



Annual Report: Georgia Courts

July 1, 2009 - June 30, 2010

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Justice at the Center...

“It is in justice that the ordering of society is centered.” Aristotle

State of Judiciary Address

On March 16, 2010, Chief Justice Carol W. Hunstein delivered her first State of the Judiciary Address before a joint session of the House and Senate. She turned to Ancient Greece, the birthplace of democracy, to remind legislators that as Aristotle noted: “It is in justice that the ordering of society is centered.”

Mission of Courts. The Chief Justice reviewed the mission and work of the various classes of court to provide “open, just and timely resolution of all matters before the courts.” Noting that she is honored to stand shoulder to shoulder with the best judges this country has to offer, she emphatically stated her conviction that, “Georgia’s judiciary is critical to this state’s public safety and well-being.”

Economic Downturn. Responding to the state’s fiscal crisis, the Chief Justice stated, “The courts have not resisted sharing the burden of bad economic times. Our judges have volunteered to take furloughs. We have eliminated staff positions and laid off people whose livelihoods depended on them. We have closed law libraries.” “However, these budget cuts threaten the basic constitutional rights of civil litigants and criminal defendants . . . the need for justice does not diminish with a shrinking economy—it grows. We simply cannot afford to lose the rule of law.”

Case backlogs. As the Chief Justice put it, “Hardest hit by court backlogs are our most vulnerable citizens: abused children, battered women, crime victims and the elderly.”

New Initiatives and Legislation

Led by Chief Justice Hunstein, the judicial branch united to push for adequate funding of court operations. Trial courts expressed concern over cuts to the Institute of Continuing Judicial Education. ICJE conducts training seminars for all Georgia judges; annual training hours are required for judicial office holders.

Information Sharing. The AOC initiated a weekly meeting of judicial branch stakeholders to bolster support of Judicial Council Policy Committee recommendations and to promote court system programs and budgets. Thus information sharing became a stimulus for building a team approach to legislative inquiries about the judiciary.

Judgeships Funded. At the close of the 2010 Session funding of new superior court judgeships in the Atlanta, Alcovy and Brunswick Judicial Circuits succeeded in both Houses. These three positions were filled by Governor Perdue but the effective date of their terms was delayed until July 1, 2010, when actual funding of the positions took effect. Terms of office for these three positions ends on December 31, 2012.

Governor's Veto. HB 1236, a measure requiring municipal court judges to be licensed attorneys was vetoed by the governor. The veto message stated that city officials should be allowed to determine the qualifications necessary for the office of municipal court judge.

Process Servers. Legislation officially creating the profession of certified court process server also cleared the General Assembly and was signed into law by the Governor. The Judicial Council is charged with promulgating rules and regulations to train and certify individuals who will be entitled to serve process for any court in the state. Individuals at least 18 years of age may file an application with the sheriff of the county where they wish to serve. The AOC along with the Georgia Sheriffs' Association will approve mandatory courses and testing for process server certification. Applicants must also undergo a criminal background check and obtain a commercial surety bond or insurance policy.

Fee Increases. The General Assembly enacted legislation to generate more revenue by increasing filing fees charged by the courts as well as fees of state agencies and departments. Fees for filing appeals in the Court of Appeals and the Supreme Court of Georgia were increased ten-fold. The measure, signed into law by the Governor, could not be amended until 2011. After consultation with the bill sponsors the Supreme Court and the Court of Appeals judges initiated a rule change to bypass the increase in appellate filing fees.

Justice at the Center...

Judicial Council of Georgia

The 25-member Judicial Council develops policies for improving and administering the Georgia Courts. The Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Georgia serves as chair of the Council; membership, as established by Order of the Supreme Court, consists of judges from each level of court: appellate, superior, state, juvenile, probate, magistrate and municipal. The Council oversees the work of the Administrative Office of the Courts through established oversight committees: Standing Committee on Policy; Committee on Court Reporting Matters; Committee on Drug Courts; Judicial Workload Assessment Committee; Records Retention Committee.



Front row, from left: **Judge Michael Clark**, Superior Court, Gwinnett Judicial Circuit; **Judge Stan Smith**, Superior Court, Dublin Judicial Circuit; **Judge Bill Bass**, State Court of Grady County; **Chief Judge M. Yvette Miller**; Court of Appeals of Georgia; **Chief Justice Carol W. Hunstein**, Supreme Court of Georgia; **Presiding Justice George H. Carley**, Supreme Court of Georgia; **Judge John J. Ellington**, Court of Appeals of Georgia; **Judge Kathlene Gosselin**, Superior Court, Northeastern Judicial Circuit; **Judge Richard Alexander**, Magistrate Court of Gwinnett County. Back row, from left: **Judge Quillian Baldwin**, Superior Court, Coweta Judicial Circuit; **Chief Judge Cynthia J. Becker**, Superior Court, Stone Mountain Judicial Circuit; **Judge David Emerson**, Superior Court, Douglas Judicial Circuit; **Judge Ronnie Joe Lane**, Superior Court, Paulina Judicial Circuit; **Judge Ron Ginsberg**, State Court of Chatham County; **Judge David Strickland**, Municipal Court of Covington; **Judge Lynwood Jordan**, Probate Court of Forsyth County; **Judge Robert Rodatus**, Juvenile Court, Gwinnett Judicial Circuit; **Judge F. Bryant Henry**, Juvenile Court, Lookout Mountain Judicial Circuit; **Judge Al Willis**, Magistrate Court of Dooly County.

Not pictured: **Chief Judge John D. Allen**, Superior Court, Chattahoochee Judicial Circuit; **Chief Judge Doris Downs**, Superior Court, Atlanta Judicial Circuit; **Judge Charles Paul Rose**, Superior Court, Atlantic Judicial Circuit; **Judge Lawton Stephens**, Superior Court, Western Judicial Circuit; **Judge Melvin K. Westmoreland**, Superior Court, Atlanta Judicial Circuit; **Judge Tammy S. Brown**, Probate Court of Barrow County.

Summary of Judicial Council Actions FY10

July 22, 2009 Meeting

- ◆ Justice Carol W. Hunstein becomes Chief Justice and Chair of the Judicial Council; Justice George H. Carley assumes the office of Presiding Justice and Vice Chair of the Judicial Council;
- ◆ Ms. Marla S. Moore becomes Director of the AOC;
- ◆ Judicial Council adopts a policy regarding proper attire in all Georgia courtrooms that allows an exception to the ban against head gear for individuals wearing head coverings relating to religious beliefs.

December 11, 2009 Meeting

- ❖ As a cost-cutting measure, the Judicial Council votes to limit the 2009 judgeship study to those circuits that actually qualify for new judgeships. The Council also authorized new civil and criminal case-type categories, including “serious” felony as recommended by the Judicial Workload Assessment Committee;
- ❖ Chief Justice Hunstein announces that at the request of the Legislature each class of court will promulgate specific court rules on procedures for recusal of judges; the Chief Justice appoints an ad hoc Recusal Rules Committee.
- ❖ Chief Justice Hunstein reports on recent conversations with Gov. Perdue regarding funding needs of the Judicial Branch.

February 24, 2010 Meeting

- ❖ Chief Justice Hunstein convenes special meeting of the Judicial Council to establish budget priorities and discuss proposed cuts to the judicial branch budget being considered by the General Assembly;
- ❖ Judicial Council votes to grant Chief Justice Hunstein authority to represent the interests of the judiciary to Legislature.

June 11, 2010 Meeting

- ◆ Approves grant funding to local drug court programs as recommended by the Standing Committee on Drug Courts;
- ◆ Adopts Department of Archives imaging standards and hardware specifications for judicial branch records;
- ◆ Authorizes submission of Judicial Branch Records Retention Schedules to State Records Committee for review in October.
- ◆ Adopts changes to the Judicial Council Judgeship Policy as recommended by the Judicial Workload Assessment Committee.

Judicial Council of Georgia



Administrative Office of the Courts

A Judicial Branch Resource. . .

The work of Administrative Office of the Courts consists of shared services provided variously to the trial and appellate courts of the state. Organizational units and their functions are presented here in brief.

The agency **Fiscal Office** assists twenty-nine separate judicial branch programs in tasks including: budget preparation and management; payroll administration and audit compliance; invoicing and accounts payable. The AOC fiscal office also handles budget inquiries from the Governor and General Assembly on behalf of each Judicial Council budget unit.

The **Governmental Affairs** section is a clearinghouse for judicial branch legislative initiatives. For the duration of each legislative session, AOC staff maintains a website specific to actions of the General Assembly and the status of court-related legislation. With the assistance of student interns, the staff provides information to members of the House and Senate and their committees. The AOC also lends supports to other judicial branch groups and the State Bar of Georgia on issues of common concern.

The **AOC Information Technology** unit plays a central role in courts automation efforts around

the state. The unit has primary responsibility for maintaining the agency's internal network, court system personnel database, desktop software and equipment, e-mail, web and listserv capabilities. In addition IT staff is integral to technology initiatives involving other court system groups. Collaboration with Georgia Superior Court Clerks Cooperative Authority (GSCCCA) is central to the mission of the AOC. This work includes advancing child support e-filing; civil case e-filing capabilities and certification of annual trial court case counts.

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Sentencing Forms

AOC staff assisted with a comprehensive revision of superior court standard sentencing forms used in criminal convictions. The redesigned forms feature improved organization of information and standardization of data elements. Legal terminology and statutory provisions were updated in accordance with legislative changes made subsequent to adoption of the original superior court sentencing forms. When adopted by the Council of Superior Court Judges, the new forms will be incorporated into the Uniform Rules of Superior Court for use in criminal sentencing in Georgia's general jurisdiction trial courts.

Committee on Justice for Children

The mission of J4C is to improve the legal and court process of court-involved children in civil child abuse and neglect proceedings. Court Improvement Initiatives are federally funded.

Cold Case Project: A one-year project initiated in April 2009 in collaboration with the Division of Family and Children's Services and Office of the Child Advocate, the Cold Case Project was designed to improve permanency for Georgia's most vulnerable youth – those most likely to emancipate from foster care, with a particular emphasis on legal orphans (children with termination of parental rights proceedings completed on both parents and no legal connection to any adult).

Eleven experienced child welfare attorneys were hired to serve as Supreme Court of Georgia Fellows for the Cold Case Project. The fellows reviewed 214 cases from 45 counties to identify legal and actual barriers to permanency. The attorneys also met with J4C staff weekly to discuss the cases they reviewed and brainstorm local and systemic solutions to legal and social work problems identified in the children's cases.

After these reviews, follow-up discussions were held with the local DFCS offices. Areas identified for needed improvement include, among others: uniform relative search documentation; better documentation of "compelling reasons" (a required evidentiary finding for some cases); and more documentation of a child's true engagement of his/her permanency plan.

The full evaluation report conducted by Applied Research Services, Inc. is available at www.gajusticeforchildren.org

The Cold Case Project received an award from the Georgia Child Welfare Association (GCWA); Casey Family Programs is providing

foundation funding to continue the project in-house at DFCS, but still in partnership with J4C.

Court Process Reporting System

(CPRS): Throughout FY10, J4C increased access to the data in this secure, web-based system that provides child-specific case plan information

to juvenile court stakeholders. Additionally, J4C continued a partnership with the Council of Juvenile Court Judges and Georgia Court-Appointed Special Advocate to generate pre-populated, standardized reports in CPRS. J4C Staff traveled to numerous counties around the state to demonstrate the use of this system to local stakeholders

and to gather feedback to develop user-specific enhancements to the interface. Using grant funds, J4C continues to provide equipment to juvenile court stakeholders to ensure enhanced access to CPRS and improve outcomes for children.

Court Improvement Initiative (CII):

Paulding and Chatham counties served as hosts for the two CII meetings in FY10. The semi-annual meetings of Georgia's fourteen CII courts provide a forum for vigorous discussion and shared learning on ways to improve how courts handle child abuse and neglect cases. The August 2009 meeting in Paulding County was centered on the theme of independent living services and an initial exploration into implicit bias; the February 2010 meeting in Chatham County focused further on addressing implicit bias in the child welfare system and the courts.

One Cold Case under review involved a child, T, in care since the age of 3. In 2010, at the age of 15, T began the process of being placed in a permanent home. Upon hearing the news, T responded, "Am I dreaming? Does this mean I'm getting closer to getting a family?" After twelve long years without a permanent, safe connection with a caring adult, T was finally hopeful of becoming part of a family again.



Administrative Office of the Courts

A Judicial Branch Resource. . .

AOC IT also provides and maintains case management systems for 274 local probate and magistrate courts; participates in the state Traffic Records Coordinating Council; and assists the Governor's Office of Highway Safety and others.

Many AOC core functions involving daily contact with judges, clerks, court administrators and other court system professionals are grouped in the agency's **Court Services** unit. Annual case counts for each class of court and complex studies on judicial workload assessment for the superior courts are spearheaded by the *Research Section*. Court services also encompasses the administration of professional boards and commissions responsible for *regulation, testing and licensing* of Georgia court reporters, foreign language interpreters, dispute mediators and neutrals, and private

probation companies. The *judicial liaison* section assists the Council of Probate Court Judges, Council of Municipal Court Judges, magistrate court clerks, and judges training councils with planning for mandatory continuing education as well as the governing committees for these groups.

The AOC is proud to support court system projects that improve outcomes for our most vulnerable citizens: children, the elderly and other under-served groups. The **Children, Families and the Courts** section administers federal funds, private foundation funds and state funds that make these efforts possible. In addition to the work of the Committee on Justice for Children and Committee on Civil Justice, Elder Law Pro Bono Program (see pages 6 and 7), the section works hand-in-hand with the state Division of Child Support Services Paternity/Legitimation Task Force. The

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Elder Law Pro Bono Program

Through partnership with the Georgia Senior Legal Hotline (a project of the Atlanta Legal Aid Society) and Georgia Legal Services Program, a full-day training program was developed to educate volunteer attorneys on basic issues facing senior citizens: probate, consumer, advanced directives, powers of attorney, etc.

These training seminars offered in Macon and Ellijay drew more than 100 attorneys combined. Each attorney taking the class pledged to accept two referred cases on a pro bono basis over the next year. Potentially, this means 200 cases will be referred to provide free legal services to seniors in need. Plans are to offer the training in other areas of the state.

unit staffs the Supreme Court Committee on Access & Fairness which sponsors educational programs for high school students and other efforts.

The **Accountability Courts** section oversees financial and technical assistance to Georgia’s felony, juvenile and/or adult Drug Courts and Driving under the Influence (DUI) specialty courts. The unit also manages state-funded grants to local non-profit groups for provision of civil legal services to victims of domestic violence. In addition operating procedures and standards for Domestic Violence courts are being developed by the Task Force on Domestic Violence. Finally the accountability courts section assists in establishing local Child Support Problem Solving courts.

Director’s Staff:

Essential agency functions reporting directly to the AOC director include: legal services provided by the General Counsel; personnel matters handled by Human Resources; and agency publications and media relations assigned to the Public Information Office.

Jury Composition Committee

Chaired by Justice Hugh Thompson, a group of state and superior court judges, superior court clerks, court administrators, jury clerks and attorneys, have been studying the feasibility of creating an inclusive juror source list at least annually for each of the 159 counties in the state. Such a system would replace Georgia’s current “balanced box” method of creating the jury pool.

Dr. John Speir of Applied Research Services, Inc. conducted a comprehensive research project on behalf of the committee to determine if an inclusive statewide list could be created using available databases from Voter Registration, Vital Records and the Dept. of Driver Services. This pool, totaling more than 16 million records, would be cleaned of duplicates and out-of-date records, to become the basis for Georgia’s inclusive source list.

The committee has determined that implementation of the system also requires setting standards for data preparation, revising court rules governing jury pools and statutory revisions. The Committee is working closely with the Council of Superior Court Clerks to estimate the annual cost of preparing such a list and distributing it to the state’s 159 superior court clerks.

Resources: Appropriations

The Judicial Council budget unit sustained a 9.4% reduction by the General Assembly. The FY 2010 base budget request of \$14,173,198 resulted in an adjusted appropriation of \$13,041,958.

Breakdown for the Judicial Council Budget Unit showing individual percentage reductions are as follows:

Georgia Appellate Resource Center	\$551,000	(-5.0%)
Office of Dispute Resolution	\$61,913	(-15.4%)
Institute of Continuing Judicial Education	\$946,894	(-8.5%)
Judicial Qualifications Commission	\$348,331	(+24.9%)
Judicial Council	\$11,133,820	(-8.8%)

Supreme Court

The Supreme Court of Georgia, the state's highest court, is composed of a Chief Justice, a Presiding Justice, and five Justices. The court's primary function is to review decisions made in a lower trial or appellate court. Cases are assigned to one of the seven justices for preparation of opinions. The draft opinion is circulated to all other justices for study; after discussion *en banc* the opinion is adopted or rejected by vote of the justices.

Cases Filed	2008	2009
Direct Appeals	502	554
Petitions for Certiorari	616	564
Certified Questions	2	6
Applications for Appeal		
Habeas Corpus	416	393
Discretionary	250	260
Interlocutory	46	46
Interim Review	3	3
Attorney Disciplinaries	165	126
Bar Admissions	12	8*
Original Petitions	34	9
Emergency Motions	14	10
Execution Matters	6	NR
Death Penalty Habeas Corpus	7	NR
Total	2,073	1,979

*Includes Judicial Qualifications

Supreme Court

Cases Disposed	2008	2009
By Opinion	391	325
Affirmed without Opinion	7	8
Stricken from Docket	1	1
Allowed Withdrawn	21	21
Transferred to Court of Appeals	77	93
Appeals Dismissed	150	125
Other Direct Appeals	11	
Petition for Certiorari		
Granted	67	56
Denied	639	420
Other	51	64
Habeas Corpus Applications		
Granted	22	32
Denied	257	296
Dismissed	56	75
Other	4	4
Discretionary Applications		
Granted	15	52
Denied	83	91
Transferred to Court of Appeals	45	45
Other	83	58
Interlocutory Applications		
Granted	16	14
Denied	11	22
Transferred to Court of Appeals	6	7
Other	10	3
Interim Review		
Granted	0	2
Denied	4	1
Extraordinary Motions		
Granted	0	0
Denied	3	1
Transferred to Court of Appeals	NR	3
Dismissed	NR	1
Attorney Discipline	123	132**
Bar Admissions	5	3
Judicial Qualifications	2	3
Total	2,160	1,958

**Includes Appointing of Special Master

Court of Appeals

The Court of Appeals of Georgia, made up of twelve judges, has constitutional jurisdiction over appeals from superior, state, and juvenile courts in all cases where exclusive jurisdiction is not reserved to the Supreme Court of Georgia. Each case appealed to the court is heard by a panel of three judges. The Chief Judge of the court appoints a Presiding Judge and assigns two other judges to the panels each year. If a judge of a panel dis-sents, the case is assigned to a larger panel for decision.

Filings	2008	2009
Direct Appeals	2,443	2,410
Discretionary Applications	495	503
Interlocutory Applications	335	318
40 (b) Motions	NR	29
Total	3,273	3,260

Dispositions	2008	2009
Direct Appeals		
By Opinion	1,322	1,277
Companion Cases	130	126
Non-Published Opinion & Rule 36	331	367
Order	680	729
Total	2,463	2,499
Discretionary Applications		
Granted	97	130
Denied	251	214
Dismissed	115	129
Transferred	25	25
Withdrawn	6	0
Other	1	4
Total	495	502
Interlocutory Applications		
Granted	102	117
Denied	201	165
Dismissed	25	16
Transferred	4	6
Withdrawn	3	1
Other	0	0
Total	335	305
Total	3,293	3,001

Court of Appeals

Superior Courts

The 159 superior courts are general jurisdiction trial courts exercising both civil and criminal jurisdiction. Superior court judges hear all felony cases, as well as, divorce cases and other civil matters. Superior courts have jurisdiction to hear appeals from lower courts as provided by the Georgia Constitution.

The superior courts are organized into 49 judicial circuits made up of one or more counties. Creation of circuits and new superior court judgeships are established by act of the General Assembly.

Superior court judges are constitutional officers who are elected to four-year terms in circuit-wide nonpartisan elections. Senior superior court judges may hear cases as assigned in any circuit.

	CY 2008	CY 2009
Total Criminal		
Dockets Filed	152,229	150,440
Defendants Filed	165,647	163,639
Serious Felony		
Dockets Filed	NA	8,051
Defendants Filed	NA	9,990
Felony*		
Dockets Filed	85,845	78,140
Defendants Filed	97,832	87,618
Unified Appeals	23	22
Misdemeanor		
Dockets Filed	28,120	23,402
Defendants Filed	29,551	25,184
Probation Revocation	38,240	40,825
Total Civil Dockets Filed	291,369	304,975
General Civil Dockets Filed	130,213	134,492
Domestic Relations Dockets Filed	161,156	170,483
Total Dockets Filed	443,598	455,415

*Prior to the CY2009 case count, "serious felony" was not a separate case-type.

State Courts

State courts are county courts that exercise limited jurisdiction. State court judges have criminal jurisdiction over misdemeanor offenses, felony preliminary hearings, traffic violations, application and issuance of search and arrest warrants. Civil matters not reserved exclusively to the superior courts are also adjudicated in state courts. Appeals of judgments from the magistrate courts may be returned to the state court and handled as a *de novo* appeal.

The General Assembly creates state courts by local legislation establishing the number of judges and their status as full-time or part-time. State court judges are elected to four-year terms in countywide, nonpartisan elections.

	CY 2008	CY 2009
Serious Traffic		
Open	26,482	24,288
Filed	54,578	44,635
Disposed	32,991	35,623
Non-Traffic Misdemeanors		
Open	44,906	55,032
Filed	114,979	122,757
Disposed	107,201	108,107
Probation Revocations		
Open	4,300	6,085
Filed	27,356	29,901
Disposed	18,399	17,941
Other Traffic		
Open	157,615	164,742
Filed	486,305	473,877
Disposed	457,605	410,429
Landlord/Tenant Disputes		
Open	498	422
Filed	110,616	99,197
Disposed	113,194	53,002
Other Civil		
Open	73,545	91,161
Filed	225,025	215,556
Disposed	138,667	139,811
Total		
Open	307,346	341,730
Filed	1,023,498	999,443
Disposed	868,057	764,913

Juvenile Courts

Jurisdiction of the juvenile courts extends to delinquent and unruly children under 17 years of age and deprived and neglected children under 18 years of age. Juvenile court judges have jurisdiction over minors who commit traffic violations or request consent to marry or enlist in the armed forces. Juvenile courts have concurrent jurisdiction with superior courts in child custody and child support cases and in proceedings to terminate parental rights. Certain serious violent felonies committed by juveniles may be tried in superior court. Juvenile court judges are appointed by the superior court judges of the circuit to four-year terms.

	CY 2008	CY 2009
Delinquent		
Filed	66,120	58,289
Disposed	65,042	55,001
Open	23,362	25,343
Unruly		
Filed	20,247	17,411
Disposed	19,146	15,743
Open	7,244	7,755
Termination of Parental Rights		
Filed	1,575	1,390
Disposed	1,473	1,282
Open	823	842
Deprived		
Filed	24,120	20,055
Disposed	23,028	17,856
Open	15,230	15,280
Traffic		
Filed	10,359	9,939
Disposed	9,743	9,202
Open	4,174	5,103
Special Proceedings		
Filed	5,309	4,381
Disposed	4,642	3,984
Open	2,091	2,324
Total		
Filed	127,730	111,465
Disposed	123,074	103,068
Open	52,924	56,647

Juvenile Courts

Probate Courts

County probate courts exercise exclusive, original jurisdiction in the probate of wills, administration of estates, appointment of guardians and involuntary hospitalization of incapacitated adults and other individuals.

Probate court judges are constitutional officers who are elected to four-year terms. All probate court judges administer oaths of office and issue marriage licenses. In some counties probate judges may hold

habeas corpus hearings or preside over criminal preliminary hearings. Unless a jury trial is requested, a probate court judge may also hear certain misdemeanors, traffic cases and violations of state game and fish laws in counties where there is no state court.

When authorized by local statute, probate judges serve as election supervisors and make appointments to certain local public offices.

Civil	CY 2008	CY 2009
Letters of Administration	7,320	8,021
No Administration Necessary	754	698
Will Probate	18,226	19,848
Year's Support	2,049	2,254
Guardianship	13,462	14,351
Petitions	690	662
Custodial	27	18
Citations	1,696	1,753
Miscellaneous	29,394	32,015
Inventories	12,910	15,225
Mental Health	3,212	3,533
Habeas Corpus	221	17
Total Dockets	89,961	94,955
Licenses		
Marriage	65,042	68,431
Firearms	101,684	124,503

Criminal	CY 2008	CY 2009
Misdemeanor		
Filed	10,472	12,349
Disposed by:		
Guilty Plea	6,026	5,710
Cash Bond	2,388	4,234
Non Trial	1,867	2,235
Bench Trial		
Acquitted	368	505
Convicted	338	118
Traffic		
Filed	224,519	239,387
Disposed by:		
Guilty Plea	116,646	137,882
Cash Bond	76,181	67,182
Non Trial	17,960	29,701
Bench Trial		
Acquitted	2,639	4,796
Convicted	3,192	1,786
Total		
Filed	234,991	252,070
Disposed	227,605	240,378

Probate Courts

Magistrate Courts

Magistrate court jurisdiction includes: civil claims of \$15,000 or less; certain minor criminal offenses; distress warrants and dispossessory writs; county ordinance violations; deposit account fraud (bad checks); preliminary hearings; and summonses, arrest and search warrants. A chief magistrate, who may be assisted by one or more magistrates, presides over each of Georgia's 159 magistrate courts.

Most chief magistrates are elected in partisan, countywide elections to four-year terms. In some counties, the chief magistrate is appointed by the superior court judges. Terms for other magistrate judges run concurrently with that of the chief magistrate.

Civil	CY 2008	CY 2009
Claims		
Filed	174,207	186,406
Disposed by:		
Non-Trial	102,705	105,241
Trial	36,508	38,107
Dispossessories and Distress Warrants		
Filed	217,546	206,999
Disposed by:		
Non-Trial	117,664	113,098
Trial	41,744	41,075
Garnishments		
Filed	51,938	52,574
Disposed by:		
Non-Trial	36,565	33,155
Trial	1,169	1,563
Foreclosures and Attachments		
Filed	12,509	15,408
Disposed by:		
Non-Trial	8,146	10,752
Trial	23,105	1,757
Total Civil Filings	456,200	461,387

Criminal	CY 2008	CY 2009
Warrants Issued		
Felony Arrest	174,328	171,803
Misdemeanor Arrest	178,208	176,377
Good Behavior	2,599	2,394
Search Warrant	10,684	11,632
Hearings		
Warrant Application	37,837	32,516
First Appearance	193,034	192,628
Commitment	68,228	68,254
Good Behavior	2,483	2,492
Ordinance Violations		
Filed	51,672	65,100
Disposed by:		
Non-Trial	19,484	19,912
Trial	18,839	25,959
Misdemeanor		
Filed	37,259	22,430
Disposed by:		
Non-Trial	16,288	12,577
Trial	7,242	4,177
Criminal & Civil		
Warrants & Filings	927,624	919,378
Hearings & Dispositions	743,276	690,553

Magistrate Courts

Municipal Courts

Georgia's municipal courts hear traffic and ordinance violation cases in 400 towns and cities—from tiny Abbeville to suburban Avondale Estates. Municipal Court judges hear municipal ordinance violations, issue criminal warrants, conduct preliminary hearings, and sometimes have concurrent jurisdiction over shoplifting cases and cases involving possession of one ounce or less of marijuana.

Until recently, judges of the municipal courts were not represented by a voting Judicial Council member. In April, 2009 the Supreme Court issued an order increasing membership of the Council from 24 to 25 judges—giving the president of the Council of Municipal Court Judges a seat at the table.

	CY 2008	
Filings		
Traffic	686,567	1,382,451
Ordinance	61,779	280,055
Drugs	6,970	13,414
DUI	17,260	27,867
Other	160,370	164,693
Total	964,730	1,868,480
Hearings		
Traffic	248,956	417,283
Ordinance	24,129	58,693
Drugs	4,263	8,976
DUI	8,038	17,463
Other	14,540	39,197
Total	319,969	541,612

Municipal Courts

Judicial Elections and Appointments

Supreme Court

Appointments

Justice David E. Nahmias, 09/03/09

Superior Court

Appointments

Judge Russell W. Smith

Mountain Judicial Circuit, 04/23/10

Judge Linton Kim Crawford

Mountain Judicial Circuit, 05/18/10

Judge Stephen D. Kelley

Brunswick Judicial Circuit, 06/29/10

Judge Shawn LaGrua

Atlanta Judicial Circuit, 06/29/10

Judge W. Kendall Wynne, Jr.

Alcovy Judicial Circuit, 06/29/10

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