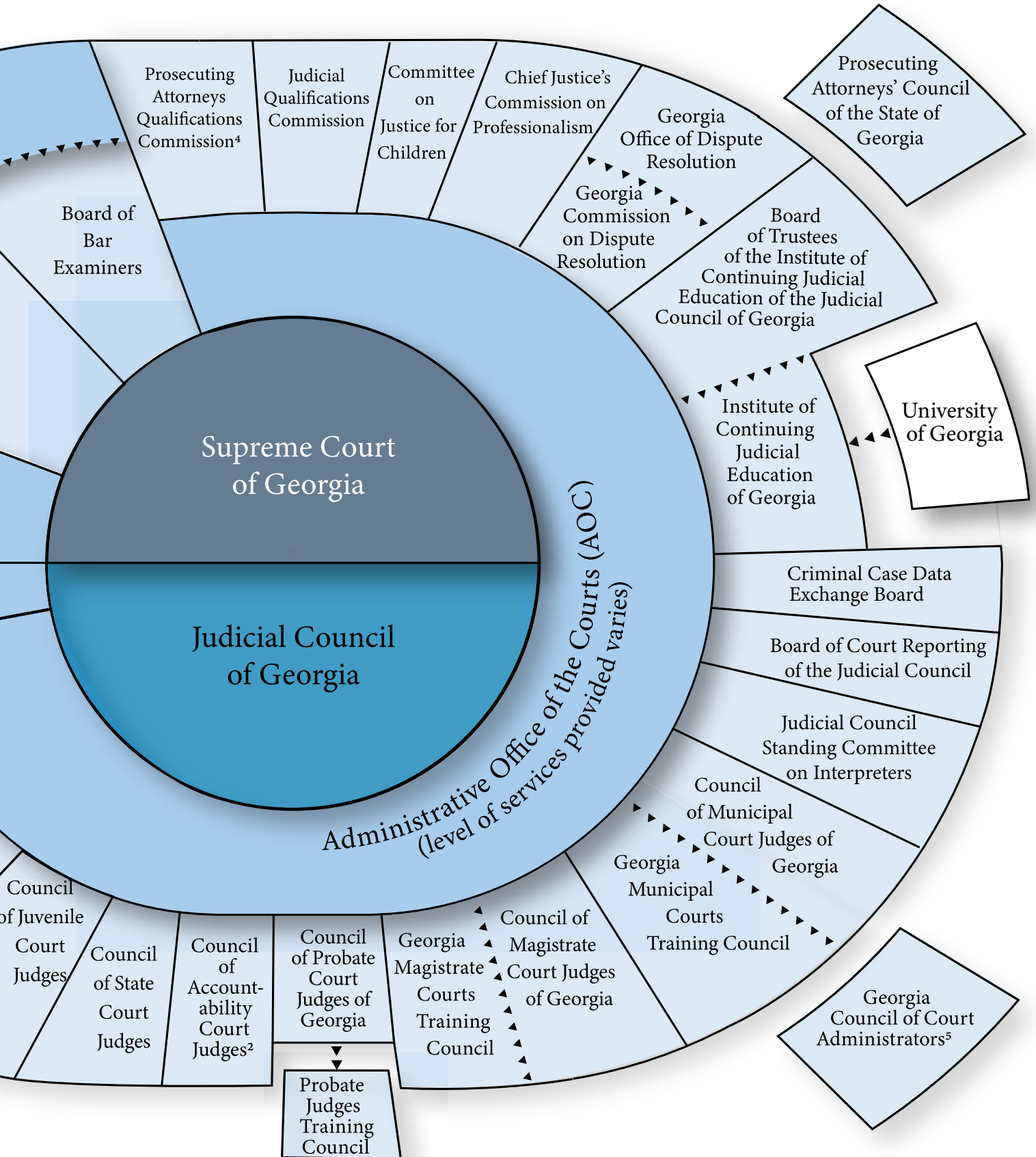
¹ Three Judicial Council nonvoting superior court judge appointees per OCGA § 15-6-50.1 (a) (2).

² Also supported by the Criminal Justice Coordinating Council, an Executive Branch agency.

³ This entity is assigned for administrative purposes only to the Administrative Office of the Courts.

⁴ Transferred to the Judicial Council Budget, Section 6, effective 7/01/2025.

⁵ AOC serves as fiscal agent.



About the AOC



Mission:

The Judicial Council and Administrative Office of the Courts lead collaboration on policy across Georgia's courts to improve the administration of justice in Georgia.

Vision:

To improve justice in all Georgia courts through collaboration, innovation, and information. As staff to the Judicial Council of Georgia, the Administrative Office of the Courts provides subject-matter expertise on policy, court innovation, legislation, and court administration to the state's trial and appellate courts. The AOC also furnishes a full range of information technology, budget, communications, and financial services at the request of judicial clients.

Director's Division is comprised of Human Resources, Governmental Affairs and Trial Court Liaison, General Counsel, and Budget. The Director determines priorities, strategy, and direction of the agency and oversees its divisions. This Division is primarily responsible for Judicial Council operations, and the Director serves as Judicial Council Secretary.

Financial Administration Division provides fiscal services for the Judicial Council, AOC, certain courts, and other judicial branch organizations. Services provided include: payroll administration, budget preparation and management, audit compliance, invoicing, fixed asset management, and management of accounts receivable and payable at the request of judicial clients. The Financial Administration staff also provides budget data to the Governor's Office and General Assembly on behalf of each Judicial Council budgetary unit.

Information Technology Division develops, supports, and enhances automation solutions for all levels of court throughout the State of Georgia. The AOC IT Division offers consulting and research services, provisioning of hardware resources and compliance with legislative mandates, as well as keeping up with industry fluctuations. The Division also manages statewide automation initiatives

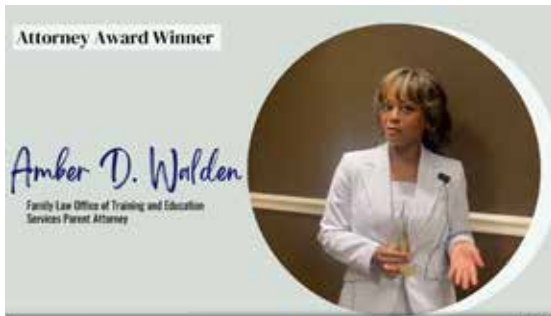
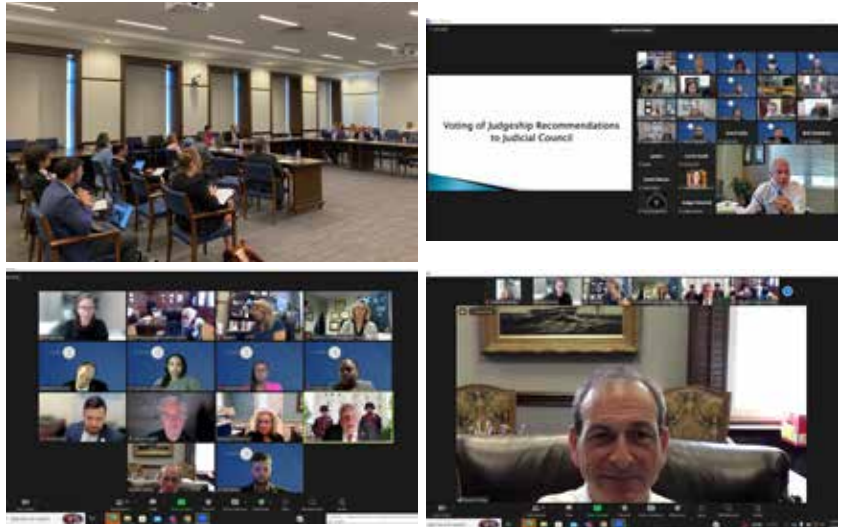
Communications, Children, Families, and the Courts Division supports court system initiatives and partnerships that improve outcomes for Georgia's most vulnerable citizens—among them: children in foster care, victims of domestic violence, persons with disabilities who need improved access to the courts, and families seeking child support. It includes staff support to the Georgia Child Support Commission, the Georgia Supreme Court Committee on Justice for Children, and the Judicial Council Standing Committee on Access to Justice. A combination of state, federal, and private funds finance this work. This Division also houses the Communications Department for the entire AOC.

Judicial Services Division is made up of two offices: Research and Data analysis, and Court Professionals. Through these two offices, this division provides data-driven analysis of the state's trial courts and oversees the policy and regulatory matters of Georgia's court professionals.

Judicial Council / AOC Highlights FY 2025

July 2024 - Committees Convene ▶

The Judicial Council’s Standing Committees continued their work on behalf of Georgia’s courts. Committees including Judicial Workload Assessment, Budget, Legislation, Technology, and Access to Justice convened to advance key initiatives, drawing on the expertise of members from every class of court. Whether evaluating judicial resource needs, shaping policy recommendations, strengthening court technology, or awarding grants that expand civil legal services, their collaboration demonstrates the essential role these committees play in improving the administration of justice statewide.



▲ August 2024 - Judicial Council General Session

Chief Justice Boggs announced the formation of an ad hoc committee to study the use of artificial intelligence in Georgia’s courts. Standing committees also reported on major initiatives across budgeting, legislation, technology, judicial workload, interpreter services, security, and grantmaking.

▲ July 2024 - Celebrating Service

We proudly showcased the 2024 Hines Award for Excellence in Child Advocacy with video interviews featuring each of this year’s honorees.

▼ August 2024 - GCFV presented an award of Special Appreciation and Recognition to the Judicial Council of Georgia/AOC





▲ September 2024 - Judges' Wellness Panel

The State Bar of Georgia's Wellness Institute concluded with a panel featuring Judges Melanic Bell, Erica Tisinger, Ken Hodges, and Shondeana Morris, who shared their experiences and practical guidance on balancing work, life, and the difficult decisions that come with judicial service.

▼ September 2024 - Constitution Day

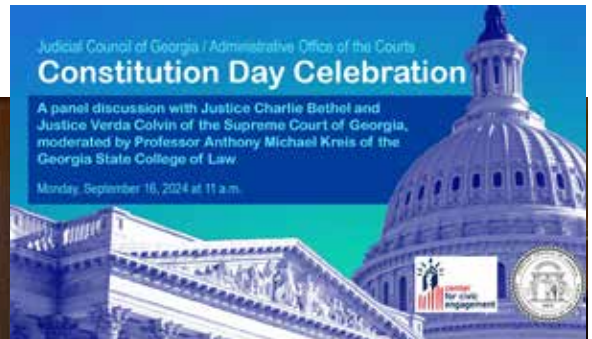
At the 2024 Constitution Day Celebration, a panel discussion featured judges from the Supreme Court of Georgia exploring key themes in judicial ethics, civic education, and the role of the courts in upholding constitutional values. The session provided an engaging forum for reflecting on Georgia's legal heritage and the responsibilities of the bench, underscoring the judiciary's commitment to transparency, public trust, and constitutional awareness.



▲ October 2024 - Hispanic Heritage Month

▼ October 2024 - Artificial Intelligence and the Courts

The Judicial Council's Ad Hoc Committee on Artificial Intelligence and the Courts, chaired by Justice Andrew Pinson, convened its inaugural meeting to begin evaluating the opportunities and challenges AI presents for Georgia's judiciary.





◀ November 2024 - Veteran Success Stories

The success stories in Veterans' Treatment Courts shared by judges in honor of National Veterans and Military Families Month reflect the powerful impact of treatment, accountability, and community support.



◀ November 2024 - Probate Judges Receive Recognitions

1. Judge Michael D. Wesley received a Citizen of the Year Award.
2. Judge Sherry Clark Moore received Woman of the Year from the Jackson County Area Chamber of Commerce.
3. Judge Shawn Rhodes was awarded the Officer of the Year Award from the Constitutional Officers Association of Georgia.

December 2024 - Judicial Council General Session ▶

The Council received reports on recent developments in ARPA fund allocation, legislation, technology, judicial workload assessment, and access to justice.



December 2024 - Annual Georgia Child Welfare Summit ▶

Co-sponsored by the Supreme Court's Committee on Justice for Children, the summit opened with Justice Charlie Bethel and CIP Director Diana Rugh Johnson launching a statewide discussion on strengthening child welfare practice.





▲ January 2025 - CMS Kickoff

After completing a multi-phase request for proposals and competitive bidding process, the Georgia Case Management System (GA CMS) project officially launched in January with AWS and Slalom selected as implementation partners.



▲ January 2025 - State of the Judiciary

Chief Justice Boggs delivered his final State of the Judiciary address, preceding his retirement announcement in March.

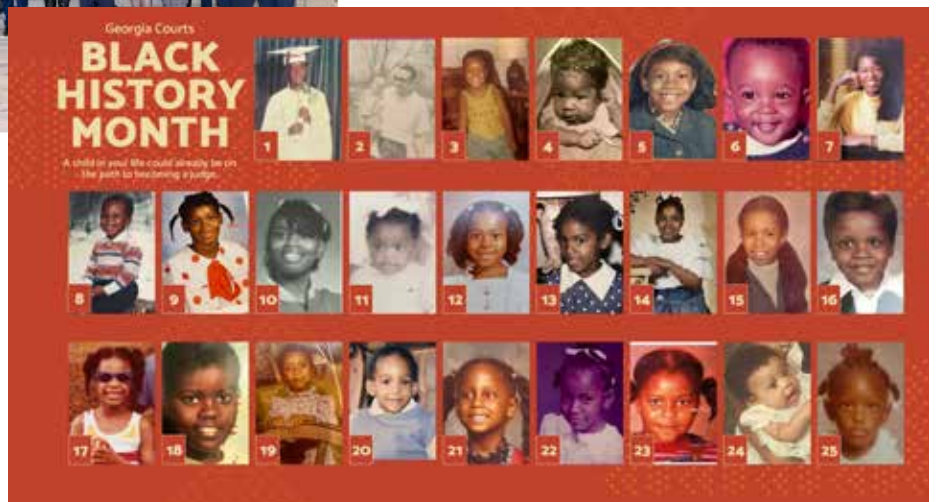
◀ February 2025 - Legislative Days

Court Councils held Legislative Days at the State Capitol, meeting with lawmakers to discuss legislative priorities and strengthen collaboration.



February 2025 - Black History Month ▶

To help inspire the next generation of Georgia's Judges, for Black History Month 2025, we featured Georgia's current judges when they were children.





◀ March 2025 -
Women's History Month

The path of every current female judge in Georgia started here: childhood.

▼ March 2025 -
GSU Alternative Spring Break

Students from the GSU School of Law A2J Center's Alternative Spring Break met with staff supporting the Judicial Council's Access to Justice Committee as they prepared for a week of pro bono service.



◀ April 2025 -
Investiture

Chief Justice Nels S.D. Peterson became the 35th Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Georgia.

▼ April 2025 -
Judicial Council General Session



◀ April 2025 -

Members of the Judicial Council voted on the 2025 Law Day Art Contest entries during the April meeting.



▲ May 2025 - Campaign for Court Interpreters

The Committee on Court Interpreters launched a social media campaign to raise awareness about Georgia’s need for Court Interpreters.

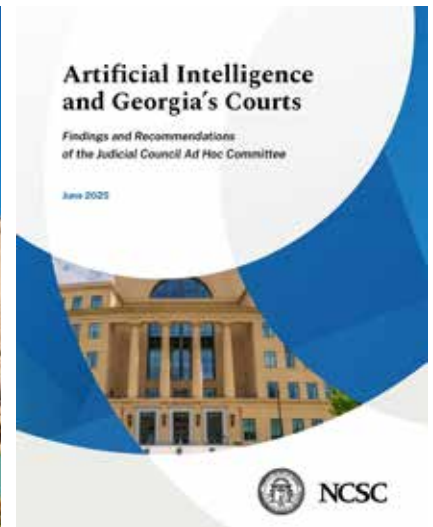
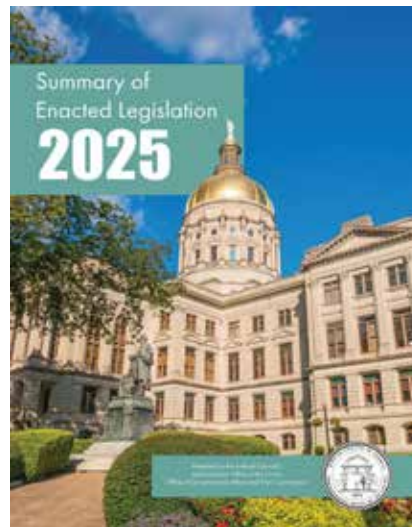
◀ May 2025 - Civics Education

Judges participated in civics lessons and mock trials across Georgia.

► May/June 2025 - Reports Issued

The Enacted Legislation Report is compiled annually by our Governmental Affairs team to provide a summary of legislation that affects Georgia’s court system. Reports are available at: <https://georgiacourts.gov/legislation/>

The Ad Hoc Committee on Artificial Intelligence and the Courts issued its final report in June. For additional details, see page 36.



▲ June 2025 - Recognitions

Many judges received recognition during the State Bar of Georgia’s Annual Meeting in the month of June.



▲ June 2025 - GA CMS Roundtables

The project team completed its 10th episode of a weekly roundtable that provides project updates to interested stakeholders.

Budget

2025 Legislative Session

Fiscal Year 2025

The Judicial Council received \$23,703,087 in State Appropriations for FY 2025 (HB 67).

Amended Fiscal Year 2025

The Judicial Council: Section 6 of the Appropriations Bill (HB 67) was amended as follows:

Judicial Council - Administrative Office of the Courts:

Increase funds for judicial security initiatives	\$27,018
Increase funds for personnel for three information technology positions	\$106,854
Reduce funds for personnel based on the actual start date of positions	\$0
Increase funds for legal records and county organ preservation	\$50,000

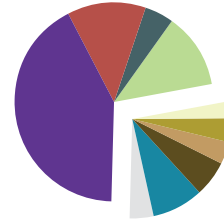
Judicial Qualifications Commission

Reduce funds for personnel based on the actual start date of positions	(\$26,015)
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Georgia State-wide Business Court

Utilize existing funds for operations	Yes
Eliminate funds for judicial salary increase as legislation failed to pass	(\$635)

FY 2025 Judicial Council Budget



Judicial Council Programs & Subprograms

Administrative Office of the Courts	\$9,945,892
Legal Services for Victims of Domestic Violence	\$3,000,000
Legal Services for Kinship Care Families & for Medical Legal Partnerships	\$1,159,500
Council of State Court Judges (including ret.)	\$2,877,383
Councils of Magistrate, Probate, and Municipal Court Judges; Child Support Collaborative; and the Georgia Council of Court Administrators	\$637,745

Other Programs

Council of Accountability Court Judges & CACJ Peer Review Process	\$1,007,767
Institute of Continuing Judicial Education Administration	\$844,596
Judicial Qualifications Commission	\$1,385,701
State-wide Business Court	\$1,944,503
Resource Center	\$900,000

	FY 2022	FY 2023	FY 2024	FY 2025	FY 2026 ²
Court of Appeals	\$25,224,226	\$29,181,016	\$27,540,195	\$26,561,098	\$27,677,694
Judicial Council ¹	\$16,708,123	\$19,232,883	\$21,093,777	\$23,703,087	\$26,262,541
Juvenile Courts	\$8,882,238	\$9,459,249	\$9,706,884	\$9,808,748	\$9,810,645
Superior Courts	\$79,063,120	\$84,828,075	\$89,059,466	\$91,892,079	\$103,428,047
Supreme Court	\$16,261,487	\$19,228,054	\$18,383,505	\$18,982,678	\$19,622,337
Totals	\$146,140,047	\$161,929,277	\$165,783,827	\$170,947,690	\$186,801,264

KEY TAKEAWAY:

< 1%

State Funds allocated to the Judicial Branch in the FY 2025 Amended Budget account for less than one percent of Georgia's over \$35 billion total state budget.

¹ Includes State-wide Business Court beginning in 2025, included within Court of Appeals in years prior

² General budget figures; all other budget figures are from the amended budget

Legislation

The General Assembly adjourned *sine die* on Friday, April 4, 2025. The following report provides the final status of each item the Judicial Council took a position in support of during the 2025 legislative session.

HB 179 - Digital Takedown

Sponsors:

Rep. Tyler Paul Smith (R – Bremen)
Sen. Brian Strickland (R – McDonough)

Final Status

House Agreed to the Senate Substitute 4/4/25. *Final Passage.*

HB 199 - Judicial Security

Sponsors:

Rep. Trey Kelley (R – Cedartown)
Sen. Blake Tillery (R – Vidalia)

Final Status

House Agreed to the Senate Substitute 3/31/25. *Final Passage.*

HB 85 - Judicial Compensation Reform - Superior Courts

Sponsors:

Rep. Rob Leverett (R – Elberton)
Sen. Bo Hatchett (R – Cornelia)

Final Status

Senate Passed/Adopted 3/28/25. *Final Passage.*

HB 86 - Judicial Compensation Reform - Statewide Courts

Sponsors:

Rep. Rob Leverett (R – Elberton)
Sen. Bo Hatchett (R – Cornelia)

Final Status

Senate Receded from its Amendment 3/28/25. *Final Passage.*

HB 132 - Office of Senior Municipal Court Judge

Sponsors:

Rep. Matt Reeves (R – Duluth)

Final Status

House Committee Favorably Reported 2/26/25.

HB 180 - Additional Qualifications for Article 6 Probate Court Judges

Sponsors:

Rep. Tyler Paul Smith (R – Bremen)
Sen. Bo Hatchett (R – Cornelia)

Final Status

Senate Passed/Adopted 4/2/25. *Final Passage.*

HB 426 - Nonpartisan Elections for Magistrate Court Judges

Sponsors:

Rep. Kimberly New (R – Villa Rica)
Sen. Rick Williams (R – Milledgeville)

Final Status

Senate Passed/Adopted 3/21/25. *Final Passage.*

HB 251 - Nonpartisan Elections for Probate Court Judges

Sponsors:

Rep. Kimberly New (R – Villa Rica)

Final Status

House Committee Favorably Reported 2/21/25.

HB 530 - Electronic Filing in Probate Courts

Sponsors:

Rep. Rob Leverett (R – Elberton)
Sen. Larry Walker III (R – Perry)

Final Status

Senate Tabled 4/2/25.

Additional Superior Court Judgeships

The General Assembly also passed legislation and appropriated funds for new superior court judgeships in the following judicial circuits, as recommended by the Judicial Council:

Alapaha Judicial Circuit - **HB 55**

Douglas Judicial Circuit - **SB 88**

Augusta Judicial Circuit - **SB 145**

Judicial Council of Georgia and Standing Committees

JUDICIAL COUNCIL OF GEORGIA 2024 - 2025 Members

Supreme Court of Georgia



Chief Justice
Nels S.D. Peterson,
Chair



Presiding Justice
Sarah Hawkins Warren,
Vice-Chair

Court of Appeals of Georgia



Chief Judge
Amanda H. Mercier



Vice-Chief Judge
Trenton Brown

State-wide Business Court



Judge
William "Bill" Grady
Hamrick III

JC/AOC



Ms. Cynthia H. Clanton,
Director, JC/AOC
Secretary

Superior Court



Chief Judge
Ann B. Harris,
President, CSCJ



Judge
Bert Guy,
President-Elect, CSCJ



Judge
D. Jay Stewart,
1st JAD



Chief Judge
T. Craig Earnest,
2nd JAD



Judge
Maureen Gottfried,
3rd JAD



Chief Judge
Shondeana C. Morris,
4th JAD



Chief Judge
Ural D. Glanville,
5th JAD



Chief Judge
Thomas H. Wilson,
6th JAD



Chief Judge
D. Scott Smith,
7th JAD



Chief Judge
T. Christopher Hughes,
8th JAD



Judge
David L. Dickinson,
9th JAD



Chief Judge
Sheryl B. Jolly,
10th JAD

State Court



Chief Judge
Jeff Hanson,
President, CStCJ



Chief Judge
Gregory V. Sapp,
President-Elect, CStCJ

Juvenile Court



Judge
T. Neal Brunt,
President, CJCJ



Chief Judge
Michelle Harrison,
President-Elect, CJCJ

Probate Court



Judge
Christopher A. Ballar,
President, CPCJ



Judge
Scott Chastain,
President-Elect, CPCJ

Magistrate Court



Judge
Robert Wolf,
President, CMCJ



Chief Magistrate
Nathan Grantham,
President-Elect, CMCJ

Municipal Court



Chief Judge
David C. Will,
President, CMuCJ



Chief Judge
Robert A. Cowan,
President-Elect, CMuCJ

State Bar of Georgia



Hon. Ivy Cadle,
President, State Bar of
Georgia

JUDICIAL COUNCIL OF GEORGIA

Created by Supreme Court Order (Amended July 2023).

All Judicial Council Members serve Ex-officio. The Director of the AOC is the Secretary of the Judicial Council pursuant to its bylaws.

Name	Role	Position
Nels S.D. Peterson	Chief Justice, Supreme Court of Georgia	Chair
Sarah Hawkins Warren	Presiding Justice, Supreme Court of Georgia	Vice-Chair
Amanda H. Mercier	Chief Judge, Georgia Court of Appeals	Member
Trenton Brown	Vice Chief Judge, Georgia Court of Appeals	Member
William "Bill" Grady Hamrick III	Judge, State-wide Business Court	Member
Ann B. Harris	Chief Judge, Cobb Judicial Circuit; President, CSCJ	Member
Bert Guy	Judge, Brunswick Judicial Circuit; President-Elect, CSCJ	Member
D. Jay Stewart	Judge, Atlantic Judicial Circuit; 1st JAD	Member
T. Craig Earnest	Chief Judge, Pataula Judicial Circuit; 2nd JAD	Member
Maureen Gottfried	Judge, Chattahoochee Judicial Circuit; 3rd JAD	Member
Shondeana C. Morris	Chief Judge, Stone Mountain Judicial Circuit; 4th JAD	Member
Ural D. Glanville	Chief Judge, Atlanta Judicial Circuit; 5th JAD	Member
Thomas H. Wilson	Chief Judge, Towaliga Judicial Circuit; 6th JAD	Member
D. Scott Smith	Chief Judge, Cherokee Judicial Circuit; 7th JAD	Member
T. Christopher Hughes	Chief Judge, Cordele Judicial Circuit; 8th JAD	Member
David L. Dickinson	Judge, Bell-Forsyth Judicial Circuit; 9th JAD	Member
Sheryl B. Jolly	Chief Judge, Columbia Judicial Circuit; 10th JAD	Member
Jeff Hanson	Chief Judge, State Court of Bibb County; President, CSJC	Member
Gregory V. Sapp	Chief Judge, State Court of Chatham County; President-Elect, CSJC	Member
T. Neal Brunt	Judge, Bartow Circuit Juvenile Court; President, CJCJ	Member
Michelle Harrison	Judge, Douglas County Juvenile Court; President-Elect, CJCJ	Member
Christopher A. Ballar	Judge, Probate Court of Gwinnett County; President, CPCJ	Member
Scott Chastain	Judge, Probate Court of Gilmer County; President-Elect, CPCJ	Member
Robert Wolf	Judge, Magistrate Court of Fulton County; President, CMCJ	Member
Nathan Grantham	Chief Magistrate, Magistrate Court of Ware County; President-Elect, CMCJ	Member
David C. Will	Chief Judge, Alpharetta Municipal Court; President, CMuCJ	Member
Robert A. Cowan	Chief Judge, Dalton Municipal Court; President-Elect, CMuCJ	Member
Ivy Cadle	President, State Bar of Georgia	Nonvoting Member
Cynthia H. Clanton	Director, Judicial Council of Georgia/AOC	Secretary

Judicial Council members as of April 1, 2025.

ACCESS TO JUSTICE (A2J)

Staff to Committee: Tabitha Ponder, Esq. and Deonte Mayfield
Authorized and created by Supreme Court order

Mission:

To improve the public's trust in the judicial branch by promoting meaningful and effective access to courts and fairness for all.

Name	Role	Position
Verda M. Colvin	Justice, Supreme Court of Georgia	Chair
Sara Doyle	Judge, Court of Appeals of Georgia	Vice-Chair
William "Bill" P. Adams	Retired Judge; Member of the State Bar of Georgia	Member
Cynthia C. Adams	Judge, Douglas Judicial Circuit; Accountability Court	Member
Rachel S. Barnhard	Executive Director, Georgia Bar Foundation	Member
Roodgine D. Bray	Attorney; Haitian American Lawyers Association of Georgia	Member
Leisa G. Blount	Judge, Probate Court of Dougherty County	Member
Sharon Edenfield	Attorney; State Bar of Georgia Young Lawyers Division	Member
Jana J. Edmondson-Cooper	Attorney; Georgia Commission on Interpreters	Member
Belinda Edwards	Judge, Atlanta Judicial Circuit	Member
Terrica Ganzy	Attorney; Georgia Association of Black Women Attorneys	Member
Mazie Lynn Guertin	Attorney; Executive Director, Georgia Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers	Member
William "Bill" Hamrick III	Judge, Georgia State-wide Business Court	Member
Tracy Johnson	Executive Director, Georgia Office of Dispute Resolution	Member
Kareemah Lewis	Attorney; Georgia Association for Women Lawyers	Member
Rashida Oliver	Judge, East Point Municipal Court	Member
Bryan C. Ramos	Judge, Brookhaven Municipal Court; Georgia Asian Pacific American Bar Assoc.	Member
Pierce Hand Seitz	Judge, Atlanta Municipal Court; Gate City Bar Association	Member
B. Shawn Rhodes	Judge, Probate/Magistrate Court Wilcox County	Member
Dr. William Simmons	6th District Court Administrator	Member
Kazuma Sonoda	Attorney; Georgia Hispanic Bar Association	Member
Jason Thompson	Judge, State Court of Fayette County	Member
Benjamin Torres	Attorney; Stonewall Bar Association	Member
Christopher Yokum	Judge, Juvenile Court Judge of Fulton County	Member

Advisory Members

Doug Ammar, Esq.	Alexandra Eichenbaum	Judge Cassandra Kirk	Rita Sheffey, Esq.
Ashley Clark, Esq.	Karlise Grier, Esq.	Anne Kirkhope, Esq.	
Clarence Cuthpert	Judge LaTisha Dear Jackson	Retired Judge Willie E. Lockette	
Judge Ingrid P. Driskell	Vicky Kimbrell, Esq.	Judge Brendan Murphy	

BUDGET

Staff to Committee: Peterson David and Andrew Zoll
Authorized and created by Supreme Court order

Mission:

The Budget Committee handles the initial review of Judicial Council, AOC, and all subprogram budgets and recommends continuation funding and enhancement requests to the Judicial Council for approval.

Name	Role	Position
Charlie Bethel	Justice, Supreme Court of Georgia	Chair
Sara L. Doyle	Judge, Court of Appeals of Georgia	Vice Chair
William "Bill" Hamrick III	Judge, Georgia State-wide Business Court	Member
Bert Guy	Judge, Brunswick Judicial Circuit; President-Elect, CSCJ	Member
Gregory V. Sapp	Chief Judge, State Court of Chatham County; President-Elect, CSJCJ	Member
Michelle Harrison,	Judge, Douglas County Juvenile Court; President-Elect, CJCJ	Member
Scott C. Chastain	Judge, Probate Court of Gilmer County; President-Elect, CPCJ	Member
Nathan Grantham	Chief Magistrate, Magistrate Court of Ware County; President-Elect, CMCJ	Member
Robert A. Cowan	Chief Judge, Dalton Municipal Court; President-Elect, CMuCJ	Member
Cynthia Clanton	Director, Judicial Council/Administrative Office of the Courts	Advisory Member
Shannon Weathers	Executive Director, CSCJ	Advisory Member
Bob Bray	Executive Director, CSJCJ	Advisory Member
Eric John	Executive Director, CJCJ	Advisory Member
Kevin Holder	Executive Director, CPCJ	Advisory Member
Sharon Reiss	Executive Director, CMAcJ	Advisory Member

COURT INTERPRETERS

Staff to Committee: Stephanie Hines, Malcolm Sinkfield, Carrie Scott, Esq.
Authorized and created by Supreme Court order

Mission:

To provide interpreter licensing and education services for Georgia courts to ensure the rights of non-English speaking persons in court and during any court-related events.

Name	Role	Position
Carla Wong McMillian	Justice, Supreme Court of Georgia	Chair
Jeffrey Watkins	Judge, Court of Appeals of Georgia	Vice Chair
Angie T. Davis	Clerk, Georgia State-wide Business Court	Member
Kellie Hill	Judge, Cobb Judicial Circuit	Member
C. Jean Bolin	Judge, State Court of McIntosh County	Member
Amber Patterson	Judge, Cobb County Juvenile Court	Member
Sandra Pak	Judge, Probate Court of Gwinnett County	Member
Norman Cuadra	Judge, Municipal Court, City of Suwanee	Member
Manchilo Guadic	Attorney, State Bar of Georgia representative	Member
Scott Holcomb	State Representative, District 82	Advisory Member
John Kennedy	State Senator, District 18	Advisory Member
Jana Edmondson-Cooper	Attorney	Advisory Member
Dax Lopez	Attorney	Advisory Member
Paul Panusky	Attorney	Advisory Member
Michelle Gonzales	Certified Court Interpreter	Advisory Member
Carola Lehmacher	Certified Court Interpreter	Advisory Member
Christopher Hansard	Court Administrator, Cobb County	Advisory Member

COURT REPORTING MATTERS

Staff to Committee: Stephanie Hines, Malcolm Sinkfield, Carrie Scott, Esq.
Authorized and created by Supreme Court order

Mission:

The Standing Committee on Court Reporting Matters acts on behalf of the Judicial Council in handling appeals from decisions of the Board of Court Reporting; reviews and recommends changes to court reporting rules and fee schedules; approves Board of Court Reporting opinions; and recommends candidates for Board of Court Reporting membership.

Name	Role	Position
Benjamin Land	Judge, Court of Appeals of Georgia	Chair
John K. Edwards, Jr.	Chief Judge, State Court of Lowndes County	Vice-Chair
William "Bill" Hamrick III	Judge, Georgia State-wide Business Court	Member
Robert McBurney	Judge, Atlanta Judicial Circuit	Member
J. Kelly Brooks	Judge, Waycross Judicial Circuit	Member
Jane Morrison	Judge, State Court of Fulton County	Member
Warner Kennon	Judge, Chattahoochee Judicial Circuit Juvenile Court	Member
Alison Toller	Judge, Northeastern Circuit Juvenile Court	Member
Kenya Johnson	Judge, Fulton County Probate Court	Member
Brandon Bryson	Chief Judge, Magistrate Court of Bartow County	Member
Matt McCord	Chief Judge, Stockbridge Municipal Court	Member
Carla McMillian	Justice, Supreme Court of Georgia	Advisory Member

GRANTS

Staff to Committee: Carole Griffith

Authorized and created by Supreme Court order

Mission:

The Standing Committee on Grants (Committee) awards the Civil Legal Assistance to Families Victimized by Domestic Violence Grant (Domestic Violence Grant), the Civil Legal Services to Kinship Care Families Grant (Kinship Care Grant), and the Civil Legal Assistance to Families of Indigent Patients (Medical-Legal Partnership Grant) annually. Established in 1999 as the Judicial Council Domestic Violence Committee, the Committee was originally charged with awarding the Domestic Violence Grant. In 2017, the Committee's charge was expanded, allowing the Committee to oversee additional grants. In 2019, the Committee awarded the first Kinship Care Grants, and in 2023, the Committee awarded the first Medical-Legal Partnership grants.

Name	Role	Position
Melanie B. Cross	Judge, Tifton Judicial Circuit	Chair
Arthur L. Smith, III	Chief Judge, Chattahoochee Judicial Circuit	Vice Chair
Anne Elizabeth Barnes	Judge, Court of Appeals of Georgia	Member
William "Bill" Hamrick III	Judge, Georgia State-wide Business Court	Member
Eric A. Richardson	Judge, State Court of Fulton County	Member
William P. Bartles	Judge, Flint Judicial Circuit Juvenile Court	Member
Melanie M. Bell	Judge, Probate Court of Newton County	Member
Cassandra Kirk	Chief Magistrate, Magistrate Court of Fulton County	Member
Graham McKinnon IV	Judge, Braselton Municipal Court	Member
Brian A. McDaniel	Judge, Southern Judicial Circuit	Member
Linda Klein	Attorney, State Bar Representative	Member
Amy Howell	Attorney, State Bar Representative	Member
April Ross	Director, Georgia Commission on Family Violence	Advisory Member
Jody Overcash	Court Administrator, Cherokee Superior, State, and Juvenile courts	Advisory Member

JUDICIAL SECURITY

Staff to Committee: Robby Lee
Authorized and created by Supreme Court order

Mission:

The Standing Committee on Judicial Security identifies and takes the steps necessary to protect the safety and security of Georgia's judiciary, both inside and outside the courthouse.

Name	Role	Position
Shawn Ellen LaGrua	Justice, Supreme Court of Georgia	Chair
Brian Rickman	Judge, Court of Appeals of Georgia	Vice Chair
Jeffrey S. Bagley	Chief Judge, Bell-Forsyth Judicial Circuit; CSCJ designee	Member
William "Bill" Hamrick III	Judge, State-wide Business Court	Member
R. Violet Bennett	Judge, State Court of Wayne County; CSJC designee	Member
Che Young	Judge, Macon Judicial Circuit Juvenile Court; CJJC designee	Member
Mike Hunsinger	Judge, Oconee County Probate Court; CPCJ designee	Member
Scott Lewis	Judge, Effingham County Magistrate Court; CMJC designee	Member
Matthew McCord	Chief Judge, Stockbridge Municipal Court; CMuJC designee	Member
Kathryn Powers	Attorney; State Bar of Georgia representative	Member
Josh Lamb	Office of the Governor designee	Advisory Member
Brad Vaughan	Legislative Director and Counsel, Office of the Lt. Governor designee	Advisory Member
Keith Williams	General Counsel, Office of the Speaker of the Georgia House designee	Advisory Member
Blair McGowan	Senior Assistant Attorney General, Georgia Department of Law designee	Advisory Member
Laura Pfister	General Counsel, Office of the Georgia Secretary of State designee	Advisory Member
Charles "Chuck" Welch	Government Transparency and Campaign Finance Commission designee	Advisory Member
Richard Hyde	Georgia Department of Public Safety appointee	Advisory Member
Chris Hosey	Director, Georgia Bureau of Investigation	Advisory Member
Samir Patel	District Attorney, Cherokee Judicial Circuit, PAC designee	Advisory Member
John "Bart" Stevens	United States Marshal Service appointee	Advisory Member
Brent Loeffler	Program Coordinator, Georgia Sheriff's Association designee	Advisory Member
Butch Ayers	Executive Director, Georgia Association of Chiefs of Police designee	Advisory Member
Stan Cooper	Director- Judicial Protective Services designee	Advisory Member
Scott Johnson	Association County Commissioners of Georgia designee	Advisory Member
Alison Earles	Associate General Counsel, Georgia Municipal Association designee	Advisory Member

JUDICIAL WORKLOAD ASSESSMENT

Staff to Committee: Stephanie Hines

Authorized and created by Supreme Court order

Mission:

The Judicial Workload Assessment Committee determines the methodology for analysis of data collected through annual trial court case counts. Additionally, based on staff studies, the Committee makes recommendations to the Judicial Council as to the need for additional judicial personnel.

Name	Role	Position
Robert D. Leonard	Judge, Cobb Judicial Circuit	Chair
Amanda Petty	Judge, Ocmulgee Judicial Circuit	Vice Chair
William “Bill” Hamrick III	Judge, Georgia State-wide Business Court	Member
Lisa Colbert	Judge, Eastern Judicial Circuit, 1st JAD	Member
Denise Marshall	Judge, Dougherty Judicial Circuit, 2nd JAD	Member
Jeffery Monroe	Judge, Macon Judicial Circuit, 3rd JAD	Member
LaTisha Dear Jackson	Judge, Stone Mountain Judicial Circuit, 4th JAD	Member
Thomas Cox	Judge, Atlanta Judicial Circuit, 5th JAD	Member
Scott Ballard	Judge, Griffin Judicial Circuit, 6th JAD	Member
Samir Patel	Judge, Cherokee Judicial Circuit, 7th JAD	Member
Alison Burleson	Chief Judge, Ocmulgee Judicial Circuit, 8th JAD	Member
Bonnie Oliver	Judge, Northeastern Judicial Circuit, 9th JAD	Member
Sheryl B. Jolly	Judge, Columbia Judicial Circuit, 10th JAD	Member
Michelle L.H. Helhoski	Judge, State Court of Cherokee County	Member
Christopher Willis	Judge, Atlanta Judicial Circuit Juvenile Court	Member
Stephanie Hewell	Judge, Probate Court of Elbert County	Member
Matthew McCoyd	Judge, DeKalb County Magistrate Court	Member
Joseph Huffman	Judge, Chatham County Recorder’s Court	Member
Will Simmons	District Court Administrator, 6th JAD	Advisor
Bob Nadekow	District Court Administrator, 8th JAD	Advisor
Connie Cheatham	Clerk, McDuffie County Superior Court	Advisor
April Garrett	Clerk, Cook County Superior Court	Advisor
Lelaine Briones	Deputy Director, Prosecuting Attorneys’ Council	Advisor
John Ellington	Justice, Supreme Court of Georgia	Advisor
Shawn Ellen LaGrua	Justice, Supreme Court of Georgia	Advisor
Trenton Brown	Vice Chief Judge, Court of Appeals of Georgia	Advisor
Christopher Hansard	Court Administrator, Cobb Superior Court	Advisor
David Emerson	Judge (ret.), Douglas Judicial Circuit	Advisor

LEGISLATION

Staff to Committee: Tracy Mason
Authorized and created by Supreme Court order

Mission:

The Legislation Committee reviews legislation affecting the judicial branch and recommends policy positions to the Judicial Council where appropriate.

Name	Role	Position
Nels S.D. Peterson	Presiding Justice, Supreme Court of Georgia	Chair
Amanda H. Mercier	Chief Judge, Court of Appeals of Georgia	Vice Chair
William “Bill” Hamrick III	Judge, Georgia State-wide Business Court	Member
Ann Harris	Chief Judge, Cobb Judicial Circuit; President, CSCJ	Member
Jeff Hanson	Judge, State Court of Bibb County; President, CStCJ	Member
Neal Brunt	Judge, Cherokee Circuit Juvenile Court; President, CJCJ	Member
Chris Ballar	Judge, Probate Court of Upson County; President, CPCJ	Member
Robert Wolf	Judge, Magistrate Court of Fulton County; President, CMCJ	Member
David C. Will	Chief Judge, Alpharetta Municipal Court; President, CMuCJ	Member
Robert “Bert” Guy	Judge, Brunswick Judicial Circuit; Legislative Chair, CSCJ	Advisory Member
Maria Golick	Judge, State Court of Cobb; Legislative Co-Chair, CStCJ	Advisory Member
Gregory V. Sapp	Chief Judge, State Court of Chatham; Legislative Co-Chair, CStCJ	Advisory Member
Render Heard	Judge, Tifton Judicial Circuit Juvenile Court; Legislative Chair, CJCJ	Advisory Member
Keith Wood	Judge, Probate Court of Dooly County; Legislative Chair, CPCJ	Advisory Member
Brendan F. Murphy	Chief Magistrate, Cobb County Magistrate Court; Legislative Chair, CMaCJ	Advisory Member
Brandon Bryson	Chief Magistrate, Bartow County Magistrate Court, Legislative Vice Chair, CMaCJ	Advisory Member
Charles Barrett	Judge, Duluth Municipal Court; Legislative Co-Chair, CMuCJ	Advisory Member
Tommy Bobbitt	Judge, Jeffersonville Municipal Court; Legislative Co-Chair, CMuCJ	Advisory Member
Cynthia Clanton	Director, Judicial Council/Administrative Office of the Courts	Advisory Member
Shannon Weathers	Executive Director, CSCJ	Advisory Member
Bob Bray	Executive Director, CStCJ	Advisory Member
Eric John	Executive Director, CJCJ	Advisory Member
Kevin Holder	Executive Director, CPCJ	Advisory Member
Sharon Reiss	Executive Director, CMaCJ	Advisory Member
Ivy Cadle	Attorney, President, State Bar of Georgia	Advisory Member

TECHNOLOGY

Staff to Committee: Kristy King
Authorized and created by Supreme Court order

Mission:

The Standing Committee on Technology provides guidance and oversight for the Judicial Council's technology initiatives.

Name	Role	Position
Shawn Ellen LaGrua	Justice, Supreme Court of Georgia	Co-Chair
Stephen Kelley	Judge, Brunswick Judicial Circuit	Co-Chair
William "Bill" Hamrick III	Judge, Georgia State-wide Business Court	Member
Diane E. Bessen	Judge, State Court of Fulton County	Member
Vincent Crawford	Judge, DeKalb County Juvenile Court	Member
Edith Haney	Judge, Probate Court of Carroll County	Member
James Altman	Judge, Magistrate Court of Fannin County	Member
Margaret Washburn	Chief Judge, Lawrenceville Municipal Court	Member
Stan Gunter	State Representative, District 8	Member
Bo Hatchett	State Senator, District 50	Member
Cynthia Parks McCaskill	Attorney	Member
ShaMiracle Rankin	Attorney	Member
T.J. BeMent	District Court Administrator, 10th JAD	Member
Ben Luke	Chief Technology Officer, Judicial Council/AOC	Member
Cindy Mason	Clerk, Columbia County Superior Court	Member
Wright Banks	Deputy Attorney General, Georgia Attorney General's Office	Member
Shelia Studdard	Clerk, Fayette County Superior Court	Member

Judicial Council of Georgia Ad Hoc Committees

The Judicial Council of Georgia establishes ad hoc committees to address the evolving and complex challenges facing the state's court system. Whether responding to global emergencies or assessing major shifts in technology and practice, these committees leverage the leadership, experience, and subject-matter expertise of the Council's Standing Committees while convening stakeholders from across Georgia to examine issues of statewide significance.

In Fiscal Year 2025, the Judicial Council launched the Ad Hoc Committee on Georgia Case Management System, a transformative initiative that will shape how courts manage cases and data, strengthen interagency coordination, and expand overall access to justice.

Over the same period, the Ad Hoc Committee on Artificial Intelligence and the Courts undertook a ten-month review of national and international best practices, engaged stakeholders across the justice system, and evaluated the potential implications of AI-driven tools on evidentiary standards, data security, judicial and attorney ethics, and access to justice. In June 2025, the Committee issued a comprehensive report outlining key opportunities and risks associated with artificial intelligence in the court system.

AMERICAN RESCUE PLAN ACT FUNDING (ARPA)

Staff to Committee: Tracy Mason and Shimike Dodson
Authorized and created by Supreme Court order

Mission:

The Ad Hoc Committee on American Rescue Plan Act Funding is responsible for soliciting, reviewing, and approving applications for eligible courts and judicial system stakeholders requesting the dissemination of federal American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 funds allocated to the Judicial Branch for eligible expenditures aimed at addressing backlogs of court cases, particularly cases involving serious violent felonies.

Georgia's ARPA Success Story

Governor Brian Kemp allocated \$96 million in American Rescue Plan Act funds to Georgia's judicial branch to make grants to courts for backlogs of court cases caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, prioritizing cases involving serious, violent felonies.

The ARPA Committee chaired by Chief Justice Michael Boggs and staffed by a multidisciplinary team from the Fiscal, Budget and Trial Liaison Divisions of the JC/AOC, has worked to process grant applications and distribute roughly half of the allocated funds to 46 out of 51 Judicial Circuits around the state.

The ARPA Program has been extended to December 30, 2026. The Committee and staff will continue to monitor that current spending stays on track and that opportunities for amended and new funding be available during the life of the program.

American Rescue Plan Act Funding (ARPA) continued

Name	Role	Position
Michael P. Boggs	Chief Justice, Supreme Court of Georgia	Chair (until 3/31/25)
Amanda H. Mercier	Chief Judge, Court of Appeals of Georgia	Chair (as of 3/31/25)
D. Jay Stewart	Judge, Atlantic Judicial Circuit, 1st JAD	Member
T. Craig Earnest	Chief Judge, Pataula Judicial Circuit, 2nd JAD	Member
Maureen Gottfried	Judge, Chattahoochee Judicial Circuit, 3rd JAD	Member
LaTisha Dear Jackson	Chief Judge, Stone Mountain Judicial Circuit, 4th JAD	Member (until 4/30/25)
Shondeana C. Morris	Chief Judge, Stone Mountain Judicial Circuit, 4th JAD	Member (as of 5/1/25)
Ural Glanville	Chief Judge, Atlanta Judicial Circuit, 5th JAD	Member
Thomas Wilson	Chief Judge, Towaliga Judicial Circuit, 6th JAD	Member
D. Scott Smith	Judge, Cherokee Judicial Circuit, 7th JAD	Member (until 4/30/25)
Jack Niedrach	Chief Judge, Rome Judicial Circuit, 7th JAD	Member (as of 5/1/25)
T. Christopher Hughes	Chief Judge, Cordele Judicial Circuit, 8th JAD	Member
Russell W. Smith	Chief Judge, Mountain Judicial Circuit, 9th JAD	Member (until 1/28/25)
R. Timothy Hamil	Chief Judge, Gwinnett Judicial Circuit, 9th JAD	Member (as of 2/7/25)
Sheryl B. Jolly	Chief Judge, Columbia Judicial Circuit, 10th JAD	Member
Peter J. Skandalakis	Executive Director, Prosecuting Attorneys' Council	Member

Advisory Members

Angie Davis	T.J. BeMent	LaQuetta Walker
Judge R. Violet Bennett	Robin S. Rooks	Maria Ceballos-Wallis
Judge Christopher Ballar	Bill Twomey	Omatayo Alli
Judge Scott Chastain	Alison Earles	Jason Sheffield
Judge Quinn M. Kasper	Kevin Jeselnik	Rep. Mary Margaret Oliver
Chief Judge David Will	J. Terry Norris	Sen. Brian Strickland
Ivy Cadle	Butch Ayers	Chris Hosey
Chief Judge Brenda S. Weaver	Grant Walraven	

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND THE COURTS

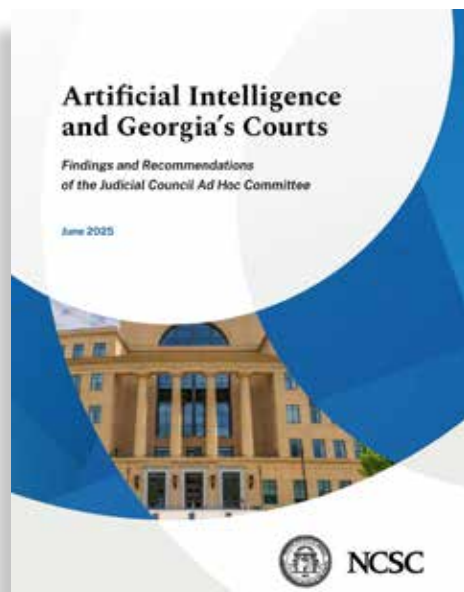
Staff to Committee: Robby Lee

Authorized and created by Supreme Court order

Mission:

The Ad Hoc Committee on AI and the Courts is responsible for assessing the risks and benefits of the use of generative AI on the courts and to make recommendations to ensure that the use of AI does not erode public trust and confidence in the judicial system.

Name	Role	Position
Andrew A. Pinson	Justice, Supreme Court of Georgia	Chair
Stephen D. Kelley	Judge, Brunswick Judicial Circuit	Vice-Chair
Elizabeth Gobeil	Judge, Court of Appeals of Georgia	Member
Brenda S. Weaver	Chief Judge, Appalachian Judicial Circuit; Accountability Court designee	Member
Robert McBurney	Judge, Atlanta Judicial Circuit, Court Reporting Matters Committee designee	Member
Jaletta Smith	Judge, State Court of Gwinnett County	Member
Jason Souther	Judge, Juvenile Court of Whitfield County	Member
Joshua Suggs	Judge, Probate Court of Miller County	Member
Tricia Hise	Judge, Magistrate Court of Habersham County	Member
Lindy Moody	Judge, Garden City Municipal Court	Member
Darrell Sutton	Attorney; State Bar of Georgia designee	Member
Angie T. Davis	Clerk, State-wide Business Court designee	Member
D'Andre Barry	Attorney; Public Defender Council designee	Member
Todd Hayes	Attorney; Prosecuting Attorneys' Council designee	Member
Bob Nadekow	District Court Administrator, Eighth Judicial Administrative District	Member
Shelia Studdard	Clerk, Fayette County Superior Court	Member



The Committee's report can be found at:

<https://www.gasupreme.us/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/Artificial-Intelligence-and-Georgia-Courts.pdf>



GEORGIA CASE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM (GA CMS)

Staff to Committee: Ben Luke and Sean Golan
Authorized and created by Supreme Court order

Mission:

The Ad Hoc Committee on the Georgia Case Management System is charged with guiding and overseeing the design, development, and implementation of a unified, secure, and user-centered statewide court case management platform.

Name	Role	Position
Robert Leonard	Judge, Cobb Judicial Circuit	Chair
Stephen D. Kelley	Judge, Brunswick Judicial Circuit	Member
Brenda Weaver	Chief Judge, Appalachian Judicial Circuit	Member
Russ McClelland	Chief Judge, State Court of Forsyth County	Member
Cindy Morris	Chief Judge, Conasauga Judicial Circuit	Member
Kevin Morris	Judge, Alcovy Judicial Circuit	Member
Radeta Smith	Clerk, Burke County Superior, State, and Juvenile Courts	Member
Sheila Studdard	Clerk, Fayette County Superior, State, and Magistrate Courts	Member
Herb Cranford	District Attorney, Coweta Judicial Circuit	Member
Shawnzia A. Thomas	Executive Director, Georgia Technology Authority	Member
Keith Perry	Chief Development Officer, Georgia Technology Authority	Member
Ben Luke	Chief Technology Officer, Judicial Council of Georgia/AOC	Member
Devin Cooper	Assistant Director of Information Technology, Judicial Council of Georgia/AOC	Member
Grace McGowan	District Court Administrator, 9th Judicial Administrative District	Member
T.J. BeMent	District Court Administrator, 10th Judicial Administrative District	Member
Christopher Hansard	Court Administrator, Superior Court of Cobb County	Member
Shannon Weathers	Executive Director, Council of Superior Court Judges	Member
Damon Elmore	Executive Director, State Bar of Georgia	Member



For project information, visit:
<https://cms.georgiacourts.gov/>



Connected Boards, Committees, Commissions, and Councils

BOARD OF COURT REPORTING

Staff to Committee: Stephanie Hines
Authorized and created by Supreme Court order

Mission:

The Board of Court Reporting of the Judicial Council of Georgia was established to license, create standard practices, discipline, and regulate the court reporting profession in Georgia. The Board of Court Reporting establishes and enforces standards that govern court reporters and provides a forum for exchanging ideas and educational services.

Name	Role	Position
Violet “Vi” Bennett	Judge, State Court of Wayne County	Chair
Kimberly Childs	Judge, Cobb Judicial Circuit	Member
Randi Strumlauf, CCR	Voice Writer Representative	Member
Debra H. Nagy, CCR	Voice Writer Representative	Member
Tina S. Roddenbery	State Bar of Georgia Representative	Member
Kate Cochran, CCR	Machine Shorthand Representative	Member
Daniel Gershwin, CCR	Machine Shorthand Representative	Member
Jennifer L. Pope, CCR	Machine Shorthand Representative	Member
Thomas “Tom” Herman	Attorney; State Bar of Georgia Representative	Member
Cynthia H. Clanton, Esq.	Director, Administrative Office of the Courts	Secretary

Roles and Responsibilities:

1. Establish rules and regulations that effectively carry out the provisions of the Georgia Court Reporting Act, see O.C.G.A. § 15-14-20.
2. Certify court reporters and court reporting firms.
3. Ensure the practice of court reporting in the courts of Georgia is an integral part of an effective judicial system.
4. Enforce the code of ethics and professional guidelines that govern the court reporting profession.
5. Provide a mechanism for training requirements.
6. Serve as a disciplinary Board.

COUNCIL OF ACCOUNTABILITY COURT JUDGES

Taylor Jones, Executive Director
<https://cacj.georgia.gov/>

Name	Role	Position
Brian A. McDaniel	Chief Judge, Southern Judicial Circuit, Superior Court	Chair
Thomas L. Cole	Presiding Judge, Eastern Judicial Circuit, Juvenile Court	Vice-Chair
Robert C. I. McBurney	Judge, Atlanta Judicial Circuit, Superior Court	Member
Maureen Gottfried	Judge, Chattahoochee Judicial Circuit, Superior Court	Member
Cynthia C. Adams	Chief Judge, Douglas Judicial Circuit, Superior Court	Member
Shana Rooks Malone	Judge, Clayton Judicial Circuit, Superior Court	Member
Jason J. Deal	Chief Judge, Northeastern Judicial Circuit, Superior Court	Member
Jason B. Thompson	Judge, Fayette County, State Court	Member
Jeremy Clough	Judge, Enotah Judicial Circuit, Juvenile Court	Member
Amber N. Patterson	Presiding Judge, Cobb Judicial Circuit, Juvenile Court	Member
Lawton E. Stephens	Judge, Western Judicial Circuit, Superior Courts	Immediate Past Chair

Mission:

To provide a unified framework that promotes and improves the quality, accessibility, and administration of accountability courts.

Highlights:

In FY 2025, there were 189 accountability courts serving 9,634 participants across the state. This is a 16% increase in participants over FY2024. Georgia’s accountability courts accepted 3,235 new participants in FY 2025.

Accountability court diversion savings are calculated by analyzing the number of participants served, alternative incarceration cost amounts, administrative costs, and operating grant expenditures. In FY 2025, the diversion savings across all court types totaled \$269,274,821. This is over a \$59 million increase from FY2024. The diversion savings for each accountability court participant served in FY 2025 was \$28,864. When considering operating grant expenditures and alternative incarceration costs, there is \$10.23 of diversion savings for every dollar invested in accountability courts. This is an increase of over \$2.27 of savings for every dollar invested compared to FY2024.

**Note: The diversion savings reflects calculations using FY 2025 expenditures and administrative costs. Future diversion savings calculations may differ.*

Vision:

Making accountability courts work for all Georgians.



Council of Accountability Court Judges continued

For FY 2025, the Funding Committee was able to award the courts \$31,030,808 in Fiscal Year Operating Grants. The Committee also awarded \$301,379 as part of the Enhancement and Innovative Grant opportunity and \$129,994 as part of the Accountability Court Law Enforcement Grant opportunity. Further for FY 2025, CACJ awarded \$668,000 as part of the Technology Grant opportunity and \$268,604 in Emergency Grants. Additionally, the Criminal Justice Coordinating Council allocated \$761,883 of the FY2022-FY2023 Byrne State Crisis Intervention Program for existing accountability courts to expand their capacity to support the implementation of peer support programming, which is a vital part of continuum of care for participants. CACJ received 13 applications and awarded \$577,552 to those courts that applied for funding: Appalachian Judicial Circuit Adult Felony Drug Court, Colquitt County Accountability Court, Lowndes County Accountability Court, Thomas County Accountability Court, Fayette County DUI/Drug Court & Veterans Treatment Court, Lookout Mountain Judicial Circuit Mental Health Court, Dawson County Treatment Court, Rome Judicial Circuit Mental Health Court, Rome/Floyd County Drug Court, Pataula Adult Felony Drug Court, Carroll County Family Treatment Court, Troup County Accountability Courts, and Brunswick Judicial Circuit Accountability Courts.

CACJ held its annual training conference from September 15-18, 2024 in Athens, Georgia. The conference was attended by 1,426 professionals, which makes it the largest accountability court training conference to date. Attendees had the opportunity to learn innovative ideas from their peers and gather information on the latest best practices from around

CACJ continues to offer a robust training calendar. Further training opportunities were provided through the new judge orientation, the treatment provider orientation, and a series of medication assisted treatment webinars. There were also 31 coordinators who were certified through the University of Georgia Carl Vinson Institute of Government (CVIOG) Certified Coordinator program. In addition to the 2024 annual training conference, other FY 2025 training included:

- Cognitive Behavioral Interventions – Family (CBI-F)
- Cognitive Behavioral Interventions – Substance Abuse Adult (CBI-SA)
- Moral Reconciliation Therapy (MRT)
- Moral Reconciliation Therapy (MRT) - Trauma
- Level of Service – Case Management Inventory User (LSCMI)
- New Coordinator Orientation
- Attorney Training
- Adult Drug Court Team Operational Tune-up
- Mental Health Court Team Refresher
- Prime Solutions
- Treatment Provider Refresher
- Evidence Based Training – Matrix Curriculum

CACJ's Standards and Certification Committee (SCC) met in February 2024 to review certification applications and waivers from 59 accountability courts including adult felony drug courts, adult mental health courts, veterans treatment courts, and family treatment courts. All reviewed courts were certified. Additionally, under the guidance of the SCC, 51 courts were peer reviewed. Ongoing technical assistance is being provided, as needed.



During FY 2025, CACJ engaged in multiple research projects.

- CACJ contracted with Applied Research Services to develop a data-driven expansion process to inform the growth and consolidation of new and existing courts. They also conducted an updated recidivism study with statewide, per court, and matched comparison group findings.
- CACJ contracted with CVIOG to estimate the economic impact of accountability court participants in each court type.
- CACJ partnered with Georgia State University (GSU) and Florida Atlantic University on a Health and Human Services grant to evaluate the impact of services on child welfare outcomes in six of Georgia’s family treatment courts.
- CACJ contributed to an academic paper titled “Are Accountability Courts in Georgia a Cost-Effective Public Health Policy Alternative?”.
- CACJ worked with CVIOG to study participant outcomes by demographics to determine if any demographic characteristics or combination of characteristics impact accountability court participant outcomes.

The Treatment Services team at CACJ was busy providing technical assistance throughout FY 2025. They conducted 27 treatment fidelity site visits and 13 medication for addiction treatment (MAT) best practice visits. Additionally, staff provided MAT training to two courts.

Model Courts

During the annual training conference, CACJ recognized the 2025 Model Veterans Treatment Courts and Family Treatment Courts. These courts will serve as model programs and learning sites for others until 2027.



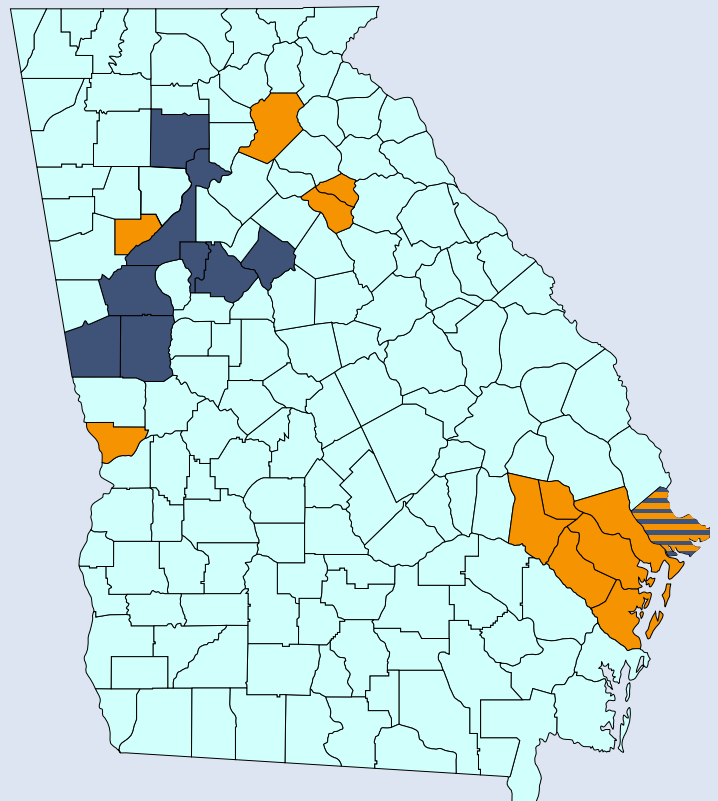
2025 Model Veterans Treatment Courts

- Appalachian Judicial Circuit Veterans Treatment Court
- Cherokee County Veterans Treatment Court
- Clayton County Veterans Treatment Court
- Coweta Judicial Circuit Veterans Treatment Court
- Fulton County Veterans Treatment Court
- Henry County Veterans Treatment Court
- Newton County Veterans Treatment Court
- Savannah-Chatham Drug Court with Veterans Division.



2025 Model Family Treatment Courts

- Atlantic Judicial Circuit Family Treatment Court
- Chatham County Anchor Court
- Coweta County Family Treatment Court
- Douglas County Family Treatment Court
- Hall County Family Treatment Court
- Muscogee County Family Drug Court
- Western Judicial Circuit Family Treatment Court



COMMISSION ON DISPUTE RESOLUTION

Tracy B. Johnson, Executive Director; Karlie A. Sahs, Deputy Director
<https://godr.org/>

Name	Role	Position
M. Cindy Morris	Chief Judge, Conasauga Judicial Circuit, Superior Courts	Chair
Carric B. Markham	Judge, Probate Court of Coweta County	Chair-Elect
John J. Ellington	Justice, Supreme Court of Georgia	Member
Sara L. Doyle	Judge, Court of Appeals of Georgia	Member
N. Staten Bitting Jr.	Attorney, Mediator	Member
Rebecca Crumrine Rieder	Attorney, Fmr. Judge, Atlanta Judicial Circuit, Superior Court	Member
Clarence Cuthpert Jr.	Judge, State Court of Rockdale County	Member
Mary Donovan, Esq.	Attorney, Mediator	Member
Herbert H. (Hal) Gray III	Attorney, Mediator/Arbitrator	Member
Melissa C. Heard	Mediator, Executive Director of Justice Center of Atlanta, Inc.	Member
Nicole W. Hull	Attorney, Mediator, ADR Trainer	Member
Quinn Kasper	Mediator, Part-time Judge, Cobb County, Magistrate Court	Member
Rob Leverett	Attorney, State Representative, District 33	Member
Patrick T. O'Connor	Attorney, Mediator	Member
Pandora E. Palmer	Judge, Flint Judicial Circuit, Superior Court	Member
Jack Partain	Mediator, Senior Judge, Conasauga Judicial Circuit, Superior Courts	Member
Vic Reynolds	Judge, Cobb Judicial Circuit, Superior Court	Member
Peggy Roth	Mediator	Member
Renata D. Turner	Judge, Atlanta Judicial Circuit, Juvenile Court	Member
Randall Weiland	Mediator, Program Director, Atlantic Judicial Circuit ADR Program & 1st Judicial District Court Administrator	Member
Peggy McCoy Wilson	Judge, Western Judicial Circuit, Superior Courts	Member

Mission:

The Georgia Commission on Dispute Resolution (GCDR) is a policy-making body appointed by the Supreme Court of Georgia, charged with helping to fulfill its constitutional mandate to “provide for the speedy, efficient, and inexpensive resolution of disputes and prosecutions” in the judiciary. The Commission does this by managing a statewide system that offers true and effective alternatives to traditional litigation. Those alternatives – mediation, non-binding arbitration, and case evaluation – give Georgia litigants lower-cost choices for resolving their differences, and they help save scarce court resources for those cases that cannot be resolved without a judge or jury.



Highlights:

There are currently 36 approved court programs (serving 111 counties) and approximately 3,000 registered neutrals (mediators, arbitrators, and evaluators). The Commission remains committed to improving justice by supporting high-quality dispute resolution services throughout Georgia's courts.

The 31st Annual ADR Institute was held on November 21, 2024, at the State Bar of Georgia Conference Center in Atlanta. Justice John J. Ellington delivered the welcoming remarks to the 555 registered attendees, with 170 attending in person and 385 viewing via livestream. The Eleventh Chief Justice Harold G. Clarke Award was presented to Eleanor Crosby Lanier, in recognition of her outstanding contributions to the field of alternative dispute resolution (ADR) in Georgia.



Executive Director Tracy Johnson, Chief Justice Harold G. Clarke Award recipient Eleanor Crosby Lanier, and Chief Judge M. Cindy Morris

The 2025 Court ADR Program Directors' Conference was held February 26-28, 2025, in Savannah. The conference agenda included sessions on effective communication strategies, ethics complaint management, and court ADR program evaluations, thus facilitating robust discussions on program administration, ethical considerations, data collection, and best practices in dispute resolution. The conference emphasized the importance of sustainable practices for program administration and highlighted peer engagement, providing an opportunity for program directors to exchange insights and strategies to strengthen ADR programs across the state. Takeaways from the conference will inform future training and support efforts.

The Commission assembled a Judicially Hosted Settlement Conference (JHSC) Working Group to develop a structured

framework for the JHSC in Georgia. The group will establish best practices, training guidelines, and program parameters for judges who facilitate settlement conferences. The working group will explore training requirements, procedural guidelines, and ethical considerations, while assessing how Judicially Hosted Settlement Conference can complement existing ADR processes to strengthen the efficiency of Georgia's statewide dispute resolution system. The working group's findings as well as recommendations will be presented to the GCDR for review, potentially pointing to the creation of a new neutral registration category.

The GCDR, through its Outreach Committee, has actively engaged in outreach efforts to underserved areas lacking formal court ADR programs. These efforts offer assistance and inform the courts about available resources, bridging the gap in access to mediation services and promoting statewide equitable access to dispute resolution.

In partnership with the Council of Probate Court Judges, the GCDR is proud to announce the publication of the Probate Mediation Handbook for Georgia Probate Courts. This handbook is the result of a multi-year initiative (2021–2024) to expand and support the use of mediation in probate matters. It provides comprehensive guidance for probate judges and court staff on identifying cases suitable for mediation, making referrals, selecting qualified mediators, and managing the mediation process from start to finish. It also includes practical tools such as checklists, sample orders and forms, participant information sheets, and ethical considerations specific to probate mediation. The handbook was developed through the dedicated efforts of a statewide working group of judges, attorneys, mediators, and court professionals.

Several membership changes were made to the Commission in FY25. Judge Carrie B. Markham was sworn in as Chair-Elect on August 14, 2024. The December 4, 2024, Commission meeting was held at the Mercer University School of Law, where outgoing members Mary S. Donovan, Esq., and Melissa C. Heard, M.S.S.W. were recognized as outgoing members. Ms. Donovan, former Dean of the Law School, served on GCDR since 2014. Ms. Heard served since 2009 and had chaired the Committee on Training & Credentials since 2010. In addition, Senior Judge Jack Partain, Judge Quinn Kasper, and Peggy Roth were sworn in by Justice Ellington as incoming members. The Commission is grateful for each outgoing members' contribution to dispute resolution in Georgia.

COMMITTEE ON JUSTICE FOR CHILDREN (J4C)

Diana Rugh Johnson, Court Improvement Program

<https://georgiacourts.gov/j4c/>

Name	Role	Position
Charles Bethel	Justice, Supreme Court of Georgia	Chair
Carolyn Altman	Judge, Paulding Judicial Circuit, Juvenile Courts	Member
Kim Anderson	CEO, Families First	Member
Mandi Ballinger	State Representative, District 23	Member
Candice Broce	Commissioner, Georgia Department of Human Services	Member
Emma Brown-Bernstein	Staff Attorney, Public Defender, Atlanta Judicial Circuit	Member
Jerry Bruce	Director, Office of the Child Advocate	Member
Neal Brunt	Judge, Cherokee Judicial Circuit, Juvenile Courts	Member
Lindsay H. Burton	Judge, Northeastern Judicial Circuit, Superior Courts	Member
Samantha Cannon	Clerk of Court, Muscogee County Juvenile Court	Member
Chris Carr	Attorney General, Georgia Office of the Attorney General	Member
Autumn Cavalleri	CQI Unit Manager, Georgia Department of Human Services	Member
Thomas Cole	Judge, Juvenile Court, Eastern Judicial Circuit	Member
Stephen L.A. Dillard	Judge, Court of Appeals of Georgia	Member
Louis Erste	State Schools Chief Policy Officer and Title IX Coordinator, GaDOE	Member
Laurie-Ann Fallon	SAAG, Barrow County Division of Family & Children Services (DFCS)	Member
Darice Good	Owner, Good Legal Firm, LLC	Member
Arleymah Gray	Director of Federal Plans, Georgia Division of Family & Children Services	Member
Britt Hammond	Judge, Toombs Judicial Circuit, Superior Courts	Member
Michelle Harrison	Judge, Douglas Judicial Circuit, Juvenile Courts,	Member
Render Heard Jr.	Judge, Tifton Judicial Circuit, Juvenile Courts	Member
Amanda Heath	Judge, Augusta Judicial Circuit, Superior Courts	Member
Emma Hetherington	Director, Wilbanks CEASE Clinic, UGA School of Law	Member
Warner Kennon	Judge, Chattahoochee Judicial Circuit, Juvenile Courts	Member
Michael Key	Senior Judge	Member
Jennifer King	Executive Director, Georgia CASA	Member
Glenene Lanier	Permanency Section Director, Georgia DFCS	Member
Juliana Lassiter	Parent with lived experience	Member

Mission:

To improve the efficiency and effectiveness of Georgia's juvenile courts through data-driven initiatives and implementation of best practices.

Name	Role	Position
Nealie McCormick	Chairman, Georgia Council on American Indian Concerns	Member
Mary Margaret Oliver	State Representative, District 82	Member
Amber Patterson	Judge, Juvenile Court, Cobb Judicial Circuit	Member
Chuck Payne	State Senator, District 54	Member
Jacqueline L. Payne	Managing Attorney, Kinship Care Project at Atlanta Legal Aid	Member
McCracken Poston	Judge, Lookout Mountain Circuit, Juvenile Courts	Member
Shawanda Reynolds-Cobb	Commissioner, Georgia Department of Juvenile Justice	Member
Freddie Powell Sims	QA/CQI Lead, Georgia DFCS	Member
Juanita Stedman	Executive Director, Together Georgia Judge	Member
Jennifer Stein	Executive Director, Prevent Child Abuse Georgia	Member
Anthony Reeves Stover	Youth Engagement Coordinator, Multi-Agency Alliance for Children	Member
Allison Toller	Judge, Northeastern Judicial Circuit, Juvenile Courts	Member
Michael Waller	Executive Director, Georgia Appleseed Center for Law and Justice	Member
Julie Walters	Training Lead, Georgia DFCS	Member
Danielle Whitaker	Judicial Staff Attorney, Fulton County Juvenile Court	Member
Maureen Wood	Judge, Rockdale Judicial Circuit, Juvenile Courts	Member

J4C, Georgia CASA, and the Office of the Child Advocate held their eighth annual statewide Child Welfare Summit on December 4 – 6, 2024. The Summit welcomed 500 in-person attendees including judges, attorneys, service providers, mental health professionals, law and social work professors, CASA staff and volunteers, non-profit directors, law enforcement, court clerks, probation officers, law students, foster parents, school social workers, and parents and youth with lived experience in the child welfare system. .

J4C supports judicial education by providing scholarships for Juvenile Court Judges to attend state and national conferences. Over the past 12 months, J4C has sent judges to the National Conference on Juvenile Justice, the Institute for New Juvenile and Family Court Judges, the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges Annual Conference, and the Georgia Child Welfare Summit. J4C also sponsors New Judge Orientation, which is part of the Council of Juvenile Court Judges’ fall conference in October with a follow-up session offered as a preconference event at the Child Welfare Summit in December. J4C provides new Juvenile Court Judges with resources and written materials including Child Welfare Law & Practice published by the National Association of Counsel for Children, and Reasonable Efforts: A Judicial Perspective published by the Nation-

al Association of Counsel for Children.

J4C sponsors the Justice P. Harris Hines Awards for outstanding advocacy for children in dependency proceedings. Justice Bethel presented the 2025 Hines Awards at the State Bar Annual Meeting in June to attorney Ashley Stinson of the Gwinnett County Juvenile Court and permanency supervisor Quandula M. Wright of the Worth County Division of Family and Children Services.

Georgia now has 72 attorneys and 14 judges who are certified Child Welfare Law Specialists (CWLS). J4C supports recruitment and retention of CWLSs through financial assistance with application fees as well as renewal and recertification costs.



L to R: Quandula M. Wright, Justice Charlie Bethel, and Ashley Stinson

CRIMINAL CASE DATA EXCHANGE BOARD (CDX)

Commission Staff: Amber Range, Kriste Pope
<https://jcaoc.georgiacourts.gov/entity/cdx/>

Name	Role	Position
Pete Skandalakis	Executive Director, Prosecuting Attorneys' Council	Chair
Greg Allen	Superior Court Clerk, Forsyth County; Governor Appointee	Member
Butch Ayers	Executive Director, Georgia Association of Chiefs of Police	Member
Chris Barnett	Deputy Director, State Board of Pardons & Paroles, designee	Member
Bob Bray	Executive Director, Council of State Court Judges	Member
Marie Broder	District Attorney, Griffin Judicial Circuit; Governor Appointee	Member
Joseph Cushner	Judge, State Court of Bulloch County; Governor Appointee	Member
Richard Dunn	Director, Office of Planning and Budget	Member
Evan Gross	Executive Director, Council of Superior Court Clerks	Member
Chris Hosey	Director, Georgia Bureau of Investigation	Member
Pat Labat	Sheriff, Fulton County; Governor Appointee	Member
Ben Luke	Chief Technology Officer, Judicial Council of Georgia/AOC, designee	Member
Terry Norris	Executive Director, Georgia Sheriffs' Association	Member
Wade Padgett	Judge, Court of Appeals of Georgia; Governor Appointee	Member
Phil Sellers	Chief Information Officer, Department of Community Supervision, designee	Member
Shawnzia Thomas	Chief Information Officer, Georgia Technology Authority	Member
Rob Thrower	Legislative Liaison, Department of Corrections, designee	Member
Shannon Weathers	Executive Director, Council of Superior Court Judges	Member
Gary Yandura	Police Chief (ret.), City of Brookhaven; Governor Appointee	Member

Mission:

The CDX Board is charged with developing uniform standards for the initiation and transmission of electronic criminal history data among law enforcement, prosecution, and all levels of court. Its primary objective is to improve the quality, timeliness, and completeness of charge records entered into the Computerized Criminal History (CCH) database maintained by the Georgia Crime Information Center (GCIC).

The Board unites stakeholders across Georgia's justice system including sheriffs, police, prosecutors, defense attorneys, judges, clerks, corrections, parole, and technology partners to streamline processes, reduce duplication, and ensure accurate and timely reporting.

Since its reconstitution in 2022, the CDX Board has:

- Adopted the Uniform Standards for the Creation and Transmission of Electronic Criminal History Data (2023).
- Published the Guidelines and Best Practices for Criminal Data Exchange in Georgia (2024).
- Partnered with GCIC, the Criminal Justice Coordinating Council (CJCC), and the Department of Driver Services (DDS) to align reporting processes statewide.
- Reduced duplicate records and open charge dispositions, particularly in larger jurisdictions.
- Launched training initiatives for clerks, judges, prosecutors, and law enforcement to promote compliance and accuracy.

Work of the Past Year:

Standards and Policy Updates

- Advanced a collaboration between GCIC and the Department of Community Supervision (DCS) to enable field officers to verify probation status directly.
- Adopted refinements to statewide standards, incorporating feedback from sheriffs and other stakeholders.
- Supervision (DCS) to enable field officers to verify probation status directly.

Training and Education

- Transitioned from live sessions to role-specific video training modules. Script development is underway, supported by the Judicial Council/AOC and the Georgia Sheriffs' Association.
- Conducted live regional training for municipal, probate, magistrate, and juvenile clerks with strong statewide participation and positive feedback.

Data Integrity and Error Reduction

- GCIC implemented automatic closure of expired Failure-to-Appear (FTA) charges, resolving over 138,000 legacy cases statewide.
- The State Board of Pardons and Paroles closed 20,000 open arrest records by December 2024 and expanded its disposition team, clearing 36,754 records by March 2025, with a goal of 50,000 by mid-2025.
- These coordinated actions have significantly reduced the backlog of unresolved records and improved the reliability of Georgia's criminal history data.

Metrics and Reporting

- GCIC developed prototype reporting tools to track submission rates, error rejections, and timeliness.
- The Judicial Council/AOC IT Division in partnership with GCIC is converting these tools into interactive dashboards to provide statewide visibility into compliance and data quality.

GEORGIA CHILD SUPPORT COMMISSION

Commission Staff: Kurt Bryan, JoAnna Deering, Esq., and Lazzaro Quintanilla
 Created by O.C.G.A. § § 19-6-50 et seq., staffed by JC/AOC through interagency agreement with DHS
<https://csc.georgiacourts.gov/>

Name	Role	Position
R. Michael Key	Senior Judge, Juvenile Court of Troup County	Chair
Chuck Clay	Attorney	Member
Lisa G. Colbert	Judge, Superior Court for the Eastern Judicial Circuit	Member
Kathleen B. Connell	Attorney	Member
Chuck Efstration	State Representative, District 104	Member
Houston Gaines	State Representative, District 120	Member
Emanuel Jones	State Senator, District 10	Member
Lisa Jones	Judge, Juvenile Court, Southwestern Judicial Circuit	Member
Benjamin Land	Judge, Court of Appeals of Georgia	Member
Emory Palmer	Judge, Superior Court for the Coweta Judicial Circuit	Member
Regina Quick	General Counsel, Georgia DHS	Member
Christina L. Scott	Mediator	Member
Brian Strickland	State Senator, District 17	Member
Roger C. Tutterow	Economist, Kennesaw State University	Member
Connie L. Williford	Judge, Superior Court for the Macon Judicial Circuit	Member

Mission:

The Child Support Commission was created by statute for the purpose of collecting information and studying data related to awards of child support and to create and revise the Basic Child Support Obligation Table. To maintain effective and efficient child support guidelines that will serve the best interest of Georgia's children, the Commission conducts comprehensive reviews of the Child Support Guidelines (O.C.G.A. 19-6-15) and economic conditions while bearing in mind the changing dynamics of family life and all other relevant matters. The Child Support Commission is also responsible for developing and maintaining the state's child support calculator and proposing legislation when it deems an amendment to the guidelines statute is necessary. Commission staff offers training to judges, judicial staff, attorneys, mediators, staff of the Division of Child Support Services (DCSS), and the public on the child support guidelines and best practices for using the child support calculator; maintains websites for the Child Support Commission and for Georgia's income withholding order process in private child support actions; and coordinates meetings for the Commission in compliance with the Commission's bylaws and the Open Meetings Act.

During the 2024 Legislative Session, the Child Support Commission proposed legislation to modernize and update Georgia's child support guidelines (O.C.G.A. 19-6-15). Senate Bill 454 was carried in the Senate by Commission members, Sen. Brian Strickland and Sen. Emmanuel Jones, and in the House by Commission member, Rep. Houston Gaines. Senate Bill 454 passed the General Assembly and was signed by the Governor on May 6, 2024. This bill updates several aspects of the statute, including Georgia's Basic Child Support Obligation Table, as recommended by the economist who conducted the Commission's 2022 Economic Study. The updated Basic Child Support Obligation Table was successfully updated within the child support calculator on July 1, 2024. This bill also added a new Veterans Affairs disability credit, also effective July 1, 2024. In addition, SB 454 updates the statute to replace the parenting time deviation and the low-income deviation with a parenting time adjustment and a low-income adjustment, effective January 1, 2026.

The work of the Georgia Child Support Commission is available to the public and can be found at <https://csc.georgiacourts.gov/>. The Commission develops and maintains a child support calculator based on Georgia's child support guidelines statute, O.C.G.A. § 19-6-15. The calculator may be accessed by visiting <https://csconlinecalc.gem:giacourts.gov/frontend/web/index.php>. The calculator is supported and security is maintained by the Judicial Council, Administrative Office of the Courts, Information Technology Division. The AOC also maintains a website for information on Georgia's private Income Withholding Order process at <https://jgeorgiacourts.gov/iwo/>.

Courts, attorneys, mediators, and the public alike use the calculator deployed on August 8, 2016. (The original calculators, web-based and Excel, were initially deployed at the end of December 2006.) Every Excel version of the child support calculator was permanently retired on October 1, 2018. Staff continues to provide virtual training to court personnel, attorneys, mediators, DCSS, and the public on a routine basis. Trainings include, but are not limited to, using the child support calculator generally, the low-income deviation, steps to impute income, and how to avoid common mistakes identified in the 2022 case sampling. Online training is going well, and all sessions have been well attended. Staff has prepared training videos that are available on demand on the Child Support Commission website at <https://csc.georgiacourts.gov/training/>. The Child Support Commission staff also presented at the successful ADR Institute hosted by the Georgia Commission on Dispute Resolution on November 21, 2024.

Four Commission members were sworn in for additional terms during the 2025 fiscal year, Representative Chuck Efstoration, Representative Houston Gaines, Senator Brian Strickland, and Senator Emanuel Jones. We are grateful to them for their continued service to Georgia's child support system. Longtime Judicial Council/AOC staffer, Noelle Lagueux-Alvarez, who served as Staff Attorney to the Commission, was promoted to CCFC Division Director in June, 2025. JoAnna Deering has assumed the role of Staff Attorney to the Commission and brings with her over 30 years of legal experience.



Left: Child Support staff member presenting on parenting time issues in the Conasauga Judicial Circuit. **Right:** Staff members Kurt Bryan and Lazarro Quintanilla met with Judge Dean Buccini in Paulding after court observation.

INSTITUTE OF CONTINUING JUDICIAL EDUCATION OF GEORGIA (ICJE)

Lynne Moore Nelson, Esq. Executive Director
 Established by Order of the Supreme Court of Georgia
<https://icje.law.uga.edu/>

Name	Role	Representing
Judge Megan Kinsey	Chair	Magistrate Courts
Judge Matthew McCord	Vice-Chair	Municipal Courts
Kyemeshia T. Gibson	Secretary/Treasurer	Superior Court Clerks
Judge William P. Bartles, Ret.	Immediate Past Chair	N/A
Justice Verda M. Colvin	Liaison Member	Supreme Court Liaison
Judge Christy J. Anderson	Member	Probate Courts
Dean Courtney Anderson	Ex-Officio Member	Georgia State University College of Law
Judge Alison T. Burlison	Member	Superior Courts
Cynthia H. Clanton, Director	Member	Judicial Council of Georgia
Dean Martin Ellin	Ex-Officio Member	Atlanta’s John Marshall Law School
Dean Richard D. Freer	Ex-Officio Member	Emory University School of Law
Judge Elizabeth Gobeil	Member	Court of Appeals
Judge Warner L. Kennon, Sr.	Member	Juvenile Courts
Brad Marsh, Esq.	Member	State Bar of Georgia
Judge A. Gregory Poole	Member	Superior Courts
Dean Usha R. Rodrigues	Ex-Officio Member	University of Georgia School of Law
Judge Allison Barnes Salter	Member	State Courts
Dean Karen J. Sneddon	Ex-Officio Member	Mercer University School of Law

Mission:

The Institute of Continuing Judicial Education of Georgia (“ICJE”), established in 1978 by Order of the Supreme Court of Georgia, provides continued education and training since its founding and is a professional education consortium of the Georgia Judicial Branch, the State Bar of Georgia, and Georgia’s ABA-accredited law schools: Emory University School of Law; Georgia State University College of Law; Mercer University School of Law; the University of Georgia School of Law; and, Atlanta’s John Marshall Law School. ICJE’s mission is to provide professional development and judicial information services to Georgia judges and court personnel so they are prepared to provide timely, fair, and impartial court services to the public.

FY 2025 ICJE at a Glance

Number of Class of Courts Served	15 – ICJE serves Georgia’s trial-level classes of court and international judges
No. of Learners Served	4,868 learners received 634 hours of continued education for a total of 72,199 continuing educational units
Trainings Delivered	45 trainings delivered <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 30 in-person synchronous trainings • 12 online synchronous trainings • 3 asynchronous taped replay trainings • 105 days of training and support provided
Days of Training	ICJE provided 105 days of programming, which represented 40% of the business days in the 2025 scheduled training
ICJE Operations	ICJE has a modest staff of 8 dedicated professionals tasked with supporting over 4,800 learners at a ratio of 1 staff member per 608 constituents

Highlights:

In Fiscal Year 2025, ICJE reached 4,868 learners with innovative, accessible training – strengthening Georgia’s judiciary and supporting courts statewide.

To make participation more accessible, we completed our “training venue menu” to guide future site selection. We launched the 2025 registration with online registration for credit card payments and paper registration for check payments. Looking ahead to FY26, we will expand online registration to allow all learners to pay by either credit card or check—streamlining the process for everyone and encouraging usage of the improved online registration software program and avoiding postal service delays.

Innovations in Training Delivery

We encouraged greater instructor–learner engagement through live online polling, giving participants more opportunities to contribute during classes. Programming also expanded to include Municipal Court Judges’ New Judges Orientation and Probate Court Judges’ Certificate Ethics Training. Additionally, we introduced and offered the Judges’ Training Academy, led by Court of Appeals Judge J. Wade Padgett and retired Superior Court Judge Tain Kell, both live and via taped replay—expanding reach and flexibility for the multi-class of court judicial learners.

Expanded Training Locations

To serve learners across the state, we added new training venues, including the Thompson Hotel in Savannah, the UGA Terry College of Business, and the UGA Tifton Campus Conference Center.

Program Improvements & Policy Updates

We simplified post-training surveys to increase response rates and met our goal for each judicial class of court to have access to at least one national instructor—either in person or online via our multi-class of court offerings. The ICJE Board of Trustees also adopted a refreshed no-show policy with a three-tier escalation system to encourage commitment and reduce repeat no-shows for both online and in-person trainings.

Board Growth & Team Development

We were honored to welcome Walker County Probate Court Judge Christy Anderson and UGA School of Law Dean Usha Rodrigues to the ICJE Board of Trustees. Our team also grew with the addition of Event Planner Virginia Kerrigan, who has already brought valuable expertise to our operations.

ICJE staff continued their own professional learning to better serve our learners. Event Coordinators Laura Kathryn Hogan and Annelle Berry attended the 2024 National Association of State Judicial Educators (NASJE) conference in Tempe, Arizona, and Executive Director Lynne Moore Nelson and Event Coordinator Susan Blount earned Event Planning and Meeting Management certification from the University of Georgia.

Looking Ahead to FY26

We are excited to introduce a new, curated training program: Judicial Financial Management: Ethics, Accountability, and Fiscal Responsibility. This comprehensive course will emphasize accountability, transparency, and the critical role of ethical decision-making in managing public funds and court-related finances.

As we close out FY25, we are deeply grateful to our instructors, learners, supporters, and partners who make this work possible. Together, we are building a stronger, more connected judicial community – ready to meet the challenges of the future.



1. Probate Court Judge Patty Laine (Hall County) leading class at the Probate Court Clerks’ Annual Training at UGA Tifton Campus Conference Center. 2. Superior Court Judges’ 2024 NJO class with instructors Court of Appeals Judge J. Wade Padgett, retired Superior Court Judge Tain Kell, and Superior Court Judge Alison Burleson (front row center). 3. Learners attending the Magistrate Court Clerk Annual Training at Sea Palms

Reports from Appellate Courts and Trial Court Councils

SUPREME COURT OF GEORGIA

<https://www.gasupreme.us/>

Fiscal year 2025 saw steady operations despite changes to the Supreme Court of Georgia and growth in case intake. It also ushered in the results of focused and thoughtful work by study committees made up of representatives from all classes of state courts aimed at narrowing Georgia’s civil justice gap and ensuring that the ever-growing prevalence of artificial intelligence does not impede the swift and fair delivery of justice in Georgia.

WORK LOAD

The Supreme Court took in more than 1,490 new cases—including direct and cross appeals, petitions for certiorari, discretionary and interlocutory appeals, death penalty habeas cases, and lawyer disciplinary matters—between July 2024 and June 2025. New filings reflected growth in petitions for certiorari—up 9 percent from the previous year—and direct and cross appeals—up 27 percent. The Court effectuated roughly 1,400 dispositions, fulfilling its constitutional mandate to decide cases within two terms—or in about six to eight months. The Court also issued 286 published opinions, representing a 16 percent increase from the previous fiscal year.

The Court heard oral arguments in 64 cases, including two at Georgia State University’s College of Law (November 2024), three at the University of Georgia School of Law (February 2025), and three at the Booth Western Art Museum in Cartersville (March 2025)—the hometown of legal trailblazer and former Chief Justice Robert Benham.



CHANGES TO THE BENCH

The Court bid farewell to former Chief Justice Michael P. Boggs at the end of March 2025. He returned to private practice after 25 years in elected office and more than two decades of service as a judge at various levels of state court. In his third and last State of the Judiciary address, the former Chief Justice touched on initiatives to increase access to legal services and improve the administration of justice, as well as the importance of an independent judiciary in preserving the rule of law.

The remaining Justices unanimously selected then-Presiding Judge Nels S.D. Peterson to become the next Chief Justice and Justice Sarah Hawkins Warren to step into the role of Presiding Justice. They were sworn into their four-year leadership terms during an investiture ceremony at the State Capitol in April 2025.

The Court also welcomed its newest member, Justice Benjamin A. Land, who was sworn in by Gov. Brian Kemp on July 24, 2025. The governor administered the oath of office in the North Wing of the State Capitol, and Justice’s brother, U.S. District Court Judge Clay D. Land of the Middle District of Georgia, offered introductory remarks.



Above: The Investiture of Chief Justice Peterson and Presiding Justice Warren, and the swearing-in of Justice Land (pictured bottom right).

Left panel, clockwise from top left: The Court hearing oral arguments at GSU College of Law, Cartersville’s Booth Western Art Museum, and UGA School of Law.



Front row: Justices John J. Ellington, Sarah Hawkins Warren, Nels S.D. Peterson, and Charlie Bethel.
Second Row: Justices Andrew A. Pinson, Shawn Ellen LaGrua, Carla Wong McMillian, Verda M. Colvin, and Benjamin A. Land.

REGULATORY REFORM AND AI

Both the Supreme Court of Georgia's Study Committee on Legal Regulatory Reform (led by Justice Carla Wong McMillian) and the Judicial Council of Georgia Ad Hoc Committee on Artificial Intelligence and the Courts (led by Justice Andrew A. Pinson) submitted their reports at the end of June 2025.

The regulatory reform committee, established in August 2024, was tasked with examining the Court's regulation of the practice of law and ways that changes in regulatory practices might help address the state's civil justice gap, which prevents many rural or low-income residents from accessing legal representation in non-criminal matters. The committee's members included judges from various classes of courts along with attorneys from diverse practice areas.



Reports from the Georgia Supreme Court Study Committee on Legal Regulatory Reform and the Judicial Council Ad Hoc Committee on Artificial Intelligence and the Courts. Both reports are available at:
<https://www.gasupreme.us/committee-reports/>

Also formed in August 2024, the ad hoc AI committee was charged with assessing the risks and benefits associated with the use of Generative AI in the courts and making recommendations to help maintain public trust and confidence in the judicial system as the use of AI increases. The committee's principal focus was on court rules and procedures related to that issue. And in coordination with the Supreme Court, the State Bar of Georgia also established a committee to review how AI impacts the Georgia Rules of Professional Conduct and other practice-of-law-related matters involving AI.

OTHER ANNOUNCEMENTS

Former Chief Justice Harold D. Melton's portrait was unveiled to the public and received by the Court in January 2025, with former Chief Justice David E. Nahmias's portrait becoming the latest addition to the collection in August 2025. Both portraits were painted by Georgia artist Suzanne Royal.



Portrait unveilings for former Chief Justices Melton (left) and Nahmias.

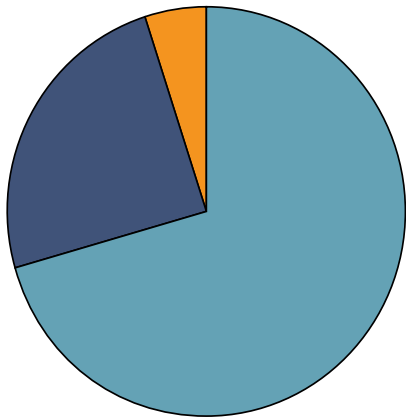
COURT OF APPEALS OF GEORGIA

<https://www.gaappeals.gov/>

MISSION:

Sitting in five three-judge panels, the Court of Appeals handles the majority of appeals in Georgia. The Court is responsible for assuring that the rule of law applies equally to all appeals and that they are resolved correctly and promptly. As an appellate court with statewide jurisdiction, the Court of Appeals shares responsibility with the Supreme Court for producing a clear and consistent body of case law that can be relied upon throughout the state.

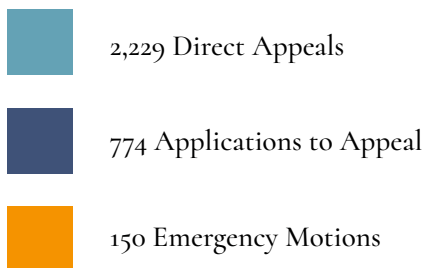
FY2025 COURT OF APPEALS BY THE NUMBERS



More than 78 written opinions per Judge.

Each Judge was assigned more than 148 direct appeals and reviewed more than 296 additional appeals assigned to other judges.

3,153 New Cases



OFFSITE ORAL ARGUMENTS

In FY2025, the Court of Appeals continued its program of outreach to Georgia citizens with five offsite oral argument sessions. Judges heard arguments in these locations:

Piedmont University, August 29, 2024
 Presiding Judge Christopher J. McFadden
 Chief Judge Amanda H. Mercier
 Judge Brian M. Rickman

Georgia College and State University, September 18, 2024
 Presiding Judge Stephen Louis A. Dillard
 Vice Chief Judge Trenton Brown
 Judge J. Wade Padgett

Cobb County Courthouse, October 4, 2024
 Presiding Judge M. Yvette Miller
 Judge Todd Markle
 Judge Benjamin A. Land

Chatham County Commission Chamber, Savannah, April 24, 2025
 Presiding Judge Brian M. Rickman
 Judge Elizabeth D. Gobeil
 Judge Jeffrey R. Davis

Elbert County Historical Courthouse, May 1, 2025
 Presiding Judge Christopher J. McFadden
 Judge Kenneth Bryant Hodges, III
 Judge Trea Pipkin



Piedmont University students and professors welcomed Division 5, who heard oral arguments on campus in August 2024. L to R: Judge Brian Rickman, Presiding Judge Christopher McFadden, and Chief Judge Amanda Mercier. (photo credit: Grace Wills)



Seated left to right: Presiding Judge Christopher J. McFadden, Presiding Judge Sara L. Doyle, Presiding Judge Anne Elizabeth Barnes, Chief Judge Amanda H. Mercier (July 1, 2023 - June 30, 2025), Presiding Judge M. Yvette Miller (ret. December 2024), Presiding Judge Stephen Louis A. Dillard, and Presiding Judge Brian M. Rickman. Standing left to right: Judge Jeffrey A. Watkins, Judge Trea Pipkin, Judge Todd Markle, Vice Chief Judge Trenton Brown, Judge Elizabeth D. Gobeil, Judge Kenneth B. Hodges, III, Judge Benjamin Land (appointed to the Supreme Court of Ga. in July 2025), and Senior Judge C. Andrew Fuller.

FY2025 COURT OF APPEALS BY THE NUMBERS

Over 600 attorneys were admitted to practice before the Court of Appeals of Georgia in FY2025. In November, the Court coordinated with various law schools to assist in admitting over 200 attorneys to practice in the Court: Atlanta John Marshall Law School, Emory University School of Law, and Georgia State University College of Law.

SUMMER INTERN ENGAGEMENT PROGRAM

Judge Elizabeth D. Gobeil successfully completed her fourth annual Summer Intern Engagement Program, an enrichment program for appellate court interns, externs, and term clerks. This endeavor was a collaboration among the judges of the Court of Appeals, the justices of the Supreme Court of Georgia, the State-wide Business Court, the Attorney General's Office, Phillips State Prison, Fulton County courts, and the Young Lawyers Division of the State Bar to provide learning and networking opportunities for law students and recent graduates.



Appellate interns participating in the Summer Intern Engagement Program enjoyed an interactive judges' panel where the judges shared anecdotes from their professional careers, emphasizing the importance of kindness, integrity, and building a good reputation. L to R: Presiding Judge Christopher J. McFadden, Judge Trea Pipkin, Judge Jeffrey Davis, Judge Elizabeth D. Gobeil and Presiding Judge Sara L. Doyle.



Left: Judge J. Wade Padgett assumed office in April 2024. Right: Judge Jeffrey R. Davis assumed office in January 2025.

APPELLATE PRACTICE WORKSHOP

Presiding Judge Christopher J. McFadden hosted the inaugural Appellate Practice Workshop on April 2-3, allowing lawyers the opportunity to hone their appellate writing and advocacy skills. Among those serving on the judging panels were Presiding Judge Doyle, Presiding Judge Rickman, Judge Gobeil, Judge Pipkin, Judge Watkins, Judge Padgett, and many other judges from metro area courts.



The Appellate Practice Workshop participants heard from Judge Neera Bahl, Director at the State Board of Workers' Compensation, Chief Justice David K. Thomson of the Supreme Court of New Mexico, and Court of Appeals Judges L to R: Presiding Judge Sara Doyle, Presiding Judge Christopher McFadden, and Presiding Judge Anne Elizabeth Barnes.

Court of Appeals of Georgia continued

OTHER ANNOUNCEMENTS

On January 1, 2025, the Court officially welcomed Judge Jeffrey R. Davis to the bench. Judge Davis was elected in a statewide nonpartisan election to fill the seat vacated by Presiding Judge Miller.



Judge Jeffrey R. Davis beside his wife and family while being sworn in to the Court by Chief Judge Amanda H. Mercier.

Effective July 1, 2025, Judge Trenton Brown began his two-year term as Chief Judge of the Court of Appeals of Georgia. He and Judge Elizabeth Gobeil were unanimously elected by their peers to serve as Chief Judge and Vice Chief Judge. The Chief Judge of the Court of Appeals is responsible for the administration of the Court and serves as the Court’s spokesperson. The Vice Chief Judge serves in the Chief Judge’s absence and undertakes a variety of duties at the Court.

RETIREMENT

Presiding Judge M. Yvette Miller’s retirement celebration took place on October 24, honoring her 25 years of service to the Court of Appeals of Georgia. Presiding Judge Anne Elizabeth Barnes, Justice John Ellington, former Justice Leah Ward Sears, and prominent attorneys Harold Franklin and Stephanie Parker spoke to Presiding Judge Miller’s trailblazing career.



The Honorable M. Yvette Miller addressing her guests during the retirement ceremony held to commemorate her achievements and service to the citizens of the state of Georgia. (photo credit: Presiding Judge Stephen Louis A. Dillard)



2025 Hugh Lawson Moot Court Competition held at Mercer University School of Law. L to R: Doc Schneider, Presiding Judge Stephen Louis A. Dillard, champion Taylah Cash, '24 champion Talia Levine, and Judge Todd Markle. (photo credit: Mercer University)



Judge J. Wade Padgett speaks on professionalism and the Lawyer’s Creed during the State Bar of Georgia’s Annual Meeting.

GEORGIA STATE-WIDE BUSINESS COURT

MISSION:

To lower costs, improve the efficiency of all courts, and promote predictability of judicial outcomes in certain complex business disputes for the benefit of all citizens of this state.

OVERVIEW

The State-wide Business Court has jurisdiction over claims involving the Uniform Commercial Code, the Georgia Uniform Securities Act, the Georgia Business Corporation Code, Georgia Trade Securities Act, and other business disputes. The court also has supplemental jurisdiction over all related pending claims. Absent equity jurisdiction, the court’s jurisdiction is limited to claims greater than \$500,000—except for commercial real estate, which will be limited to claims greater than \$1 million. The cost to file a case in the court is \$3,000. For the same fee, qualifying cases may be transferred from state courts to the court with the consent of the parties.

BY THE NUMBERS

The numbers below reflect the State-wide Business Courts docket since it began accepting cases on August 1, 2020 through Fiscal Year 2025 (June 30, 2025).

- 122 Cases have been filed
- \$972 million approximately in controversy
- 95 Cases disposed of with an average disposition time of 337 days.
- 997 Orders issued.
- 10 Days average wait time for an order on a ripe motion/request.
- 108 Hearings have been held.
- Three jury trials have been held.
- 103 Case conferences have been conducted.



The Georgia State-wide Business Court celebrated its 5th Anniversary in August of 2025.



Judge William “Bill” Grady Hamrick III and staff of the State-wide Business Court, Left to Right: Christy Bass, Darlene Rector, E. Lynette Jimenez, Judge Hamrick, Angie Davis, and Tynesha Manuel

COUNCIL OF SUPERIOR COURT JUDGES

Shannon Weathers, Executive Director
<https://georgiasuperiorcourts.org/>

LEADERSHIP

President

Judge Robert W. (Bert) Guy, Jr., Brunswick Judicial Circuit

President-Elect

Judge Dustin W. Hightower, West Georgia Judicial Circuit

Secretary-Treasurer

Judge Paige Reese Whitaker, Atlanta Judicial Circuit

Immediate Past-President

Chief Judge Ann B. Harris, Cobb Judicial Circuit

VISION

Judicial Excellence; Accessible, Effective, and Efficient Superior Courts.

MISSION

The Council of Superior Court Judges' mission is to provide leadership and support to preserve the ability of the courts to meet their constitutional and statutory responsibilities and further the administration of justice while functioning as a liaison with other courts and the other two branches of Government.

The Council provides payroll and travel reimbursements; budget administration and accounting; leave entry, benefit coordination, and other human resources needs for all judges and their state-paid staff; and management of all superior court statewide accounting functions.

The Council also provides legal support for required publications such as the Uniform Rules for Superior Courts and Pattern Jury Instructions; statewide legal support for judges handling death penalty habeas corpus cases; logistics for seminars and meetings; and numerous other critical statewide functions for superior courts.

HIGHLIGHTS

During the session, the General Assembly passed HB 85, the Superior Court Judicial Compensation Reform Act, addressing the longstanding disparity in compensation among Superior Court judges. The legislation was the result of a multi-year effort, guided by the 2023 report of the Judicial Council of Georgia Ad Hoc Committee on Judicial

Salaries and Supplements, co-chaired by Justice Charles J. (Charlie) Bethel and the late Chief Judge Russell W. (Rusty) Smith. Sponsored by Chairman Robert (Rob) Leverett, HB 85 provides stability and predictability to the compensation structure of Superior Court judges by providing a uniform, predictable, and equitable compensation plan that will benefit the administration of justice in Georgia. The Council is grateful to the General Assembly for passing and Governor Brian Kemp for signing this legislation.

The General Assembly also passed bills providing for one additional judge to three judicial circuits: Alapaha, Douglas, and Augusta. These three judgeships will help to address the critical needs of these circuits illustrated by the report of the Judicial Council Standing Committee on Judicial Workload Assessment with terms beginning January 1, 2026.

The Council thanks the judges of its Legislative Support Team, chaired by Judge Robert W. (Bert) Guy, Jr., and Director of External Affairs Cheryl Karounos for their work during the legislative session.

Each year, the Council recognizes a deserving judge with the Emory Findley Award. The award, named after the late Judge Emory Findley, recognizes judges for their outstanding leadership and dedication to the continued improvement of our court system. This year's recipient was Chief Judge Brenda S. Weaver of the Appalachian Judicial Circuit. Judge Weaver is a past Council of Superior Court Judges president, a past Council of Accountability Courts chair, and has previously served her community as an Assistant District Attorney and as Chief Juvenile Judge of the Appalachian Judicial Circuit.



Chief Judge Brenda S. Weaver (L), the 2025 recipient of the Emory Findley Award, with Senior Judge Kathlene F. Gosselin (R)



Chairman Rob Leverett of Elberton (L), 123rd House District, receives the Friend of the Judiciary Award from Council of Superior Court Judges President Bert Guy (R)

During the Summer Conference, the Council recognized the sponsor of HB 85, Chairman Rob Leverett, with the Friend of the Judiciary Award in recognition of his steadfast support of the judiciary and his instrumental role in the passage of the Superior Court Judicial Compensation Reform Act.



Chief Judge Rusty W. Smith

A *Lifetime Achievement Award* was awarded posthumously to Chief Judge Rusty W. Smith for his distinguished service to the judiciary and the enduring legacy left through his unwavering commitment to justice, integrity, and the rule of law. Chief Judge Smith's family was present to accept the award.

New Judge Orientation

The goal of New Judge Orientation (NJO) is to prepare new judges for success as they take the bench. Criminal topics include pretrial issues, presentation of evidence, submitting the case to the jury, sentencing, merger, and motions for new trial. Civil topics include domestic relations, pretrial motions, discovery disputes, attorney fees, verdict, and post-trial issues. Other topics include contempt, recusal, and the Judicial Qualifications Commission. The NJO program was created by Judge Wade Padgett and former Judge LaTain Kell. Together, they have trained the majority of the current judges on the Superior Court bench. With Judge Padgett's elevation to the Court of Appeals, the leadership of the program was transitioned into the capable hands of Judge Alison Burleson of the Ocmulgee Judicial Circuit and Judge Robert McBurney of the Atlanta Judicial Circuit.

Pattern Jury Instructions Committee

The Council continues the process of rewriting many of the suggested pattern jury instructions in plain English. This initiative is intended to better assist judges in the instruction of jurors by promoting a clear and concise presentation of the law to citizens serving on a jury. The newest published charges include a revised proximate cause charge and a new charge on medical malpractice. The Pattern Jury Instructions Committee also approved a new charge on second degree murder, revised multiple justification charges based on new case law regarding justification for a felon in possession of a firearm, and revised the intellectual disability charge based on a recent statutory change.

COUNCIL OF STATE COURT JUDGES

Bob Bray, Executive Director
<https://georgiacourts.gov/statecourt/>

LEADERSHIP

President

Chief Judge Jeffrey B. Hanson, Bibb County State Court

President-Elect

Chief Judge Gregory V. Sapp, Chatham County State Court

Secretary

Judge Susan E. Edlein, Fulton County State Court

Treasurer

Judge Eric A. Richardson, Fulton County State Court

Immediate Past-President

Chief Judge John K. Edwards, Jr., Lowndes County State Court

MISSION AND GOALS

“Impartial Courts - Judicial Excellence - Accessible and Efficient Justice.” The Council of State Court Judges consists of 134 active State Court Judges, who serve in 72 counties, and 59 Senior Judges and State Court Judges Emeritus. Each year the Council develops a Strategic Business Plan to further its mission toward the improvement of State Courts, the quality and expertise of its judges, to maintain the impartiality of the judiciary and to ensure the fair, efficient administration of justice. The five Strategic Objectives of the Council are to:

1. Support the State Courts
2. Enhance Effectiveness and Continuity of our Council
3. Support the Judiciary as a whole
4. Foster relationships within the Judiciary and with other branches of government
5. Serve, inform, and interact with the public

HIGHLIGHTS

Statewide, State Courts are in 72 of Georgia’s 159 counties yet are strategically created to provide access to nearly 80% of the state’s population. This past year saw a statewide increase of more than 37,000 cases filed in state courts for a total of 714,037 civil and criminal cases. This was an increase of 6% statewide. The total revenues generated by our 134 State Court Judges this past year were \$144,785,537, an increase of \$12,083,536 over last year’s reported revenues. This statewide increase in case filings has created the need for more state court judges in many state courts across Georgia, to address the growing caseloads.

After conducting extensive judicial workload assessment studies; the Council successfully supported the passage of HB 150 which adds a second Judge for the State Court of Carroll County; HB 625 which creates two new Judges for the State Court of Fulton County by adding an 11th and 12th Judge; HB 722 which adds a second part-time Judge to the State Court of Bryan County; SB 328 which adds a fifth Judge to the State Court of Henry County; and, HB 798 which adds a second Judge to the State Court of Spalding County.

The Council honored Judge Ana Maria Martinez of the State Court of DeKalb County by presenting her with the Ogden Doremus / Kent Lawrence Award. The award is given to a State Court Judge who has achieved the highest level of respect from his or her peers as being a Judge recognized for their judicial ethics and professionalism on the bench and their involvement in their communities. Among her many accomplishments, Judge Martinez co-founded the Georgia Latino Law Foundation, an organization that supports the rising Latino legal community through its student Law Day events, Leadership Academy and Mentoring Program, and Judicial Judge Internship Program.

Judge Ralph Bailey, Jr., Henry County State Court who presented the award on October 16; Judge Ana Maria Martinez; and Council President Judge Jeff Hanson, Bibb County State Court.



The Council held a robust training schedule in FY 2025. The Fall Conference was held at the Savannah Riverfront Marriott Hotel on October 16th – 18th, 2024. Over 100 Judges attended the in-person conference. The educational sessions concentrated on the new standards and best practices regarding the reporting of criminal case dispositions; the trauma informed courtroom; identifying the impaired driver and interpreting alcohol test results. The Spring Conference was held at Legacy Lodge in Buford on May 14th – 16th, 2025 and was attended by nearly 100 Judges. The presentations began with a panel discussion by state lawyer-legislators who discussed the challenges of practicing law and serving in the state legislature. The Judges also heard from the Director of Judicial Protective Services, Mr. Stan Cooper, on safety mindfulness. The banquet speech was given by Christopher P. Twyman, the incoming President of the State Bar of Georgia.

On November 7th several State Court Judges attended the Judicial Security Symposium at the Georgia Public Safety Training Center in Forsyth. The Judges in attendance were: Judge Jeff Hanson (Bibb), Judge Michael Hubbard (Carroll), Judge Stephen Knights (Henry), Judge Brian Ross (DeKalb), Judge Phyllis Williams (DeKalb), Judge Kimberly Alexander (DeKalb), Judge Veronica Cope (Gwinnett), and Judge Sonya George (Clayton).



State Court Judges attending the Judicial Security Symposium

Georgia's state court judges continued to be recognized for exceptional leadership and service at both the state and national levels. Judge Derek J. White (Chatham) was selected to serve on the Board of Directors of the United States Tennis Association (USTA) for the 2025–2026 term, joining the organization's national leadership after previously making history as the first African American to serve as CEO and President of the USTA Southern Section, the largest section representing 23 percent of USTA members. Judge R. Violet Bennett was elected Chair of the Board of Court Reporting, which oversees the certification and professional conduct of court reporters statewide. Judge

Ashley Palmer of the State Court of Cobb County was honored as an Atlanta 2025 Women of Achievement Award recipient and selected to participate in Leadership Cobb. Additionally, Judge Herbert Benson (Tift) received the 2025 Golden Deeds Award from the Tifton Exchange Club, while Judge Yolanda Mack (DeKalb) was recognized with both the Lioness of Justice Award from Schneider Injury Law Firm and the MLK Peace Award from the City of Stone Mountain, reflecting the judiciary's broad commitment to excellence, service, and community leadership.

Judge Billy Tomlinson is trailblazing with his use of the State Court Website for Byan County. In addition to enhancing its functionality, he also added a Spanish tab and translated court documents for the county's expanding Spanish speaking population. He expects to add Korean translations soon, for the growing Korean speaking population in Bryan County.

The Council held its New Judge Orientation for newly appointed State Court Judges at the University of Georgia School of Law in Athens, Ga on January 27th thru January 30th. The following Judges attended the four-day training sessions: Judge Charles Bailey (DeKalb), Judge J. Patrick Brooks (Charlton), Judge Melissa M. Calhoun (Effingham), Judge John B. Cunningham (Coweta), Judge Leonard M. Grinstead (Liberty), Judge Clint L. Lott, IV (Coffee), Judge Yolanda Mack (DeKalb), Judge V. T. McRae (Rockdale), Judge Donald O. Sheppard, III (Screven), Judge Matthew S. Swope (Coweta), Judge James W. Webb (Elbert), Judge Phyllis R. Williams (DeKalb), and Judge John "Tripp" Wingate, III (Hall). The four-day program examines the role of the Judge as a member of the State Judicial Branch and resources; criminal day; civil day; and finishes with items associated with judicial ethics.

Judge Jason Thompson (Fayette), Judge Sharell Lewis (Bibb) and Judge Charles Auslander and Judge Ryan Hope (Clarke) served on a panel for an informal luncheon discussion with law students at the University of Georgia School of Law on Monday, January 27th.

Judge Stephen Knights with the State Court of Henry County spoke to Creekside Christian Academy's 5th Annual History Night, where he highlighted civics and the role of judges in our system of government.

At the Annual Meeting of the State Bar of Georgia, several State Court Judges were honored. Judge Carl Bowers (Cobb), Judge Ashley Palmer (Cobb) and Judge Patsy Porter (Fulton) received Distinguished Judicial Service Awards. Judge Jane Manning received the Traditions of Excellence Award. Judge Manning (Cobb) also had an article published in the Georgia Bar Journal (May 2025), "A Guide to Winning Your eDiscovery Dispute and Teaching the Judge Along the

COUNCIL OF JUVENILE COURT JUDGES

Eric John, Esq., Executive Director

<https://georgiacourts.gov/cjcj/>

LEADERSHIP

President

Judge Michelle Harrison, Douglas Judicial Circuit

President-Elect

Judge McCracken Poston, Jr., Lookout Mountain Judicial Circuit

Vice President

Judge Alison Toller, Northeastern Judicial Circuit

Secretary

Judge Thomas L. Cole, Eastern Judicial Circuit

Treasurer

Judge Amber Patterson, Cobb Judicial Circuit

Immediate Past-President

Judge T. Neal Brunt, Cherokee Judicial Circuit

MISSION

The juvenile courts' mission, in partnership with the local and state agencies and under the authority of the Georgia juvenile code, is to protect the well-being of children, preserve and strengthen families, and ensure public safety by fairly and effectively addressing cases involving individuals under their jurisdiction. To achieve these goals, juvenile court judges through their rulings and orders implement best practices in child welfare, evidence-based programs in delinquency matters that reduce recidivism and promote positive youth development, and accountability programs designed specifically for eligible youth and young adults.

VISION/PROFILE

The Council serves as the collective body of all juvenile court judges in Georgia. The Council, its Executive Committee, and several standing committees meet regularly to shape policy and governance for juvenile courts through the adoption of general policies, uniform procedural rules, and standardized forms for juvenile court proceedings. The Council staff provides legal research support, legislative monitoring, and specialized oversight of the Judicial Citizen Review Program. The goals of these activities are to provide consistency and fairness in juvenile court processes across Georgia; to support and strengthen juvenile courts admin-

istratively, legally, and procedurally; to oversee data collection and reporting to inform best practices and legislative advocacy; and to promote training and coordination among judges and relevant agencies.

The Council of Juvenile Court Judges is composed of all judges of the courts exercising jurisdiction over juveniles. Council membership for Fiscal Year 2025 includes 178 members: 75 Full-Time Juvenile Courts Judges, 26 Part-Time Juvenile Court Judges; 10 Full-Time Associate Juvenile Court Judges and 10 Part-Time Associate Juvenile Court Judges; 35 Pro Tempore Judges; and 22 Senior Judges. (As of 07/01/2025).

HIGHLIGHTS

The Council of Juvenile Court Judges held its Fall Conference in Athens, GA, October 21-23, 2024. During the conference, Tifton County Juvenile Court Judge Render Heard was awarded the Judge Aaron Cohn Award, which is given each year to a juvenile court judge who has made significant contributions to the Council and/or the field of juvenile justice and child welfare. Judge Heard was the President of the Council in 2022-2023. Mr. Sean Kean, with Canyon Solutions, was presented with the Council's Judge Martha K. Glaze Service Award, also given annually to a non-judicial person who has made significant contributions to the Council and/or the field of juvenile justice and child welfare. The Council congratulates each of these recipients on this well-deserved recognition.

The Juvenile Data Exchange (JDEX) is a centralized data system designed to collect, standardize, and share juvenile justice and child welfare information in courts across the state. It is a collaborative initiative among the Council of Juvenile Court Judges, the Judicial Council / Administrative Office of the Courts, the Department of Juvenile Justice and other partners that exists to support judges, attorneys, agencies, and the legislature in making informed, consistent decisions involving youth and families across all counties. The data in JDEX informs judicial decision-making, legal advocacy, and legislative action to improve outcomes in juvenile justice cases including decreased recidivism and increased public safety as well as disproportionality and disparities occurring across the state. Beginning in 2025, JDEX will be the repository of a wide range of data related

to dependency cases involving foster care. The collection of this data is the result of legislation passed in 2024 and is intended to afford children in foster care and their families every opportunity to succeed, while ensuring that the timetable leading to permanency is not interrupted more than necessary.

Justice Case Activity Tracking System (JCATS), is a case management system, powered by Canyon Solutions, Inc., in partnership with the Council, for juvenile courts in 75 counties in Georgia. This includes eight counties that have separate contracts for the system with bonus features. In 2015, when JCATS went to a web-based system, there were 35 counties with JCATS. As of today, we have increased the number of counties with this case management system by 114%. With 159 counties in the state, and only 75 counties using JCATS, the system is still capturing 95% of the delinquency data, due to many of the counties using JCATS having metro populations.

Children In Need of Services (CHINS) now has a Statewide Coordinator here at the Council as of late 2023. The coordinator assists courts in the implementation of their CHINS protocols and service initiatives working in partnership with local jurisdictions, state departments (DJJ, DBHDD, and DFCS) and non-profit partners to increase communication and collaboration for children in need of services. In August 2024, the Council partnered with Voices for Georgia's Children and held a conference for CHINS coordinators from juvenile courts across the state, at Middle Georgia State University in Macon, GA. In August 2025, the Council will hold another convening of Georgia CHINS Coordinators host by the Houston County Juvenile Court.

The 2025-2026 Council President, Judge Michelle Harrison, Douglas Judicial Circuit, sworn-in during the 2025 Spring Conference.



COUNCIL OF PROBATE COURT JUDGES

Kevin Holder, Executive Director
<https://gaprobate.gov/>

LEADERSHIP

President

Judge Christopher Ballar, Gwinnett County

President-Elect

Judge Scott Chastain, Gilmer County

Vice President

Judge Patty Walters Laine, Hall County

Secretary-Treasurer

Judge Darin McCoy, Evans County

Immediate Past-President

Judge Danielle McRae, Upson County

MISSION

Our Council's vision is excellence in the administration of justice in every probate court. Our Council's mission is to advance the common interests of and assist probate courts in fulfilling their responsibilities. Finally, our Council's guiding principles are to ensure that probate courts fulfill their statutory responsibilities, demonstrate integrity, respect the independence and diversity of each court, function collaboratively, continuously improve service to our constituency and engage all Council members. In alignment with our mission, our continuing strategic goals include:

1. Advancing the Professionalism of the Judiciary
2. Strengthening our Council
3. Enhancing the Operations of the Courts



Group photo with Lieutenant Governor Burt Jones.

OVERVIEW

In accordance with Article VI, Section I, Paragraph VI of the Georgia Constitution, there is a probate court in each of our state's 159 counties. Our class of court consists of 202 probate judges – 159 elected probate judges and 43 associate judges. Georgia's probate courts have varying responsibilities. All of our courts administer wills and estates, appoint and oversee guardians and conservators, and issue marriage and weapons carry licenses. In addition, some of our courts adjudicate traffic offenses and some hear misdemeanor cases. Others handle vital records. In addition, some of our judges also serve as chief magistrates. While each probate court is fairly unique, we are a family of courts working diligently to serve our citizens.

HIGHLIGHTS

In August 2024, Judge Carrie B. Markham of the Coweta County Probate Court was elected as the new chair-elect of the Georgia Commission on Dispute Resolution.

Some of our colleagues were recognized for their public service. Judge Sherry Moore of Jackson County was given the 2024 Woman of the Year award by the Jackson County Area Chamber of Commerce. Judge Chase Daughtrey of Cook County was given the 2024 Distinguished Citizen award by the Scouting America South Georgia Council. Judge Shawn Rhodes of Wilcox County was selected as the 2024 Constitutional Officers' Association of Georgia's (COAG) Officer of the Year. Finally, Judge Michael Wesley of Telfair County was named the 2024 Citizen of the Year by the Xi Beta Beta chapter of Omega Psi Phi Fraternity Incorporated.



Probate judges Keith Wood, Shawn Rhodes, and Chris Ballar at the Georgia State Capitol.



Left: Probate judges gathered for the retirement celebration of Barrow County Probate Judge Tammy Brown. Middle: Judge Thomas Lakes of Harris County giving a presentation at the Probate Traffic New Judge Orientation. Right: Judge Shawn Rhodes of Wilcox County being presented with COAG Office of the Year award.

An orientation was held November 18-19, 2024 in Athens for our new probate judges who have traffic jurisdiction. A second orientation will be held December 16-18, 2024 in Athens for all new probate judges.

In keeping with our usual custom, on February 20, 2025, the Council of Probate Court Judges held our annual Probate Judges' Day at the Capitol event. As in years past, we had the opportunity to fellowship with and feed our state legislators, their staff members, and other Capitol Hill employees

During the 2024-2025 legislation session of the Georgia General Assembly, our Council worked in collaboration with the Council of Magistrate Court Judges to achieve final passage on House Bill 426, which provides for the nonpartisan election of magistrate judges and serves as the enabling legislation for probate judges, who introduced House Resolution 251, which is a constitutional amendment to allow for the nonpartisan election of probate judges.

Through the diligence of Cobb County Probate Judge Kelli Wolk and the work of our Council lobbyists Mark Middleton and Brooke Turner, House Bill 36 achieved final passage, which expands the list of professions who are allowed to conduct mental health evaluations in guardianships and conservatorships.

In March 2025, Judge Carlton Jones III of the Rabun County Probate Court was appointed and sworn-in by Governor Brian Kemp to fill one of two Superior Court vacancies in the Mountain Judicial Circuit. Judge Jones, who earned his undergraduate degree and law degree from the University of Georgia, had served as a probate judge since 2021.

Each year, our Council honors several of our colleagues and other stakeholders, the following individuals were honored: Friend of the Council Award – Ms. Brooke Turner

of Middleton Public Affairs; Rising Star Award – Judge Ginny Blakeney (Pike); District Director of the Year – Judge Tommy Martin (Macon); Meritorious Service Award – Judge Todd Blackwell (Baldwin), Judge Nancy Aspinwall (Liberty), Mr. Joseph Little of the Georgia Department of Public Health, and Mark Middleton, Esq. of Middleton Public Affairs; Instructor of the Year – Judge Wade Padgett of the Georgia Court of Appeals; Executive Committee Member of the Year – Judge Patty Walters Laine (Hall); Legislative Recognition Award – State Representative Rob Leverett, State Representative Kimberly New, State Representative Tyler Paul Smith, State Senator Ben Watson, State Senator Steve Gooch, and State Senator Bo Hatchett; Special Recognition Award – Judge G. Tony Thompson (Candler); and Outstanding Probate Judge of the Year – Judge Keith Wood (Cherokee).

As the term ended, the following probate judges retired from the bench: Judge Tammy Brown – Barrow County (24 years), Judge LaVerne Ogletree – Greene County (42 years), Judge Judy Mullis – Lanier County (36 years), Judge Jan Hunt – Spalding County (12 years), Judge Glenda Ernest – Stephens County (24 years), Judge Vickie Burnette – Thomas County (12 years), Judge Dwain Brackett – Union County (28 years), Judge Mitzi Moorman – Schley County (20 years), Judge Clarris Stephens – Taliaferro County (12 years), Judge Beth Mosley – Effingham County (16 years), Judge Don Wilkes – Emanuel County (22 years), Judge Harry James, III (12 years), Judge Gloria Dubberly – Tattnall County (20 years), Judge Dianne Renfroe – Taylor County (16 years), Judge Calvin Bennett – Ware County (20 years), Judge Tammy Thornton – Wayne County (16 years), Judge Robin Altman – Early County (9 years), Judge Rubie Nell Sanders – Montgomery County (24 years), Judge Helen Hewell – Banks County (8 years), Judge Lisa Vance Dykes – Wilkinson County (4 years), and Judge Debra Duncan – Glynn County (22 years).

COUNCIL OF MAGISTRATE COURT JUDGES

Sharon Reiss, Esq., Executive Director
<https://georgiamagistratecouncil.com/>

LEADERSHIP

President

Judge Robert Wolf, Fulton County

President-Elect

Judge Nathan Grantham, Ware County

Vice President

Judge Shawn Rhodes, Wilcox County

Secretary

Judge Berryl A. Anderson, DeKalb County

Treasurer

Judge Jennifer Lewis, Camden County

Immediate Past-President

Judge Brandon T. Bryson, Bartow County

MISSION

Magistrate court, also called small claims court and sometimes the people’s court, is an informal court that handles money claims of less than \$15,000. This court offers a quick and inexpensive process to resolve complaints.

The Council of Magistrate Court Judges supports community justice by:

- Improving the magistrate courts and the administration of justice;
- Assisting the chief magistrates, magistrates, and senior magistrates throughout the state in the execution of their duties; and
- Training and promoting chief magistrates, magistrates, and senior magistrates.

Case type examples include: dispossessory; evictions; four types of criminal misdemeanors; probable cause hearings; setting bond and then binding over to other courts, and some fraud cases.

HIGHLIGHTS

Legislative Leadership: The Council worked diligently along with the Probate Council to ensure passage of HB 426 which now required all magistrates to run in nonpartisan elections. The partner bill was HR 251 which allows for a constitutional amendment to also require nonpartisan elections for probate judges. Since that bill was to require a constitutional amendment, it did not pass immediately and remains alive for the next session. Additionally, the Magistrate Retirement Board began a retirement bill which is also active for the next session. The Council remains committed to our Probate brethren in assisting with the passage of HR 251.

Judicial Education & Training: The Council continued to provide comprehensive, statutorily required criminal and civil training to support new non-attorney judges and chief magistrates across the state.

Access to Justice Initiatives: A major effort is underway to align all magistrate court forms with the statewide forms wizard, improving accuracy, consistency, and usability for courts and self-represented litigants.

Member Engagement & Support: Council leadership strengthened district-level communication by meeting regularly with district representatives and supporting newly elected and appointed chief magistrates through targeted training and outreach.

Collaboration: The Council continued close collaboration with the Judicial Council, Supreme Court leadership, the Administrative Office of the Courts, and partner councils, while also supporting members. The Council is proud to maintain the recent tradition of collaborating with the Probate Council in hosting legislative days at the Capitol.



From the Council’s 2025 Spring Conference: Bottom Left - Judge Wolf passes the gavel to the incoming president, Chief Judge Nathan Grantham. Bottom right - Chief Judge Brendan Murphy recieved the Council’s Magistrate of the Year Award.

GEORGIA MAGISTRATE COURT TRAINING COUNCIL

Trial Court Liaison: Antarica Boyce

The Georgia Magistrate Courts Training Council (MCTC), which was created by statute in 1983, consists of six members and oversees the training and certification of Magistrate Judges. O.C.G.A. § 15-10-130 et seq. The Council, chaired by Judge Megan Kinsey (Magistrate Court of Butts County), met seven times in FY 2025:

August 14, 2024 – Virtual Meeting

September 11, 2024 – Virtual Meeting

October 6, 2024 – In-Person Meeting Marriot Savannah Riverfront in Savannah, GA

January 8, 2025 – Virtual Meeting

February 12, 2025 – Virtual Meeting

February 17, 2025 – In-Person Workshop in Athens, GA

April 27, 2025 – In-Person Meeting Westin Beach Resort in Jekyll Island, GA

The Council developed and approved the training curriculum for mandatory annual magistrate training,

focusing on several topics including special condition bonds, implicit bias, post-judgment actions, rules of evidence, courthouse and personal security, dispossessories, damages, ex parte, behavior on social media, decision making in criminal cases, and case law legislative updates. The Council issued certification to magistrate court judges meeting the annual training requirement for CY 2024.

The Council was assisted by two subcommittees: the Curriculum Committee, which studies and recommends possible training topics to the full Council, and the Mentor Committee, which oversees the mentoring of new magistrate judges.

Judge Megan Kinsey serves as Chair of the MCTC and was reelected to the ICJE Board of Trustees for a second term.

The Georgia Magistrate Courts Training Council submits this report pursuant to O.C.G.A. § 15-10-134(e).

COUNCIL OF MUNICIPAL COURT JUDGES

Executive Trial Court Liaison: LaShawn Murphy
<https://georgiacourts.gov/municipal/>

LEADERSHIP

President

Chief Judge David Will
Cities of Alpharetta, Clarkston, and Sandy Springs

President-Elect

Chief Judge Robert Cowan,
City of Dalton

Vice President

Chief Judge Norman Cuadra
City of Suwanee

Secretary

Judge Pamela Boles
City of Cumming

Treasurer

Chief Judge James Baker
City of LaGrange

Immediate Past-President

Chief Judge Matthew McCord
Cities of Stockbridge and Hampton

MISSION & GOALS

To set standards and policies, and to provide information and education services to the Municipal Courts of Georgia so they can more efficiently and effectively operate their courts, administer justice, and serve the public.



CMuCJ Legislative Day at the Capitol. Council members with Governor Brian Kemp and First Lady Marty Kemp.

HIGHLIGHTS

As a critical component to the yearly development of the CMuCJ and the services and representation it provides its membership, representatives from the Council met to re-assess the strategic objectives, set goals, assess the progress in implementing them and set goals for accomplishing them. The facilitated session was held July 24-26, 2024, in Rising Fawn, Georgia.

The Council's full Executive Committee met September 24, 2024, at the Calloway Gardens Resort and also conducted its Fall Business meeting September 26, 2024, in conjunction with the Law & Practice Update.

Council officers, legislative committee chairs, and Executive Trial Court Liaison braved frigid weather and attended the 62nd Annual Wild Hog Supper, held January 12, 2025, at the Georgia Freight Depot. The event kicks off the start of the year's legislative session for the General Assembly.

The Council held its Legislative Breakfast and Day at the Georgia State Capitol February 25, 2025. Legislative Breakfast and Day at the Capitol. The Executive Committee met that afternoon for a hybrid meeting at the office of the Nathan Deal Judicial Center.

Members also met on May 13, 2025, at the Westin Jekyll Island Resort. The Council also held its Past-Presidents Meeting on May 14 and its annual Summer Business Meeting and Awards & Recognition Ceremony on May 15, 2025, where the Membership approved the FY25-26 Council Budget and received updates on legislative initiatives and proposed Rule changes. Honorable Charlie Bethel, Supreme Court of Georgia, swore in the Council of Municipal Court Judges newly elected officers and served as guest speaker at the Annual Summer Business Meeting & Awards Ceremony.



Leadership of Council of Municipal Court Judges being sworn in by Justice Charlie Bethel.

The Council elected officers and even number District Representatives for 2025-2026 as follows:

- President, Chief Judge Robert Cowan, Dalton
- President-Elect, Chief Judge Norman Cuadra, Suwanee
- Vice President, Judge Pamela Boles, Cumming
- Secretary, Chief Judge Gregory Williams, Camilla, Dawson, and Leslie
- Treasurer, Chief Judge James Baker, LaGrange
- Immediate Past President, Chief Judge David Will, Alpharetta, Clarkston & Sandy Springs
- District Two, Judge Willie Weaver Sr. and Chief Judge Jeremy Baker
- District Four, Judge Denise VanLanduyt and Judge Janet Scott
- District Six, Judge James Dalton II and Chief Judge Wanda Dallas
- District Eight, Judge Thomas Bobbitt III and Chief Judge Dexter Wimbish
- District Ten, Chief Judge Dale “Bubba” Samuels and Judge Samuel Barth

Judge Teresa Mann, Judge Richard Sanders, and Chief Judge Margaret Washburn were elected to another term on the Municipal Court Judges Training Council.

HONORS

The Council recognized a number of municipal court judges with accolades for various achievements.

Chief Judge Willie Weaver Sr., Municipal Court of Albany, received the Frost Ward Lifetime Achievement Award, which recognizes a municipal court judge who has made

significant contributions to the Council of Municipal Court Judges over a long period of time.

Senior Judge Ben Studdard III, State Court was recognized with the Glen Ashman Education Achievement Award which honors judges that exemplify judicial education through extensive time and efforts spent towards educating municipal court judges and clerks.

Judge John Clayton Davis received the Special Recognition Award for significant efforts and contributions in progressing the Council in his many years of service as Treasurer. And Judges Jennifer Mann (4th), Denise VanLanduyt(4th), Roberta Cooper(5th), and Allyson Pitts(5th) received the Special Recognition Award for excellent representation and efforts as District Representatives.

The Council’s President’s Award, on behalf of Chief Judge David Will, was awarded to Chief Judge Charles Barrett Municipal Court of Duluth; for his continued perseverance in the legislature on behalf of the Council.

Chief Judge Margaret Washburn and Chief Judge Rashida Oliver bestowed the Washburn-Oliver Award on Judge Leslie Spornberger Jones (former Past President) which honors women whose extraordinary commitment to the Council is evident in years of self-sacrifice for the betterment of the council, wise advice, thought leadership, and championing the development and mentoring of new leaders.



Left: Chief Judge David Will, President. Middle: Representative Matt Reeves, Chief Judge Charles Barrett and Tracy Mason, Deputy Director (JC/AOC) presenting at CMuCJ 10th District meeting. Right: Judge Allyson Pitts, 5th District Representative accepting Special Recognition with (L-R) LaShawn Murphy, Chief Judge Annie Doris Holder & Chief Judge Margaret Washburn (Award & Recognition Committee Members)

MUNICIPAL COURTS TRAINING COUNCIL

Executive Trial Court Liaison: LaShawn Murphy



Chief Judge Rashida
Oliver, MuCTC Chair

The Georgia Municipal Courts Training Council (MuCTC), created in statute per O.C.G.A. § 36-32-22, consists of six members and oversees the training and certification of municipal court judges and chief clerks. The Council, chaired by Chief Judge Rashida Oliver (Municipal Court of Suwannee), met six times in FY 2024:

- November 1, 2024, Union City, Georgia In Person
- December 20, 2024 - Via Zoom
- March 7, 2025 - Via Zoom
- April 28, 2025 – Via Zoom
- May 13, 2025 – (Hybrid) Via Zoom and In Person, Savannah, Georgia
- June 30, 2025 – Via Zoom

The other members of the Training Council included: Judge Rick Ryczek, Vice-Chair; Ms. Cynthia Clanton, Council Secretary & AOC Director; Chief Judge Ronald Freeman; Chief Judge Lisa Reeves and Chief Judge Margaret Washburn. Chief Judge Matthew McCord also served as the Institute of Continuing Judicial Education Board representative of the Council.

The first half of the fiscal year's training was a duplicate of the CY24 Law & Practice Update. In the second half, the Council developed and approved a robust training curriculum for mandatory new judges' orientation and annual municipal court judges' training. A New Judge Orientation (NJO) Track for Municipal Court Judges was offered in March 2025 via Zoom. The NJO track included an Introduction to the Municipal Court Benchbook, an overview of the Municipal Court Uniform Rules and a segment called Practical Procedures and the Fundamentals in Municipal Court. This segment included sessions on Implicit Bias, Probation Revocation & Bench Trials, Knowing Yourself As a Judge, and a Q&A panel on Special Issues, and Judicial Demeanor. The curriculum for the Summer Law and Practice Update included plenary sessions on DUI and Traffic Law Update; Legislative Update on the

2025 session; First Amendment Auditors; Mock Hearing; Opinions from the JQC; Toxicology: Substances of Abuse, Court Security and updates on DUI Law, Criminal Case Law, Evidence, and from the Department of Driver Services (DDS).

Municipal court judges were offered the opportunity to participate in Multi-Class of Court Training Courses Synchronous (Online and In-Person) and Asynchronous (Taped) on the following topics during FY24: Diving into the Ethics of Social Media and Elections, Interpreters and Breaking Language Barriers, Living With Intent: A Bench Card to Self-Care, Judicial Ethics & Ensuring Equal Access for ALL, The GA Commission on Family Violence Training, Exploring the Link Between Animal Cruelty and Escalated Violence, Wellness Focus on Rural Judging and its Challenges, Judges' Training Academy, and Mindfulness, Interpreters and Breaking Language Barriers, Human Trafficking Awareness, and Judges' Training Academy and Stress Management for Judges. The Council issued certification to municipal court judges meeting the annual training requirement for CY 2024.

Per statutory requirement, the Council also oversaw the training and certification of chief municipal court clerks and consents to the Georgia Municipal Court Clerks Council (GMCCC) working with ICJE in the planning of the curriculum(s). Like the judges, the first half of the fiscal year's training was a duplicate of the CY24 curriculum. In the second half, Clerks were offered two 12-Hour Recertifications and one 8-Hour Live Virtual Events; the training mandate is eight hours annually. Two In-Person 16-Hour certification seminars were provided for newly appointed chief clerks. The training curriculum for chief clerks focused on such topics as Municipal Court Uniform Rules; Retention/Open Records; Fundamentals of Courtroom Management; Role of Clerk Versus the Judge; Succession Planning; Ethics for Clerks; Courtroom & Personal Security; First Amendment Auditors; Criminal Case Data Exchange; HB 926 & Legislative Updates; Municipal Court History; and updates from DDS and the Georgia Crime Information Center. The Council issued certification to chief municipal court clerks meeting the annual training requirement for CY 2024.

The Georgia Municipal Courts Training Council submits this report pursuant to O.C.G.A. § 36-32-24.

GEORGIA MUNICIPAL COURT CLERKS COUNCIL

Liaison: LaShawn Murphy

President

Courtney Jackson
Court Administrator/Chief Clerk,
City of Decatur



Courtney Jackson

President-Elect

Jason James, Court Administrator
City of Dalton

Vice President

Gail Drayton
Chief Clerk, City of Tifton

Secretary

Misty Smith
Court Administrator, City of Woodstock

Treasurer

Nathaniel Mingo
Court Administrator, City of Riverdale

Immediate Past-President

Marcella Shaw
Court Administrator/Chief Clerk, City of Avondale Estates

MISSION

The mission of the Association shall be to act as the administrative support mechanism by assisting municipal court clerks throughout the state in their endeavor to (1) assure the administrative efficiency of the court; (2) protect the court's ethical integrity; and (3) help maintain public confidence in the court's fairness in dispensing justice impartially.



The 2024 GMCCC Board with Judge Lori Duff.

HIGHLIGHTS

As a critical component to the yearly development of the GMCCC and the services and representation it provides its membership, representatives from the Council met to set goals, assign tasks, establish timelines, re-assess the progress of outstanding initiatives and draft certification curriculums in conjunction with the Institute for Continuing Judicial Education (ICJE). The planning session was held August 21-23, 2024, in Dahlonega, Georgia.

The Council's full Board met October 25, 2024, via Zoom for a Special meeting regarding the Certified Municipal Court Clerks Program.

The Council's full Board met November 6, 2024, in Savannah and conducted its Fall Business meeting and Awards & Recognition Ceremony on November 7, 2024, in conjunction with the Municipal Court Clerks 12 Hour Recertification. At the Business meeting, the membership approved the FY25 Council Budget, Bylaws amendments and received updates on their legislative and the Certified Municipal Court Clerks Program initiatives. Honorable Lori Duff, Monroe Municipal Court, swore in the GMCCC newly elected Board at the Annual Summer Business Meeting & Awards Ceremony.

The Board had a very aggressive schedule for the second half of the fiscal year. Meetings were held January 10, 2025, via Zoom, February 21, 2025, via Zoom, March 14, 2025, via Zoom and May 30, 2025, in Hiram, Georgia for a hybrid opportunity.

Georgia Municipal Court Clerks' Week, was observed for the third year, taking place June 9-13, 2025. This special week was officially proclaimed by Governor Brian P. Kemp on January 27, 2025, in recognition of the vital role municipal court clerks play in supporting the judicial system and serving communities across the State. Courts celebrated the week around the State.

GMCCC was recognized on the House Floor by Representative Bill Yearta with a House Resolution, February 27, 2025. More than 20 municipal clerks attended the event at the Capitol.

HONORS:

The Council recognized a number of municipal court clerks with accolades for various achievements and programs.

*Georgia Municipal Court Clerks Council continued***Mentor of the Year**

Ms. Anne Bess, Chief Clerk, McRae-Helena

The mentor worthy of such honor and recognition is impactful to their mentees, inspires confidence, is innovative and empowers their mentee in their roles. Additionally, the recipient is an exemplary leader, invested in the growth and development of mentees, acts as an active listener and provides constructive feedback for their improvement.

Program of the Year

Trina Gallien, Court Administrator/Clerk, City of Johns Creek

This happened to be the third recognition across the State of this worthwhile program. Ms. Gallien developed the innovative Driver Risk Intervention & Vehicle Education (D.R.I.V.E.) Program, as an online course designed to promote lasting safe driving habits.

The Driver Risk Intervention & Vehicle Education (DRIVE) program, launched in January 2023, is the virtual revamp of the City's previous STOP program. It is part of the Court's community outreach initiative and was designed by the Court and the City Solicitor's office to educate our young drivers about topics that help reinforce safe driving habits. It is a non-instructor-led virtual course which must be completed within 30 days of registration and includes various driving laws/rules of the road, road hazard detection, safe driving techniques, and more. As a mandatory condition of the City Solicitor's PTD program, the goal of the DRIVE course is to help young drivers become aware of the serious consequences to their driving behavior by providing resourceful information for making safer driving choices.

An added benefit of the D.R.I.V.E. program is its cost-effectiveness—there are no fees associated with taking the course. This initiative is not only educational but also helps significantly reduce the risks associated with driving.

Clerk of the Year

Marcella Shaw, Court Administrator/Chief Clerk, Avondale Estates

This honoree is a dedicated clerk that goes beyond the minimum. Demonstrates strong ethical standards, integrity, fair treatment, and a commitment to public service. Engage in continuing education with ongoing efforts to enhance their skills. Also participates in the Council through committees, volunteering, mentoring other clerks, as well as helping to advance and raise the standards of the profession.

Rising Star

Katrina Pike, Chief Clerk, Reynolds

This accolade honors clerks employed for five years or less, who perform exceptionally in their role and exemplify the mission of GMCCC. Newly created in 2024, the Rising Star Award. Ms. Pike was the first clerk to receive the Rising Star Award.

President's Award

LaShawn Murphy, Executive Trial Court Liaison, JC/AOC

This honor was bestowed on Ms. Murphy in recognition of her outstanding support and service. The Georgia Municipal Courts Training Council submits this report pursuant to O.C.G.A. § 36-32-24.



Left: Jason James, Court Administrator, Dalton Municipal Court, with Katrina Pike, Rising Star. Middle: LaShawn Murphy, recipient of the President's Award, with GMCCC President Courtney Jackson. Right: Judge Lori Duff with Marcella Shaw, Clerk of the Year.

For caseload and statistical data on Georgia's courts, visit:
<https://research.georgiacourts.gov/data-and-statistics/>



The Georgia Court System

(showing appellate routes)

