



On Balance

AOC *On Balance*: Let Us Introduce Ourselves

Submitted by Christopher Patterson

Here at the AOC we know the work we do is good, helpful and often essential. From caseload research to drug courts, to legislative news, we carry out many projects that benefit the courts of this state. But simply believing in what we do and producing good work is not enough. We must make our abilities and accomplishments known to judges and clerks, to members of the Executive Branch and Legislature, to court personnel in Albany, Athens, Young Harris and Waycross.

On Balance allows us to introduce ourselves, highlight our achievements, and demonstrate our value to the judicial branch and citizens of Georgia.

We are pleased to present this inaugural edition and I invite you to contact us at 404-656-5171.

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Senior Judges Train in Alternative Dispute Resolution Techniques

Submitted by David L. Ratley



A specialized training program for Georgia's Senior Superior Court Judges took place January 22-24, 2009 focusing on "Judicially-Supervised Case Evaluations" and "Judicially-Supervised Settlement Conferences." The program, held in Athens, was jointly sponsored by the

AOC; ICJE; and the 7th, 9th, and 10th Judicial Administrative Districts. Mr. Rich Reaves coordinated the training.

Chief Justice Sears requested that the AOC devise strategies to alleviate the negative impact of suspension of the use of senior judges resulting from state budget short-falls.

The activities covered by the training program can only be handled by judges or senior judges. Primary instructors were: Ms. Ansley Barton, a leader in Georgia ADR activities; the Honorable Steve Boswell, Esq.; Mr. Rich Reaves, Ms. Jody Overcash, Mr. Shinji Morokuma and Mr. David L. Ratley.

The judicially-supervised activities will be carried on under procedures promulgated by the superior court judges of participating circuits. Assignment of cases will be handled in the same way that senior judge assignments have been in the past. The majority of participating senior judges will receive basic ADR training locally; however, senior judges will not necessarily register through the Georgia Office of Dispute Resolution for private or court-annexed mediation duties. Senior Judges who elect to become regular mediators will register with GODR and be governed by the regulations of the Georgia Commission on Alternative Dispute Resolution.

Specialty Courts: Child Support Enforcement

Submitted by Jill Radwin

Georgia courts enforce child support orders through the standard legal process, just as it is done nationwide. When the noncustodial parent fails to pay consistently over a period of time, an enforcement hearing is held to address the situation. The hearing is focused on establishing a payment plan for the delinquent child support. Often the obligor's failure to pay results in jail detention; some individuals are summoned to court again and again. Unfortunately, the children impacted by divorce are the true victims of this failure to pay. Society and the taxpayers bear the mounting court and jail costs.

Carroll County Child Support Pilot Court

Superior Court Judge John Simpson (Coweta Judicial Circuit), the Georgia Office of Child Support Services and the Administrative Office of the Courts have recently partnered to apply the "therapeutic justice" model to the issue of child support enforcement. Judge Simpson reviews the cases of a select group of noncustodial parents owing child support to determine the factors that have contributed to nonpayment. The goal of this approach is to "break the cycle" of nonpayment and make arrangements to enable these parents to pay child support on a consistent basis.

Applying the problem-solving court model to child support cases is encouraged by the federal Child Support Enforcement Agency. Judge Simpson's pilot project got underway in January 2009, with thirteen noncustodial parents voluntarily enrolled. Eventually up to thirty

noncustodial parents will participate during this inaugural year. The case coordinator, an employee of the Office of Child Support Services, screens the participants and makes referrals to the local behavioral services center. An assessment is performed to determine if the individual has a substance abuse, mental health, or literacy issue that is a barrier to keeping a job. Unemployment, lack of relationship with the dependent child and other factors often lead to delinquency of the child support payments.

Fatherhood Project

The Office of Child Support Services sponsors a Fatherhood Project which offers classes on job and interview skills to noncustodial parents and works with the State's Department of Labor for job placement. The local case coordinator has frequent meetings and contact with each participant. The judge reviews each case monthly. If the noncustodial parent fails to cooperate, the court can impose graduated sanctions or recommend removal from the program. The Administrative Office of the Courts is now providing expertise gained from working with Georgia's other accountability courts. Staff members are also reviewing other states' child support problem solving courts. The AOC will also create a program evaluation plan tracking regularity of child support payments, cost savings to the courts, improvements in providing health insurance for the children, and improved relationship and visitation between the parent and children.

Are You on Facebook? The AOC Is...

Georgia's Administrative Office of the Courts is now on Facebook. It's easy to be a member of our group. Just find our page by typing "Administrative Office of the Courts of Georgia" in the "Find Group" search tool. Join the group ... It's as easy as that!

What You'll Find

Links to our website. Notices of when publications are available and where. Start a discussion or write on our wall.

Guardianship Video Project: Hollywood It Is Not

Submitted by LaShawn Murphy



The Guardianship Code was rewritten a few years ago affecting all of the probate courts of Georgia. In 2007 the Georgia Probate Court Standard Forms (GPCSF) were also updated to reflect the changes, but informational guardianship videos for the probate court were another matter.

It fell to AOC staff — Ms. Yolanda Lewis, Mr. Christopher Patterson, and myself — to locate funding and spearhead the remake of these educational videos. The Council of Probate Judges formed a steering committee and selected a capable videographer. With assistance from the AOC Grants Unit, a grant proposal was submitted to the State Justice Institute seeking funding for two new video presentations: one for Guardianship of Adults and one for Guardianship of Minors.

Once the grant was approved, court services staff got to work on the details to make the project a reality: coordinating, planning, and contracting. Contracts had to be finalized, meetings for steering committees had to be arranged, and reference materials/information had to be provided to the producer regarding content of the videos. After many conference calls, emails, interviews of judges, and rewrites, final drafts of the scripts were completed. But we still weren't ready for production!

A meeting to ensure accuracy of the content for the video was set. It may have been the longest meeting of my career, but thankfully dinner was provided. After much gnawing and gnashing of teeth, the scripts were approved. AOC staff was busy behind the scenes working with committee members to update the guardianship handbooks. If you have ever managed a grant project, I don't have to tell you there are timelines and deadlines for everything; in addition to submitting quarterly status reports.

Finally we reached casting and auditions for the production. I made a cameo appearance as a witness and also handled logistics and locations for the shoot. Following rehearsals our contractor, Dan Sperling, started the cameras. Watching the shoot I thought the Council had Steven Spielberg reincarnated. Dan Sperling Video was the epitome of perfectionism, professionalism and patience.

After weeks of editing, and awaiting SJI approval, a final version was delivered. A copy of the video has been distributed to all 159 probate courts and posted to the council's website — www.georgiacourts.org/councils/probate/index.html

I am glad the project is complete — the videos are ready for public use — and I found the film-making process interesting. However, for me, this definitely was not a trip to Hollywood!

The AOC Goes Green in 2009



What to expect. Look for our standard agency publications on the Web. *The Annual Report on the Work of the Georgia Courts*, the *Georgia Courts Journal*, *Your Guide to the Georgia Courts* and all informational brochures will now be published in digital format exclusively.

Quality Assurance. Each of the publications you have come to rely on will be available on our Website: www.georgiacourts.org/aoc/publications.php

Information will be updated continuously and accessible to you without the delays associated with printing and mail delivery. We will also post “printer-friendly” versions to give you the option of creating paper versions of our publications locally.

E-Mail Subscription Service. For added convenience you are invited to subscribe to our publications via e-mail. Direct your request to publications@gaoc.us, use the subject line to enter the publications to be delivered to your In-box. It's that simple! Requests will automatically be filled as new issues become available.

2009 Drug, DUI and Mental Health

MAY 26 - 28, 2009 • Westin Buckhead • Atlanta, Georgia

General Information

The 2009 Drug, DUI and Mental Health Court Conference will provide educational training for Drug, DUI and Mental Health Court teams to help promote and improve the drug court system through best practices training. This year's conference will focus on best practices in use in the drug court, substance abuse and mental health treatment fields in the country.

Who Should Attend?

- Judges
- Current Drug, DUI & Mental Health Court Teams
- Planning Drug, DUI & Mental Health Court Teams
- Treatment Professionals
- Defense & Family Law Attorneys
- Prosecuting Attorneys
- Legislators
- Law Enforcement
- Probation
- County Commissioners
- Court Administrators

Scholarship Information

Financial assistance is available for Georgia Drug, DUI and Mental Health Court Teams. Planning teams who have contacted the AOC for technical assistance are also eligible for financial assistance. Courts located more than 50 miles from the Westin Buckhead may choose to request a Registration Fee Waiver or Lodging Scholarship. Courts within the 50 mile radius of the Westin Buckhead are only eligible for the Registration Fee Waiver. Only three scholarships are available for each court.

Conference Registration Information

Early Bird registration for Georgia Drug/DUI/MH Court Teams (3 members eligible for financial assistance, but all team members qualify for reduced registration fee):

- \$295 per person - Due by Friday, April 3, 2009

Early Bird registration for Individuals:

- \$375 per person - Due by Friday, April 3, 2009

Regular registration for Georgia Drug/DUI/MH Court Teams (3 members eligible for financial assistance):

- \$325 per person - Due by Friday, May 15, 2009

Regular registration for individuals and out-of-state drug court professionals:

- \$395 per person - Due by Friday, May 15, 2009

Online Registration

This year, registration for the 2009 Drug, DUI and Mental Health Court Conference will only be accepted via the Internet. Please visit http://www.ciclt.net/sn/events/e_signup.aspx?ClientCode=aoc&E_ID=500011&RegType=ATT to register for the conference.

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Court Conference

Presentation Topics

The Conference brings together a slate of presenters who embody the best practices available in the drug court field. Workshop topics include best practices in treatment for juveniles and adults, an open 12-Step meeting, the impact of psychological trauma, cooccurring mental health and addictive disorders and tools to help accountability courts. Topics this year include:

- Maintaining Judicial Independence
- Motivational Interviewing
- Retention for Juvenile Courts by Engaging Parents and Family
- Psychopharmacology
- Medication Assisted Treatment
- Marketing Your Siemens Lab for Sustainability
- Ensuring Sustainability: Grants & Fundraising
- Mental Health Issues for Non-Mental Health Criminal Justice Professionals
- HIPAA and 42 CFR Part 2 - How Confidentiality Laws Impact Your Program
- Thinking for a Change and Criminal Thinking
- Getting the Most for Your Treatment Dollar
- Implementing Research Findings to Improve Incentives and Sanctions
- Seven Challenges Curriculum for Juveniles
- Gender Specific Treatment for Drug Courts
- Screening Tools for Substance Abuse/Mental Health and Parenting Skills
- Juvenile Mental Health Issues

For a detailed list of topics and schedule, please visit the conference website at www.georgiacourts.org/courts/accountability/conference.php

Location, Location, Location...

This year's conference is being held at the Westin Buckhead, located in the heart of the Buckhead Community of Atlanta. The hotel is within walking distance of many Atlanta attractions, including Lenox Square, Phipps Plaza and fine dining establishments. Reservations for hotel accommodations must be made through the hotel's website at <http://www.starwoodmeeting.com/StarGroupsWeb/booking/reservation?id=0901054150&key=404CE#contentlocation> or by calling the hotel directly at 404-365-0065.

The negotiated group rate of \$141 per night is available through April 25, 2009. Request the conference rate for the Administrative Office of the Courts, 2009 Drug, DUI and Mental Health Court Conference.

Credit Hours

Credit hours will be offered for judges, attorneys, sworn law enforcement officers, licensed professional counselors, licensed clinical social workers and certified addiction counselors.

It's Directory Update Time Again!

We're doing the Directory a little early this year. Be on the look out for your Address Verification Postcard. Please review your information carefully and return the postage-paid card by March 13. Thanks!

Municipal Judges to Implement CourTools Strategies

Submitted by Leslie Johnson



The Council of Municipal Court Judges will be the first class of court in Georgia to assess its members on a statewide basis using the CourTools instrument offered by the National Center for State Courts. As part of its 2008-09 goals and initiatives, the

Council voted to implement three CourTools court performance measures. The Council wishes to set the standards of efficiency for the municipal courts, emphasizing the operations of the court. An additional benefit will be improved trust and confidence by the public as the court identifies and corrects problem areas.

The Council has chosen to concentrate initially on Measure One: Access and Fairness. Mr. Kevin Tolmich, Assistant Director of Research and Planning, AOC; Ms.

Silvia Gaines, Project Manager for the Supreme Court Committee on Access and Fairness; and Ms. Leslie Johnson, Judicial Liaison Officer with AOC Court Services, will be assisting the Council with development and implementation, as well as the gathering and reporting of results. The other CourTools the Council plans to utilize are Measure Three: Time to Disposition, and Measure Seven: Collection of Monetary Penalties.

The National Center for State Courts has developed CourTools as a means for any court to measure its performance. With performance indicators in place, judges and court managers can gauge how well the court is achieving basic goals, such as access and fairness, timeliness, and managerial effectiveness. There are 10 CourTools available. They may be found at: http://www.ncsconline.org/D_Research/CourTools/tcmp_courttools.htm

FY 08 Annual Report Now Available Online

The *FY 08 Annual Report of the Georgia Courts* has been published to the AOC website and is available



at www.georgiacourts.org/aoc/publications.php

Composite CY 07 totals for the appellate and trial courts are presented alongside the CY 06 totals for comparison.

Complete caseload reports for the trial courts are available in the *FY 08 Annual Report — Supplemental* found in the archives section of the publications page.

Mark Your Calendar

The next meeting of the
Judicial Council of Georgia

will be held
Wednesday, July 22, 2009
State Bar of Georgia • Atlanta, GA
1:30 p.m.

AOC On Balance

What else is going on at the AOC? Let us know what you would like to know about us. Give us a call at 404-656-5171 to make your suggestion.