



On Balance

AOC in New (Familiar) Hands



Marla S. Moore

On July 22, 2009, the Judicial Council of Georgia voted unanimously to appoint Ms. Marla S. Moore as Director of the Administrative Office of the Courts. For the last three years, Ms. Moore has served as a division director at the Criminal Justice Coordinating Council, the state agency that

administers federal criminal justice grants. Twenty-five years of her career in state government were spent at the AOC, where she served as Senior Associate Director of Court Services.

“Marla Moore has a stellar reputation, based on her integrity, her competence, her intellect and her devotion to state government,” said Chief Justice Carol Hunstein, who chairs the Judicial Council. “I am confident she will do an outstanding job in difficult financial times.”

During her years of service at the AOC, Ms. Moore has worked on many committees and commission, including the Georgia Commission on Family Violence, the Georgia Department of Human Resources Sexual Assault Task Force, Commission on Gender Bias in the Judicial System, and the Supreme Court Commission on Equality.

Ms. Moore has an undergraduate degree in history and a masters in political science from Pittsburg State University in Kansas. She is a fellow of the Institute of Court Management. A resident of Atlanta, she is married to Richard A. Gosselin. Their daughter Ronnie A. Gosselin, a former AOC intern, is a first year law student at Harvard Law School.

Ms. Moore was selected from a field of candidates to fill the vacancy created by the retirement of Mr. David L. Ratley. She began her tenure as AOC Director on August 3, 2009.

AOC Associate Director earns ICM Fellowship

On May 15, 2009, Mr. Christopher Patterson, Associate Director for Court Services, became a Fellow and a Certified Court Executive of the Institute of Court Management (ICM). Upon completion of the requirements of ICM’s Court Executive Development Program, Mr. Patterson, along with 21 other court professionals from around the United States, took part in graduation ceremonies conducted at the United States Supreme Court. Chief Justice John G. Roberts, Jr., welcomed and addressed the graduates.

Mr. Patterson joined the Administrative Office of the Courts in 2005 as Assistant Director for Judicial Liaison. He was promoted to Associate Director for Courts Services in 2006 where he oversees the Judicial Liaison and Communications and Publications sections of the AOC. Prior to joining the AOC, Mr. Patterson worked for the Fulton County Superior Court.



Mr. Patterson on the steps of the United States Supreme Court.

Lessons Learned from 25 County and Circuit Level Justice for

Submitted by Michelle Barclay



Michelle Barclay

It has taken a long time to do 25 summits (one day educational seminars focused on child deprivation cases), reaching over 50 counties and 2300 attendees, but the staff and the Committee on Justice for Children are convinced that it is worth the time and effort.

History of Justice for Children Summit-Getting Started

In September 2005, Chief Justice Leah Sears and Justice P. Harris Hines took a team to Minnesota to attend a three day summit called “Justice for Children: Changing Lives by Changing Systems.–The National Judicial Leadership Summit on the Protection of Children.” This summit was sponsored by a coalition of national court and legal focused organizations and funded by the Pew Charitable Trusts. All 50 states sent a team to attend and at the end of the conference, each state had an action plan for change.

Inspired by that 2005 summit, the Supreme Court of Georgia created the Commission on Children, Marriage and Family Law to address a range of family issues affecting the dockets of this state. The Committee on Justice for Children (J4C) was re-organized as a part of that Commission and works solely to address child welfare improvements, particularly on the court and legal side. The J4C is funded with federal funds via the Children’s Bureau’s Court Improvement Program grant.

The Georgia Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS) was already sharing part of their permanency data with the courts as part of a federally funded Strengthening Abuse and Neglect Court of America (SANCA) project working from the *Building a Better Court* book and a partnership with Fostering Court Improvement (FCI). As a result of Georgia’s “action plan” from the Minnesota summit, GA DFCS made an agreement with the Office of the Child Advocate (OCA) and the J4C to move beyond the SANCA project and share ALL of the agency’s federally required safety and permanency data with the courts. This

allowed both branches of government to get started right away sharing analyzed data information at the local level which could directly affect children’s outcomes and eliminated the need to collect any new data. The agency and J4C also agreed to work to get this county level information back to the local judges, case managers, attorneys and other stakeholders.

It was agreed that local decision makers need to see this data that is too often only known to the top level state staff, so the local folks would: (1) have a feedback loop of what the case managers were entering into the statewide data systems; (2) know how their counties compared (the good and the bad) on a local level to the national federal targets and standards, the state averages and neighboring counties; (3) would be empowered to make local action plans for change; and (4) so the state level staff can learn the obstacles faced on the front line and offer assistance for change.

Goals of the Summit Program

J4C (at the state level) wanted to know “ground truth” (a military term used to describe the reality of a tactical situation as opposed to what intelligence reports and mission plans assert the reality to be). We also wanted the local decision-makers to know it as well. In a huge child welfare system with as many as 22,000 employees and up to 12,000 children in foster care, ground truth can be elusive. It was decided that the best way to achieve our improvement goals was for each county and/or circuit level judge to host a summit (like the Minnesota summit). The benefits of this approach would be that more child welfare stakeholders could be reached this way (counties only can send a few staffers to statewide conferences), plus it would allow the state to provide targeted county or circuit level data which directly affects children at a local level.

Thru the summits, charts and graphs are put up on a screen to display information like how their county’s child maltreatment rate compares to the national Child and Family Service Review (CFSR) standard (which leads to a discussion of how well the local Child Protection Services

Children Summits in GA

(CPS) and in-home services are performing); how many children (per capita) are removed to foster care (which leads to a discussion of the local counties' legal standards for removal, as well as where the law stands today); how long children stay in foster care and where they go when they are discharged (which leads to a discussion about their permanency expertise and resources); how many children re-enter foster care and why and much more. This is a two hour presentation by J4C staff in partnership with OCA and DFCS staff, but it is an interactive presentation rather than a lecture. The goals for this presentation are to learn the best practices from counties with measures that are closest to the national CFSR targets as well as learn about areas needing improvement and creatively brainstorming for solutions.

Each summit always opens with a taped message from Chief Justice Sears and Justice Hines individualized for that county or circuit, then a video that reflects the system through a child's eyes, then the data presentation, an update on law and policy regarding permanency in the afternoon, and then a youth presentation in the afternoon to discuss strengthening the youth voice in court and in his or her case in general. The summit is designed to elicit audience participation especially at the end with targeted local action plans for improvement.

Five Lessons Learned

1. Most did not know

Most of the audience attendees did not know what their "measures" showed, they are too busy with the day to day work to read much about the CFSR process, nor keep up with state improvement efforts.

2. Most were glad to know

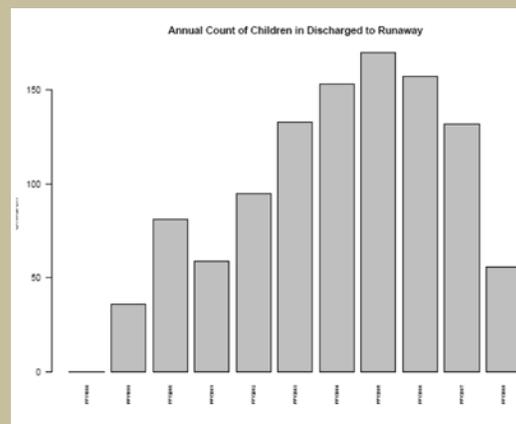
However, most attendees quickly engaged in the presentation and discussion around their local measures because they knew that each "number" presented represented a real, local child.

3. Real change for positive child outcomes can occur with these sorts of summits

There are many examples to share but will pull out two examples to highlight. At Clayton county's judicial summit, after learning that 22% of their reunifications were taking place within 72 hours, the attendees as a group made a conscious decision to try and reduce this number to 10% and stated so as a goal on their summit action plan. Almost one year later, Clayton's data showed 11% of their reunifications took place within 72 hours, an achievement to be celebrated. Clayton's data also indicates that child safety has not been compromised by reducing this number.

Another example is the number of children being discharged to other or runaway (a category allowed in in the federal reporting system, AFCARS). This number has been increasing every year which has been troubling many people for good reason. These runaway children often end up on the street, in trouble or even killed.

Through concentrated attention on this discharge problem at these summits and even more focused work by DFCS and OCA, the numbers of children discharged to runaway has been steadily decreasing. See the chart representing the entire state below over a 10 year period, the last year being 2008.



In particular, in 2007, DeKalb county summit attendees set a goal to reduce the number of children dis-

Lessons Learned cont.

charged to runaway. Their hard work has paid off, Dekalb county has had the most dramatic drop in the state from 55 children in 2005 to 9 in 2008.

4. Challenges to the accuracy of the data have been helpful

So far, every time an attendee says they do not believe what the data says, it has led to a “digging deeper” exercise, where file review reading takes place and either a data entry problem is found or a confirmation that the data is, in fact, correct. This “digging deeper” work has turned out to be an excellent quality assurance process on the data itself.

5. Our state staff is seeing patterns of best practices that now are supported by data, such as:

- Counties with a full range of family preservation services appear to have to a lower removal rate
- Early, thorough, diligent relative searches leads to shorter times to permanency
- Quality representation for agency, parents and children appears leads to better CFSR measures, especially quality representation for the agency
- The more knowledgeable the staff and the attorneys are regarding permanency options, the more likely that county is to have timely permanency
- High quality Permanency Hearings and orders appear to lead to more timely permanency
- Quality child and family assessment information known and accessible to all also appears to lead to more timely permanency

Summary and Next Steps

The J4C plans to continue these summits across the state and progress on that goal can be viewed on the website, www.gajusticeforchildren.org

With the data that DFCS and OCA shares with the judicial branch, J4C is able to view over 16 CFSR measures and over 100 other child outcome measures all broken down to the county level. Focusing first on child out-

comes instead of court process measures is definitely the way to begin talking about measures to audiences. Plus, as we have learned thru our CFSR, identifying really good court process does not necessarily mean really good outcomes for children.

To collect court process measures such as due process (notice and representation measures) and some timeliness measures (such as hearing times), J4C has turned to file reviews with a team of attorneys. A web based pilot data collection system during the SANCA project was attempted for some court process measures, but is on hold for now. We learned that collecting automated information is lot of work for county level staff (even with incentives) and uniformity of data entry is always a problem. Instead, file reviews have proved to be a very successful, low cost, low burden way to collect the court process measures. Since most of the court process measures, listed in the *Building a Better Court* book, need to be 100% (such as appointment of representation for children or notice to parties), one only has to read 3 to 5 files. You do not need to read 50 more files to know you have an issue needing improvement.

To summarize, the best news from these lessons learned is that while the Georgia child welfare system is far from perfect, we have documentation of proof of substantive improvement over time. We also know where to focus our improvement efforts now. More importantly, none of the data or information available to J4C today was available when the Committee was originally created. Today, we have data sharing agreements and professional working relationships with other agencies and other branches of government working toward common improvement goals for the child welfare system. We could not a more important cause and we are committed to keeping it up!

JQC New Website

The Judicial Qualifications Commission has a new website. Visit www.gajqc.com for more details.

Watch Out, There's a Camera on You

Submitted by Ashley G. Stollar



Ashley G. Stollar

You've seen me. Lurking nearby. Waiting for something to happen. I look innocent enough. Just another AOC staffer at the Judicial Council meeting perhaps. But when the flash bulb goes off, you know who I am. I'm the girl with the camera. I'm there

when you least expect it. I catch you staring absent-mindedly while you should be listening. I take that shot of you as you're eating during a luncheon. I'm on the floor of the House chambers when you get sworn-in as a judge, popping up to get that perfect shot with the Governor.

I am Ashley G. Stollar. Photographer. Graphic Designer. General Menace to Judges and other Court Personnel.

I have traveled the state taking pictures of courthouses; attending meetings of the State Court judges, Probate Court judges, Magistrate Court judges; chronicling Judicial Council meetings, the granddaddy all of judicial meetings; documenting visits from foreign judges and high school classes. I am a veteran of the retirement circuit — Supreme Court Justices, Court of Appeals Judges, AOC employees.

Courthouse dedications and restorations, grand openings of specialty courts.

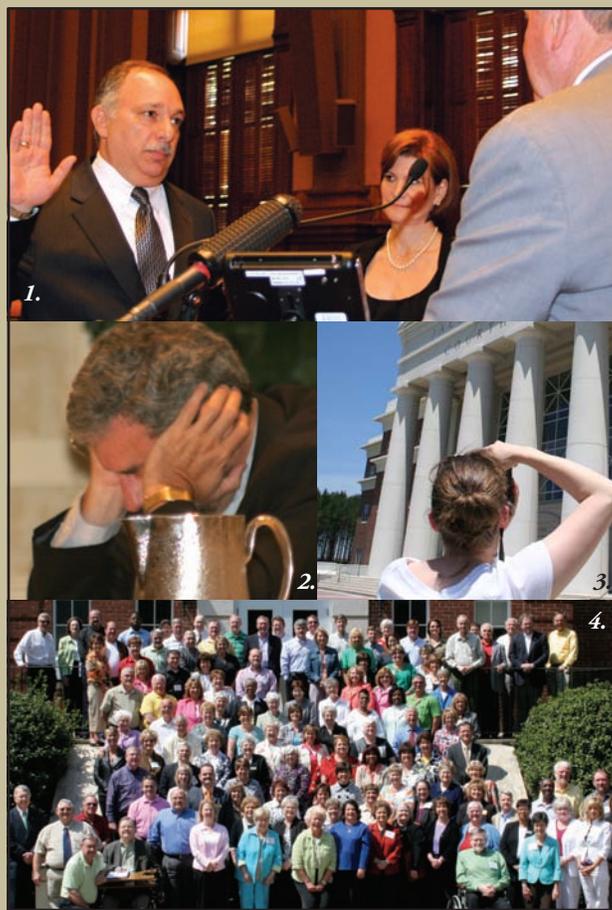
It's not a job without risks. In the line of duty I have been stepped on, kicked, and made to climb the largest ladder on the UGA campus (thank you, Probate Court Judges!). But there are interesting parts of the job such as following the Court of Appeals during its Centennial around Georgia and visiting the state's law schools with the

Supreme Court. I have photographed two members of the US Supreme Court — Justice Anthony Kennedy and Justice Clarence Thomas.

When I'm not taking pictures, there are other duties to attend to. Many of the publications you receive from the AOC come through me. The *Courts Journal*, *Courts Directory*, and *Annual Report* are my biggest projects, but I also layout various council newsletters, staff publications, and other projects that come across my desk.

Don't be afraid when you see me. I really don't mean to do

any harm. I'm just here to take your picture!



1. Judge Jay Roth being sworn-in as State Court Judge; 2. Deep in Thought at Judicial Council; 3. The Photog in Action. 4. Group Shot of the Probate Judges of Georgia.

E-Filing Leaving Its Mark As It Expands Across Georgia

Submitted by Rory Parker

Since the 2007 pilot launches in Bibb and Washington Counties, the Administrative Office of the Courts and The Georgia Department of Human Services' cooperative Georgia Judicial Exchange Child Support (GAJE) electronic filing project continues to grow and expand across Georgia.

The program, which is administered and distributed by the AOC, has been a game changer for the manner in which child support filings from the Office of Child Support are filed into Superior Court in that it eliminates the manual handling of documents, transportation and storage.

The Georgia DHS funded development of GAJE in response to the increasing number of child support claims across Georgia in an effort to improve delivery of service and reduce cost. The program is specifically for child support cases, which make up over 50 percent of most counties' civil cases statewide and could potentially be used for other case types in the future.

E-filing can come in many shapes and sizes. There are e-filing programs that are sophisticated email systems; however, the AOC's GAJE is a more robust offering that is directly engaged with both court and OCSS systems complete with digital signatures and stamps, so that data and information entered is instant, authorized and secure.

The most beneficial component of e-filing is that it saves money for court clerk offices as well as child support offices through removing the need for multiple physical storage locations of papers and documents vital to any given case and the cost of maintaining such places, in addition to personnel hours used in transport of documents. It also cuts back on human error and saves time on corrections of documents that could otherwise hold up the process of having the case filed.

Ever since the pilot launches in Washington and Bibb counties in 2007, the AOC's GAJE system has gained nothing but speed and has since been picked up by Chatham, Douglas, Jefferson, Oglethorpe, Fulton and now Clarke counties due to its proven track record of increasing the efficiency and timeliness of child support case claims.

The AOC's e-filing project team members are hard at work trying to deploy the program into more counties across Georgia and have been met with overwhelmingly positive response from both interested counties and those that are already using the system. The positive word of mouth from OCSS offices and court clerks about the AOC and the e-filing project makes the effort of implementing it worthwhile.

"I would advocate e-filing for other counties," says Joy Conner, Washington County Clerk of Superior Courts.

Mr. David L. Ratley Retirement

On July 27, 2009, a retirement party for outgoing AOC Director David L. Ratley was held in Atlanta. A standing-room only crowd of judges from all levels of court, court administrators, AOC employees, family, and friends joined in saying farewell Mr. Ratley.

Mr. Ratley was presented with a resolution from the Supreme Court of Georgia from Chief Justice Carol W. Hunstein. Former Chief Justice Norman Fletcher, Ms. Mary McQueen, Director of the National Center for State Courts, and Mr. Tom Gunnels, Superior Court Administrator, spoke about Mr. Ratley's eight years with AOC and his many years as a court administrator.



Chief Justice Hunstein presented Mr. David L. Ratley with a resolution from the Supreme Court.

Workshop Seeks to Build Depth Among Certified Court Interpreters

Submitted by Linda Smith

Working on behalf of the Georgia Supreme Court Commission on Interpreters, Administrative Office of the Courts staff conducted a 2-day orientation session for prospective foreign language court interpreters on May 13-14, 2009. The interactive workshop, held at the AOC - Macon office, was attended by thirty-one individuals. For those present, participation in the orientation session was a first step toward becoming a certified court interpreter.

Licensure as a State-certified court interpreter in Georgia can only be acquired through the Georgia Supreme Court Commission on Interpreters.

The Commission was created by Supreme Court order in 2003 to safeguard the rights of non-English



Court Interpreters Orientation Workshop participants.

speaking court users. Its efforts, primarily centered upon the professionalization of the court interpreting field, include approving court interpreters programs, developing training and certification criteria and establishing standards of conduct.

The AOC maintains a statewide registry of 131 licensed interpreters who are trained to ensure understanding and participation for limited/non-English speaking persons. Certified interpreters are available in many languages, including: Arabic, French,

Haitian-Creole, Mandarin, Portuguese and Spanish. The database also contains registered interpreters for persons who speak Persian, Romanian, Polish, Bosnian and Japanese. The registry is accessible to the public and members of the Bench and Bar.

Through generous support of the Georgia Bar Foundation, the Commission is able to host workshops quarterly and provide scholarships to prospective court interpreters to offset the cost of the oral certification examination.

For more information on the certification process or to locate a Certified, Conditionally-Approved or Registered interpreter in your area, please visit the Commission's website at <http://www.georgiacourts.org/agencies/interpreters/cms/>.

We are a ".Gov" Now!

Submitted by Jorge Basto

As of the beginning of May 2009, the Administrative Office of the Courts of Georgia can now be found at www.georgiacourts.gov. We still hold the ".org" extension but through the request of our Director and the efforts of IT, our Agency now has the privileged domain of a government agency.

Based on a survey recently done with the Court IT Officers Consortium (CITOC), only 5 other AOC's around the US have acquired a top level ".gov" domain. Most judiciaries around the nation use secondary level (court.state.gov) domains or opt to use the ".us" and ".org".

The AOC has also purchased www.gacourts.gov which will be made available soon along with many of our changes to our hosted websites. With the implementation of our new content management tool (Joomla) we are going to be able to turn around new site requests and changes in a much more efficient manner as well as updating and maintain all of our content.

Mark Your Calendar

The next meeting of the
Judicial Council of Georgia
 will be held
 Friday, December 4, 2009
 Sloppy Floyd Building • Atlanta, GA
 1:30 p.m.