Judicial Council of Georgia
Administrative Office of the Courts

Annual Report

FY 2015

July 1, 2014 - June 30, 2015

The **JUDICIAL COUNCIL OF GEORGIA** was created in 1945 to develop policies for administering and improving Georgia courts. Judicial Council members and committees meet throughout the year to address specific aspects of court administration and improvement. The Judicial Council is made up of 26 members who represent every class of court: the Chief Justice and the Presiding Justice of the Supreme Court; two judges from the Court of Appeals; the presidents and presidents-elect of the superior, juvenile, state, probate, magistrate, and municipal court councils; and 10 judicial district administrative judges.

The **ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE OF THE COURTS** was created in 1973 as the staff for the Judicial Council. O.C.G.A. §15-5-24 charges the AOC with providing services related to court administration, compiling data, examining dockets and making recommendations for expediting litigation, acting as fiscal officer for the Judicial Council, and making recommendations for improving court administration and the judicial system. The AOC accomplishes these charges by offering subject-matter expertise on policy, court innovation, legislation, and court administration to all Georgia courts.

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Director, Cynthia H. Clanton

Judicial Council of Georgia
Administrative Office of the Courts
244 Washington Street, SW • Suite 300
Atlanta, GA 30334

www.georgiacourts.gov

TABLE OF CONTENTS

2 State of the Judiciary

4 Statement from Judicial Council/AOC Director

5 Judicial Council of Georgia

6 Strategic Plan

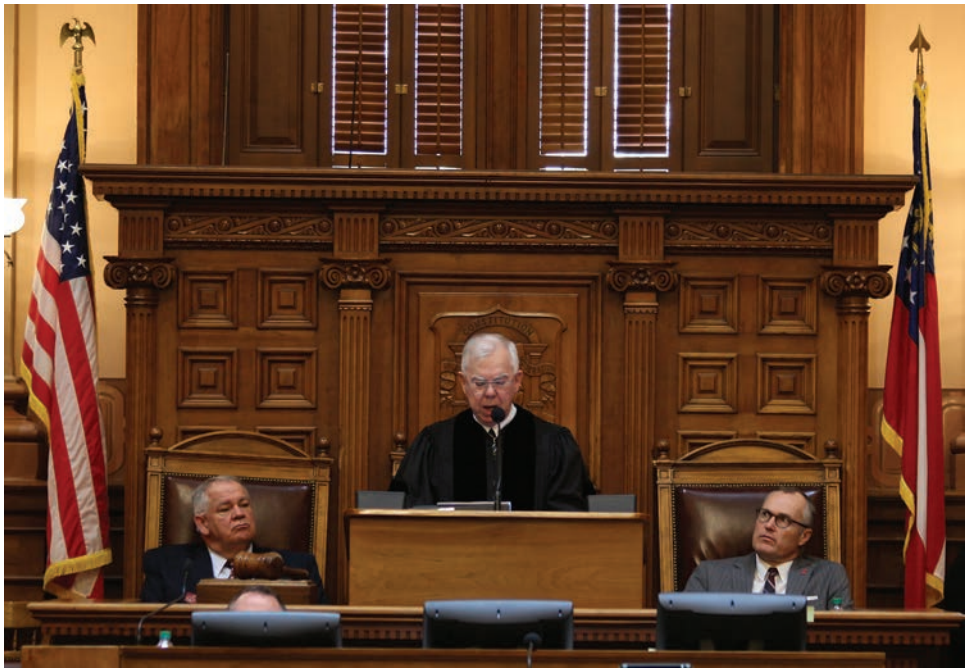
10 Judicial Council Actions

11 FY 2015 in Review

12 Activities Supporting the Georgia Courts

20 Examining the Work of the Georgia Courts

23 Judicial Appointments and Elections



Chief Justice Hugh P. Thompson delivered his second State of the Judiciary address to a joint session of the Georgia General Assembly on February 4, 2015. "Each day in Georgia, our judges dispense justice," the Chief Justice observed. "Each day, when they look at the people in their courtroom, they consider that their decisions will change individuals' lives forever."

The state of Georgia's judiciary is sound and strong because each day across the state prosecutors, public defenders, sheriffs and their deputies, clerks, probation officers, and more than 1400 judges go to work, committed to bringing justice to the state.

Access to Justice

"According to the National Center for Access to Justice, when it comes to access to attorneys, Georgia ranks in the bottom ten states." In Judge J. David Roper's Augusta courtroom, 35 percent of litigants in domestic cases now represent themselves. There are six rural counties in Georgia where there are no lawyers and another 20 where there are fewer than five.

This year, legislation is being introduced to encourage private civil attorneys to work in severely underserved rural areas. Attorneys who work in designated counties would receive assistance paying off law school debts after a specified period of time.

Specialty Courts

Georgia is a model for criminal justice reform. More than 5100 Georgians participated in specialty courts during 2014. These courts are another example of savings for Georgia, as a state and as a people. Ordinary Georgians who have spent their lives abusing drugs are graduating from drug courts in order to work, pay taxes, and contribute to their communities.

Veterans courts focus on helping those who have helped this nation. In Judge Reuben Green's court, Cobb Veterans Court participants are paired with fellow veterans — now attorneys — who volunteer their time to stand and help participants along their way.

Judge Reuben Green

Growth in Georgia

For the first time, Georgia's population has surpassed 10 million. "Like other states, Georgia is experiencing a growth in our elderly population." This will bring one of the greatest challenges our courts will face, particularly to the probate courts. The probate courts lack the staff and resources they need to deal with more and more seniors who have no family to support them. The probate courts of the state will need the support of the General Assembly as the population ages and more resources are called to bear on those courts.

As the population in the state grows, so do the companies that do business in Georgia. "Our courts must be ready and able to quickly resolve business disputes," Chief Justice Thompson said. Fulton County's Business Court, under the leadership of Judge John Goger, provides prompt resolution of complex commercial litigation by a panel of experienced judges. "As we go forward, we would like to see more of these courts in our state."

The Chief Justice lauded Georgia's Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) system, reporting that each year 70 percent of the cases that go through ADR are settled, resulting in nearly 25,000 fewer civil cases in the courts.

Diversity

As the state's population grows, so does the diversity of the population. "Our judges must reflect our population," the Chief Justice said. "The perception of justice is almost as important as justice itself."

Two important milestones were reached for the superior courts in January. On January 1, Judge Meng Lim took his seat on the bench of the Tallapoosa Judicial Circuit as the first Asian-American superior court judge in Georgia, after winning a run-off election in the two-county circuit in 2014. And on January 7, 2015, Judge Dean Bucci of the Paulding Judicial Circuit was sworn-in as the first Hispanic superior court judge in the state.

The Chief Justice closed his address by saying, "Judge Lim and the other judges I have mentioned here today represent our state's future. They represent the many judges who embody the values Georgians hold dear – humility, integrity, hard work, courage, resiliency, love of country, and love of community."

Judge Meng Lim, at right with his parents, was elected as Georgia's first Asian-American Superior Court Judge.

Director's Statement

On behalf of the Judicial Council and the Administrative Office of the Courts, I am pleased to present the 42nd annual report on our accomplishments during FY 2015. Much of the work described in this annual report was performed under the watchful eye of Marla S. Moore, the previous AOC director, who retired in May 2015 after 34 years of service. We appreciate her leadership. I was appointed to serve as interim director upon Marla's retirement before being selected to serve as the agency's director on November 3, 2015. I am truly honored by this opportunity.

The vision memorialized in the Judicial Council strategic plan is to improve justice in ALL Georgia courts through collaboration, innovation, and information. As staff to the Judicial Council, we at the AOC are committed to making this vision a reality. This annual report reflects our past year's work and lays out our plan to continue implementing the initiatives of the strategic plan into 2016.

The judicial branch is full of wise and dedicated leaders focused on addressing the needs of litigants throughout Georgia. One such leader was Chief Justice Harold Clarke. His words continue to inspire me as our agency focuses anew on providing the highest level of service to our clients – our judges. Always a distinguished and forward-thinking jurist, Justice Clarke said:

"The only real road to image improvement follows the route of improved public service. . . . [I]f . . . the courts worry enough about public service and the manner of performing that service, the matter of public image will take care of itself. . . . [W]e have courts . . . because people have problems. The justification for our existence rests with our ability to solve the people's problems in a manner acceptable to the people. . . ."

As an agency, the AOC is focused like a laser on serving the needs of the judiciary and its councils, boards, committees, and commissions. Improved communication, increased collaboration, and development of the next generation of judicial leaders are benchmarks we have adopted to measure the success of our work.

The AOC is first and foremost a service agency. Our mission is to help meet the needs of the judiciary statewide. The work outlined in this report touches every court, every city, and every corner of our state in one way or another.

For more information about the Georgia judicial branch, please visit our website, where you can view our social media and publications, at www.georgiacourts.gov

Thank you for this opportunity to serve the judges and the citizens of Georgia.

Cynthia H. Clanton
Director
Judicial Council/Administrative Office of the Courts

Judicial Council of Georgia

Chief Justice Hugh P. Thompson
Chair
Supreme Court

Presiding Justice P. Harris Hines
Vice Chair
Supreme Court

Chief Judge Sara L. Doyle
Court of Appeals

Judge Stephen L.A. Dillard
Court of Appeals

Judge Brenda S. Weaver
Council of Superior Court Judges

Judge Horace J. Johnson
Council of Superior Court Judges

Judge Wayne M. Purdom
Council of State Court Judges

Judge Richard A. Slaby
Council of State Court Judges

Judge John B. Sumner
Council of Juvenile Court Judges

Judge Benjamin P. Brinson*
Council of Juvenile Court Judges

Judge Don E. Wilkes
Council of Probate Court Judges

Judge Alice Padgett
Council of Probate Court Judges

Judge Robert E. Turner
Council of Magistrate Court Judges

Judge Kristina Hammer Blum*
Council of Magistrate Court Judges

Judge Leslie Spornberger Jones
Council of Municipal Court Judges

Judge Gary E. Jackson
Council of Municipal Court Judges

District Administrative Judges

Judge John E. Morse, Jr.
First District

Judge Harry J. Altman II
Second District

Judge Edward D. Lukemire*
Third District

Judge Tangela Barrie
Fourth District

Judge Gail S. Tusan*
Fifth District

Judge Matthew O. Simmons
Sixth District

Judge S. Lark Ingram
Seventh District

Judge Kathy Palmer
Eighth District

Judge Melodie Snell Conner
Ninth District

Judge J. Carlisle Overstreet
Tenth District

Leaders of the Judicial Council and AOC collaborated during FY 2015 to identify three Strategic Objectives as priorities to fulfill the Council and AOC's mission and vision. Each Objective has a focused set of priority initiatives for FY 2014 – FY 2016 to help translate the strategy into action.

Strategic Objectives

1. Improve Citizen Experience with Georgia Courts

Improving the citizen experience with Georgia courts begins with developing a clear understanding of current issues using objective inputs and common measures. Georgia's courts serve a diverse mix of customers, including citizens, litigants, and attorneys. The Council and AOC will work to establish a baseline evaluation of the current customer experience with Georgia courts. Sustained use of performance measures and a commitment to performance improvement efforts will help courts improve the citizen experience. The Council and AOC will work to educate courts on performance measures, tools and processes and encourage their use.

Mission
The Judicial Council and AOC 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.

2. Improve Collaboration and Planning

The effort to develop the FY 2014 – FY 2016 Strategic Plan demonstrated the value of bringing together leaders of different courts to work together on areas of common interest and benefit. Sustained coordinated planning is critical for the Georgia judiciary in an environment of scarce resources and budget pressures. An ongoing collaborative strategic planning process enables the Judicial Council and AOC to focus resources on the most important issues.

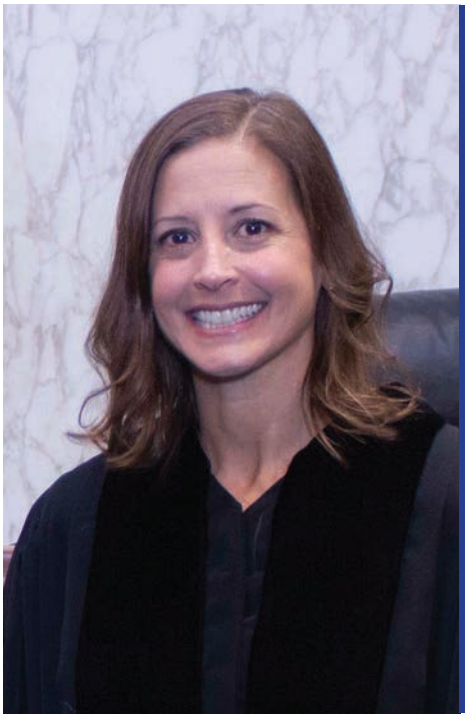
Collaborative preparation for legislative sessions will enable more cohesive, broadly supported messages to the General Assembly. Effective communication with key stakeholders will improve awareness and engagement with the Judicial Council, the judicial community at large, and AOC.

Leadership of the Judicial Council and new leadership at AOC has established and maintained positive momentum for ongoing collaboration while respecting the independence of different classes of court. This balance of collaboration and independence will guide the ongoing processes of planning and executing on strategic priorities. Reviewing and revising the Judicial Council's bylaws, committee structure, and leadership continuity will align the Council's processes with the needs of Georgia's judiciary and enable more sustained execution of strategies.

3. Build Thought Leadership

Building thought leadership for the Judicial Council involves establishing research and information sharing capabilities and sharing innovations and best practices to benefit the Georgia judicial system. The AOC will collaborate with the Judicial Council in defining research priorities and establishing a repository of information. This effort will balance responsiveness to current needs with forward looking research and information sharing focused on innovation.

Many of Georgia's courts are implementing new processes and tools to improve citizen experience and court efficiency. Sharing these best practices across the state will expand their use to reach more citizens, support consistency in approaches across the state, and help build collaboration and community across the judiciary.



"Our *goal* is to provide structure and guidance to the *Judicial Council* and AOC staff to further the mission of the Judicial Council."

— Chief Judge Sara L. Doyle

Strategic Plan Implementation Committee Membership

Judge Sara Doyle, Chair
Court of Appeals of Georgia

Judge Mary Staley
Council of Superior Court Judges

Judge Charles Wynne
Council of State Court Judges

Judge E.R. Lanier
Council of Municipal Court Judges

Judge W. Allen Wigington
Council of Magistrate Court Judges

Judge J. Lane Bearden
Council of Juvenile Court Judges

Judge Chase Daughtrey
Council of Probate Court Judges

"The strategic *plan* has been helpful, although time consuming, to take a *fresh look* at the court orders and laws that created the Judicial Council."

— Judge W. Allen Wigington

Implementation Progress

The Judicial Council and Administrative Office of the Courts will work together to implement the Strategic Plan. The Chief Justice and Director of the AOC are responsible to the Council for directing the implementation of the plan; engaging Council members for input and participation; and reporting to the Council on progress and outcomes of the implementation. An Implementation Committee was created in 2013.

Initial steps of the FY 2014 – FY 2016 Strategic Plan's Priority Initiatives are outlined below:

1. Establish a baseline evaluation of current customer experience with Georgia courts [completed];

2. Encourage Georgia courts to assess performance and develop improvement plans [completed];

3. Implement ongoing strategic planning by the Judicial Council and AOC [ongoing];

4. Implement new approaches to engage the Judicial Council in preparation for legislative sessions [ongoing];

5. Develop and implement new two-way communication strategies for Judicial Council/AOC to engage with judges [ongoing];

6. Solicit input and develop recommendations for:
   (a) Judicial Council bylaws [completed],
   (b) committee structure [ongoing], and
   (c) leadership continuity [ongoing];

7. Define research priorities and schedule for FY 2015 and FY 2016 [completed];

8. Create open repository of information for all classes of court [ongoing]; and

9. Identify and share innovations and best practices across Georgia's Courts [ongoing].

Judicial Council Actions

As the judicial branch's policy-making body for statewide issues, the Judicial Council considers new judgeships, budgetary and legislative matters, and judicial branch programs and policies.

Chaired by the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, the 26 members of the Judicial Council represent all of Georgia's appellate and trial courts. The Council also oversees the work of the Administrative Office of the Courts, which staffs the Council and its committees.

The Judicial Council met six times during FY 2015 and took the following actions:

- Approved recommendation for an additional judge in the Western Judicial Circuit;
- Adopted "Proposed Statewide Minimum Standards for Electronic Filing;"
- Adopted proposed policies and fees for court reporters in criminal cases;
- Approved the revised Policy on the Study of Superior Court Judgeships and Circuit Boundaries;
- Implemented a Tax Refund Intercept Pilot Program for court fees;
- Adopted new bylaws;
- Formed an Executive Search Committee to search for a new Judicial Council/ AOC Director.

Above: Judge Don Wilkes, Judge Gail Tusan, and Judge Leslie Spornberger Jones listen at the May 2015 Judicial Council meeting.

Left: Chief Justice Hugh Thompson swears-in new Judicial Council member Judge Tangela Barrie at the February 2015 Judicial Council meeting.

The General Assembly met from January 12 until April 2, 2015. Legislation significant to the judicial branch included pay raises for appellate and superior court judges and reforms in the area of probation supervision.

Two Judicial Council bills passed during the 2015 session, H.B. 119 and S.B. 62.

- H.B. 119 revised O.C.G.A. §24-12-21 to exempt probate courts from certain requirements related to the disclosure of AIDS information, when a probate judge issues an Order to Apprehend for a person needing a mental health evaluation. The language from H.B. 119 was attached to H.B. 72, which passed on Day 40.

- S.B. 62 amended O.C.G.A. §15-9-30.3, to clarify jurisdiction of the probate courts relating to fish and game law violations.

Additionally, three new judgeships were authorized for the Court of Appeals.

During the 2015 Legislative session $110,683,068 was appropriated to the Judicial Branch for FY 2016. Funding was received for an e-filing portal implementation, court administrator certification training, misdemeanor probation compliance position, civil legal services for victims of domestic violence, the Magistrate Court Forms Wizard, and institutionalization of the Cold Case Project. Adjustments were funded for employee and judicial retirement obligations, merit based salary adjustments, Department of Administrative Services and Teamworks billings. The Amended FY 2015 budget included additional funds for misdemeanor probation compliance positions and an adjustment to include an increase to the Judicial Retirement System for the Council of State Court Judges.

Five Year Budget Comparison FY 2012 - FY 2016

	FY 2012	FY 2013	FY 2014	FY 2015	FY 2016
Supreme Court	$8,625,575	$9,093,297	$9,392,560	$10,248,025	$10,312,655
Court of Appeals	$13,357,490	$14,106,000	$14,441,605	$15,035,519	$17,314,958
Superior Courts	$58,770,012	$61,105,042	$62,255,828	$64,909,147	$65,136,540
Juvenile Courts	$6,718,350	$6,774,461	$6,787,786	$7,029,264	$7,606,988
Judicial Council	$13,468,577	$12,423,861	$12,322,112	$13,461,113	$15,411,761
Judicial Branch/Courts					
Total	$100,940,004	$103,502,661	$105,199,891	$110,683,068	$115,782,902
State Funds	$18,299,477,557	$19,342,059,819	$19,920,261,481	$20,836,744,620	$21,828,789,407
% of State Funds	0.55%	0.54%	0.53%	0.53%	0.53%
% of State Funds Change	0.01%	-0.02%	-0.01%	0.00%	0.00%

Budget

Amended FY 2015 Budget

Amended FY 2015 Enhancement Request	Amount Requested	Amount Funded
County and Municipal Probation Advisory Council	$88,217	$42,022
Adjustments		
Council of State Court Judges Retirement	$117,265	$117,265

FY 2016 Budget

FY 2016 Enhancement Request	Amount Requested	Amount Funded
Institute of Continuing Judicial Education	$123,020	$0
Cold Case Project	$175,000	$100,000
Council of Magistrate Court Judges	$10,000	$10,000
Council of Probate Court Judges	$113,642	$0
Civil Legal Services for Victims of Domestic Violence	$386,251	$193,126
Council of Municipal Court Judges	$21,795	$0
County and Municipal Probation Advisory Council	$277,167	$277,167
Georgia Council of Court Administrators	$7,500	$7,500
E-Filing Portal Implementation	$0	$120,000
Adjustments		
Council of State Court Judges Retirement	$975,040	$1,011,867
Department of Administrative Services	$0	$43,951
Employees Retirement System	$0	$135,122
Merit-based pay adjustments	$0	$46,056
Teamworks billing	$0	$5,859

The Judicial Council/AOC provides subject-matter expertise on policy, court innovation, legislation, and court administration to all classes of courts. The agency also furnishes a full range of information technology, budget, and financial services to the judicial branch.

Director Clanton represents the interests of the Judicial Council and courts on several state bodies including the Institute of Continuing Judicial Education (ICJE) as a Trustee and the Board of Court Reporting as Secretary. She is a new appointee to the Criminal Justice Coordinating Council and several of their committees. Cynthia continues to maintain her strong ties with the State Bar of Georgia by serving as advisor to the Bench and Bar Committee, and member of the Consumer Assistance Committee.

Office of Governmental and Trial Court Liaison

In FY 2015, the Governmental and Trial Court Liaison (GTCL) team focused on providing the highest level of service to the trial court councils, collaborated and coordinated with judicial branch stakeholders, and supported the Judicial Council in its strategic goals and mission.

Liaison staff provided policy and technical support and/or administrative services to the following groups:

- Council of Municipal Court Judges (CMuCJ) and the Municipal Court Training Council
- Council of Probate Court Judges (CPCJ) and the Probate Court Training Council
- Magistrate Court Training Council
- Council of Magistrate Court Clerks
- Council of Municipal Court Clerks

Notable activities from FY 2015 include the CPCJ "READY" Campaign, the planning and facilitation of activities in commemoration of the 20th anniversary of the statutory creation of the CMuCJ, and the successful launch of the CMuCJ Lunch & Learn District Training Series. GTCL staff provided support at Council training conferences, Leadership meetings for both the CPCJ and CMuCJ, and numerous committee meetings over the course of the year. Additionally, as staff to the above-mentioned training councils, GTCL staff participated in the implementation of the Judges and Clerks module in the Georgia Courts Registrar and continued annual certification processes.

Building on the enhanced legislative preparation timeline implemented in FY 2014, the GTCL team supported the Judicial Council Policy and Legislative Committee to consider legislation for all classes of court and make recommendations to the Judicial Council. Legislative services from the GTCL team included policy analysis and legal research, assistance with communications, tracking and monitoring of legislation, and daily and weekly legislative reports. For the second year in a row, informational one-pagers for each item in the Judicial Council's legislative package were produced, compiled and used as a resource and communications tool for legislators.

Staff coordinated with the CPCJ to host the inaugural Probate Court Day at the Capitol and supported the CPCJ in passing two legislative items (provisions related to Orders to Apprehend, and clean-up language related to the jurisdiction of certain fish and game law violations). Staff worked closely with the CMuCJ to introduce three legislative items to enhance the efficiency and operations of municipal courts in Georgia.

The GTCL office administered the Georgia Certified Process Server Program, which was statutorily extended by the General Assembly. Two certification exam sessions were held in FY 2015.

More than 40 probate judges from across Georgia travelled to the State Capitol in Atlanta on January 27, 2015, to accept a commendation from Gov. Nathan Deal for the critical role probate judges play in the legal system.

Financial Administration Division

The Financial Administration Division (FAD) processed all financial transactions for 19 judicial agencies. A total of 106 programs were maintained over FY 2015, including 38 state, 13 federal, and 55 other funded programs.

All programs are continuously monitored for budgetary compliance and available for the annual independent inspection and audit.

Information Technology & The Georgia Judicial Exchange

Superior courts in 124 counties electronically file child support orders through the Georgia Judicial Exchange (GAJE) administered by the JC/AOC. Development on GAJE began in 2004 in response to the Georgia Division of Child Support Services' (DCSS) request for an e-filing system that could be used by its local offices. Pilot sites in Washington and Bibb counties initiated use of GAJE in 2008. The implementation of e-filing has dramatically shortened the amount of time it takes for a DCSS office to file court pleadings, reduced the number of staff necessary to file a pleading, and improved service to citizens.

The JC/AOC IT Division was an integral part of the team that initiated the tax refund intercept pilot program for debts to courts. Staff worked with Department of Revenue IT to determine business processes and then helped to stand up and host a third-party collections application to manage the thousands of anticipated intercept requests. The pilot project is slated to begin live intercept testing in the 2016 tax season.

The products and systems provided by JC/AOC IT enable the complete and accurate collection and reporting of standard data elements as well as the safe and effective sharing of legal documents between court system participants. Certification of these products reduces interoperability barriers that often arise when partners seek to exchange data without the benefit of prior third-party certification.

Office of General Counsel

The Office of General Counsel provided legal services and research to the JC/AOC and courts during FY 2015. More than 150 contracts were drafted and grants totaling nearly $2.1 million for nonprofits that provide civil legal services to victims of domestic violence were monitored and managed. An internal policy on handling personally identifiable information was drafted and adopted. Daily inquiries from the public, inmates, attorneys and judicial branch employees were answered. Legal guidance was provided to judges regarding the U.S. Supreme Court's *Obergefell v. Hodges* decision and its effect on same sex marriage.

Civil Legal Services to Victims of Family Violence Grant Awards FY 2015

Atlanta Legal Aid Society	*$564,909*
Gateway House	*$9,000*
Georgia Law Center for the Homeless	*$25,000*
GA Legal Services Program	*$1,393,065*
Northeast Georgia Shelter Collaborative (SAFE)	*$35,000*
Northwest Georgia Family Crisis Center, Inc.	*$25,000*
Peace Place	*$3,000*
*Southwestern Judicial Circuit (FVC)**	*$9,000*
Wayne County Protective Agency/Fair Haven	*$7,500*
TOTAL FUNDS AWARDED	***$2,071,474***

**New applicant*

Committee on Justice for Children

Since 1995, the Supreme Court's Committee on Justice for Children (J4C) has worked to improve court processes involving civil child abuse and neglect cases. The committee and staff utilize several grants, including the Federal Court Improvement Program, Casey Family Programs, and Quality Improvement Center (QIC) for Child Representation to fund their activities.

The Federal Court Improvement Program has provided the Georgia judicial system with more than $6 million over 20 years. Under Chair Presiding Justice P. Harris Hines, the grant has provided: an automated data exchange between the judicial branch and the executive branch of child specific data and associated court orders; educational experiences for attorneys and juvenile court judges; the publishing of child welfare outcomes on a public website (fosteringcourtimprovement.org); more than 100 local child welfare data summits and multiple educational summits; and the certification of 47 attorneys as child welfare law specialists. During FY 2015, nine summits, one complex trauma summit, three school justice partnership summits, a CPRS "super users" meeting, and a "Raise Your Bar" seminar were held and five attorneys were certified.

As part of the Casey funded Cold Case Project, an expert team uses a statistical predictive model to identify children who are stuck in foster care. The team reviews files and conducts meetings with local staff and foster children to ensure every legal avenue for permanently placing the children has been explored. Outcome measures show a 25 percent greater success rate for legal permanency compared to children receiving no special attention. During FY 2015, 171 cases were reviewed.

JC/AOC staff in Washington, DC, (above, left) and staff being recognized for certification programs in the Atlanta office (above, right).

Georgia Child Support Project

http://csc.georgiacourts.gov

The Georgia Child Support Project is a collaborative of the JC/AOC and the Department of Human Services, Division of Child Support Services. Its primary duty is to staff the Georgia Commission on Child Support. The Commission is engaged in several projects to improve citizen experience with Georgia courts, improve collaboration and planning, and build thought leadership.

Initiatives for FY 2015

• The Commission approved, and staff developed, a new online child support calculator. The user friendly and intuitive product should make calculating child support easier for self-represented litigants. The Excel-based calculators will remain available for as long as financially feasible to accommodate courts that do not have wireless internet access, which would preclude making changes to the online worksheets during a hearing.

• Ongoing collaborative work with the Division of Child Support Services. Projects include training, support to the agency's e-filing project, and assistance with private income deduction orders.

• Support the DCSS Parental Accountability Courts (PAC). Pat Buonodono and Elaine Johnson serve on the Parental Accountability Courts Subcommittee of the Council of Superior Court Judges' Accountability Courts Committee. A database developed by the JC/AOC will provide statistical evidence of the efficacy of these courts and support efforts to obtain grants and state funding for the these courts. Every PAC Coordinator will receive hands on training with the database.

• Respond to inquiries about calculating child support and filing income withholding documentation from self-represented litigants, attorneys, and employers on a daily basis.

• Research issues pertaining to child support and sponsor legislation that the Commission deems important.

• Provide training to attorneys, judges, and mediators throughout the state. Staff conducted 17 training sessions for attorneys, judges and DCSS agency staff.

"Although work always remains to be done, I am *proud* of all the Commission has accomplished in the past year, especially our efforts to provide educational programming and better *guidance* to our trial judges, who are charged with the responsibility of ensuring that hearing impairment and limited English proficiency are no *barrier* to justice."

— Justice Keith Blackwell

Court Interpreters

To ensure equal access to justice for people with limited English proficiency and for deaf and hearing-impaired people, courtroom interpreters must be specially trained as court support professionals. The Commission on Interpreters credentials court interpreters in a variety of languages and sets policies and procedures for court interpretation.

Georgia has 155 licensed court interpreters who are certified, conditionally approved, or registered in 11 spoken languages – Amharic, Bosnian, Cantonese, Farsi, Haitian-Creole, Korean, Mandarin, Portuguese, Spanish, Urdu, and Vietnamese. In FY 2015, four people earned licenses in Spanish and Urdu. Additionally, there are eight sign language interpreting firms currently certified to operate in Georgia.

The Gwinnett Justice and Administration Center in November 2014 served as the venue for a unique Commission-sponsored conference that combined a professional education seminar for licensed interpreters with an open opportunity for interpreters to meet and talk directly with Commission members, including Justice Keith Blackwell, Commission chair. Around 50 interpreters attended the event, and they were pleased that several judges attended the event and answered questions from interpreters about court interpretive services.

In March 2015, the Commission sponsored the second annual statewide CLE focused on language access, "Eliminating Barriers to Justice II: Why and How to Ensure Language Access for Limited English Proficient and Deaf/Hard of Hearing Litigants." The focus of the CLE, which was held at John Marshall Law School in Atlanta, was professionalism and ethical considerations in the language-access arena. Attendees also learned about access to justice for self-represented litigants and the requirement that all Georgia courts appoint a sign language or foreign language interpreter in all legal proceedings at no cost to limited English proficient or deaf/hard of hearing litigants and witnesses.

In May 2015, the Commission on Interpreters was awarded a $15,000 grant to develop a model protocol that will help state courts meet their obligations to provide interpreters and other language services. The grant, awarded by the National Center for State Courts, was part of a larger national initiative supported by the State Justice Institute. The grant allows the Commission to draft a step-by-step administrative guide for the provision of language services. The guide, the first of its kind in Georgia, will promote the reliable and efficient provision of language services in state courts throughout Georgia, both for persons with limited English proficiency and for those who are deaf or hard of hearing. The guide is expected to be available by fall 2016 and will be in the form of a template that is adaptable to the needs of local courts.

Court Neutrals

The Georgia Office of Dispute Resolution administratively supports the Commission on Dispute Resolution in its oversight of local, court-connected programs offering alternatives to traditional litigation. Those alternatives – mediation, non-binding arbitration, and case evaluation – give litigants lower-cost choices for resolving their differences compared to going to trial, and they help conserve scarce court resources for adversarial cases.

In June 2015, the Commission completed an intensive eight-month process to produce a strategic plan that would guide its work through FY2018 and beyond. The Commission – whose mission is to lead a statewide system that offers Georgians high quality, cost-effective alternatives to traditional litigation – determined that its primary focus for the next several years would be on projects that fulfill three main objectives:

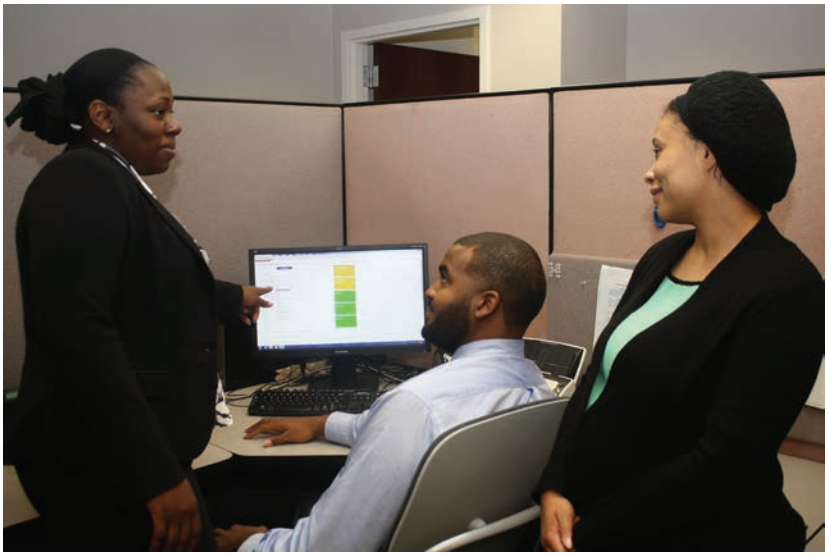
1. Conduct Research, Analysis and Education;
2. Expand Access to Dispute Resolution; and
3. Improve Education and Communication on Dispute Resolution for all Stakeholders.

The 21st Annual ADR (Alternative Dispute Resolution) Institute and 2014 Neutrals' Conference — held December 12, 2014, at the State Bar of Georgia in Atlanta — attracted more than 200 attendees, including those who watched live remote broadcasts of the conference at the state bar offices in Tifton and Savannah. Speakers included David Joseph, an experienced mediator, facilitator, and trainer from the noted Public Conversations Project of Watertown, MA, who spoke on cross-cultural communication; Commission member Dr. Tim Hedeen, who presented on the appropriate role of mediator pressure; Dr. Susan Raynes from Kennesaw State University, who described innovations in online dispute resolution; and a panel of Georgia ADR court program directors, who advised mediators and other program directors on working with self-represented parties.

Mr. David Joseph, above, spoke to the attendees at the 21st Annual ADR Institute on December 12, 2014.

Georgia Courts Registrar

The JC/AOC annually licenses, registers, and credentials over 5,000 court officials and professionals and over 300 firms. To serve these professionals the Georgia Courts Registrar (Registrar) was created as a hub where individuals and firms submit new and annual certification and licensing qualifications. The Registrar also provides a central application for court officials and professionals to create profile information, submit and track information, upload documents, and pay license and registration fees. The agency has reorganized staff to support the Registrar, thereby reducing personnel expenses and increasing efficiencies. The reorganized staffing model prioritizes efficient application processing and excellent customer service, allowing the agency to focus on delivering superior offerings. The Registrar staff process applications and provide timely support via telephone and email to ensure court professionals are properly credentialed to support Georgia's courts.



Registrar staff consult on an issue.

Member Group	Description of Services	# of profiles/applicants during 2015
County and Municipal Probation Advisory Council	Misdemeanor Probation Employee Data Maintained	1,504
	Renewal of Misdemeanor Probation Provider Registration	91
Board of Court Reporting	Learning Essentials About Professionalism (LEAP) Seminar/Training	30
	Renewal of Annual Registration Court Reporting Firms	1,199
	Renewal of Certification Court Reporters	1,136
Commission on Interpreters	Renewal of Court Interpreter Licensure	155
Commission on Dispute Resolution	Registration of Neutrals	2,109
GA Commission on Family Violence	Family Violence Intervention Program Participants	4,715
	Renewal of Family Violence Intervention Program (biennial cycle)	61
GA Certified Process Server Program	Process Server Certification Exams Administered	57
Magistrate Judges	Data Maintained and Confirmed	523
Municipal Judges and Clerks	Data Maintained and Confirmed	858
Total Services Rendered		**12,438**

Board of Court Reporting

The Board of Court Reporting governs the certification and disciplinary process of the practice of court reporting. Production of the official court record is an essential process contributing to court users' access to and fairness in Georgia courts.

JC/AOC staff oversees the swearing-in by Judge Stephen Dillard of new Board of Court Reporting members including Judge John Edwards, Jr.

Court Reporting Policies and Fees

In September 2014 and June 2015, the Judicial Council adopted the Policies and Fees for Court Reporting Services in Criminal Cases after studying the court record process for more than two years. The rule of law, individual rights and liberties, public order, and peaceful resolution of disputes are upheld when the court record is accurate and timely filed for public access, and implementation of the Policies and Fees will allow courts to streamline business processes and standardized their day-to-day operations. Below are some of the changes included in the revised policies.

Electronic Records and Timely Filings

- Effective January 1, 2015, transcripts ordered and filed in criminal cases shall be produced in a searchable, portable document format or another approved electronic format with document search capability and filed with the clerk of court in a medium that can be stored electronically.

- Transcript delivery is now governed by time limits which prevent unnecessary delay that impacts case flow and slow down Georgia's courts.

Criminal Cases and Compensation

- Clarification to the types of court reporting services requirements, such as takedown and transcription by law or upon request, were delineated for administration and management of the court record. The multi-tiered fee system developed in 1980s from a paper-based business model was replaced with a simplified compensation structure for technological advancement of court reporting services and transcripts production in electronic format. Uniform billing or standard invoicing for court reporting services provides transparency for payment of public funds.

Court Business Continuity

- The revised policies also include recommendations on how courts can preserve the court records to ensure business continuity. When adopted by courts, these recommendations would prevent the unnecessary loss of court transcripts, which can costs Georgia and its counties thousands of dollars in retrying cases and recreating transcripts.

Research, Planning and Data Analysis

During Fiscal Year 2015, the Office of Research, Planning and Data Analysis (Research) continued to provide the Judicial Council with data-driven research to aid in the Council's efforts to improve the administration of justice in all Georgia's courts. The Office also continued its perennial work of collecting and analyzing the caseloads of over 1,000 courts across the state.

Baseline Assessment of Court Access and Fairness

The first-ever statewide survey to gauge the satisfaction of Georgia's court users found that most people leaving state courthouses had a positive experience. From October 2014 to December 2014, nearly 4,000 court users in Georgia answered a survey developed by the National Center for State Courts and administered by staff of the JC/AOC and Kennesaw State University's A.L. Burruss Institute of Public Service and Research.

Almost 90 percent of courthouse visitors answered that they were treated respectfully and courteously by judges and courthouse staff.

The study was commissioned by the JC/AOC as part of the implementation process of its strategic plan. The survey will be used to set a baseline standard of court visitors' perceptions of access and fairness, as well as the quality of customer service in state courts.

The survey addressed the quality of customer service at court facilities across the state, as well as how fairly people felt treated when appearing before a judicial officer. More than 3,800 responses were received from 109 court locations, including both county and municipal courts. The responses were analyzed by the JC/AOC and distributed to participating courts, which can now be leveraged to improve the delivery of court services.

The survey's findings showed more than three-fourths of respondents agreed that their case was handled fairly, with 41 percent strongly agreeing. More than 80 percent of respondents felt court forms were clear and easy to understand. Of those who responded to questions about access, more than 80 percent felt their court made reasonable efforts to remove physical and language barriers to court services.

While 78 percent of respondents felt they completed their courthouse business in a reasonable amount of time, almost 12 percent felt unable to do so.

The results of this evaluation will be used as a point of comparison for future research projects.

Improvements to Data Collection & Quality

The JC/AOC was awarded the 2014 Reporting Excellence Award from the National Center for State Courts' Court Statistics Project. Each year, state court administrative offices submit data to the Court Statistics Project. The states that demonstrate substantial progress in their efforts to report accurate data are recognized with the Reporting Excellence Award. Georgia's courts were commended for increasing the number of case types reported in both general and limited jurisdiction courts as well as for submitting data accurate enough to be included in the Court Statistics Project's analysis.

Since 1976, the Research office has worked with local officials to measure activity in Georgia courts. The ongoing efforts produce statistics for supreme, appeals, superior, state, juvenile, probate, magistrate, civil, recorders, and municipal courts.

Georgia law requires the JC/AOC to "compile statistical and financial and other information on the judicial work of the courts and on the work of other offices related to and serving the courts," [O.C.G.A. §15-5-24 (3)] and so, the JC/AOC serves as the state archive of this court caseload information. The collected data is used to support state and county resource decisions, including recommendations for new judgeships, and to assist in policy development.

Trial Court Caseload*

Georgia's courts handled nearly four million incoming cases in CY 2014. The table below shows the distribution of those cases by court jurisdiction and case type. As in previous years, over ninety percent of Georgia's cases are handled by limited jurisdiction courts. Traffic cases make up nearly half (45%) of the state's entire caseload while all forms of criminal and civil filings together make up the remaining limited jurisdiction caseload. Juvenile cases represent just over one percent (1%) of the limited jurisdiction courts' workload.

Criminal cases comprise the largest percentage of superior court case load followed closely by domestic relation cases. Due to concurrent jurisdiction, civil cases are most often initiated in state and magistrate courts, moderating civil filings in superior court.

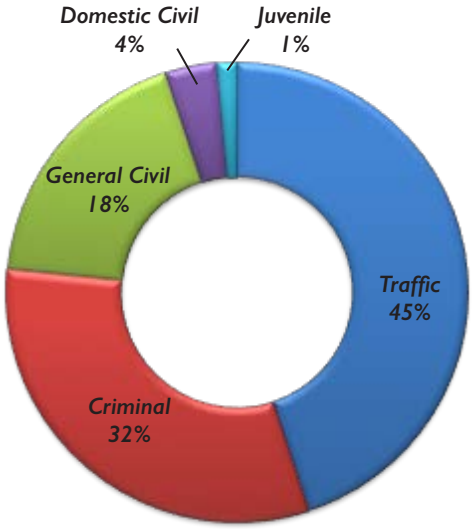
Total Filings by Case Type and Jurisdiction, CY 2014

Case Type	Jurisdiction		
	Limited	*General*	*Total*
Traffic	1,887,401	-	1,887,401
Criminal	1,159,463	167,053	1,326,516
General Civil	712,100	56,983	769,083
Domestic Civil	-	151,672	151,672
Juvenile	60,362	-	60,362
Total Incoming	3,819,326	375,708	4,195,034
Percent of Total	91.25%	8.75%	100%

*Data are accurate as of the date retrieved and may not match previous or future publications due to additional reports and/or corrections to previous reporting. Only courts that self-reported data are included in these figures. This report likely underestimates Georgia's total caseload. Reporting levels vary by class of court.

Overall, traffic cases remain the most prevalent case type, representing 45 percent of all incoming cases. Criminal cases make up another 32 percent while civil cases account for 18 percent of filings. Domestic relations and juvenile cases constitute the remaining caseload at four percent (4%) and one percent (1%) respectively.

Total Filings by Case Type, CY 2014*



Incoming Caseload by Case Type from 2010-2014*

Traffic cases have always represented the largest segment of the caseload and have remained relatively stable across time. A decrease in traffic caseload is seen between 2010 and 2013, but this decrease leveled off in 2014.

In line with national trends, criminal and civil caseloads decreased for most of this five year period. Criminal cases show a noticeable increase for 2014.

Domestic relations caseloads continue on a gradual decline from their peak in 2011. This decline appears to have quickened over time as domestic relations fell eight percent (8%) in 2014 compared to a six percent (6%) decrease in 2013 and a three percent (3%) decrease in 2012.

Juvenile cases also continue to decline with caseloads falling each every year since 2010. The 34 percent drop for 2014 is the largest observed in this timespan.

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Traffic	2,196,698	2,169,285	1,938,299	1,843,942	1,887,401
Criminal	934,200	993,429	903,670	913,352	1,326,516
Civil	930,744	888,369	848,907	793,783	770,710
Domestic Relations	177,816	182,127	175,303	164,942	151,672
Juvenile	109,143	102,321	89,363	91,317	60,362

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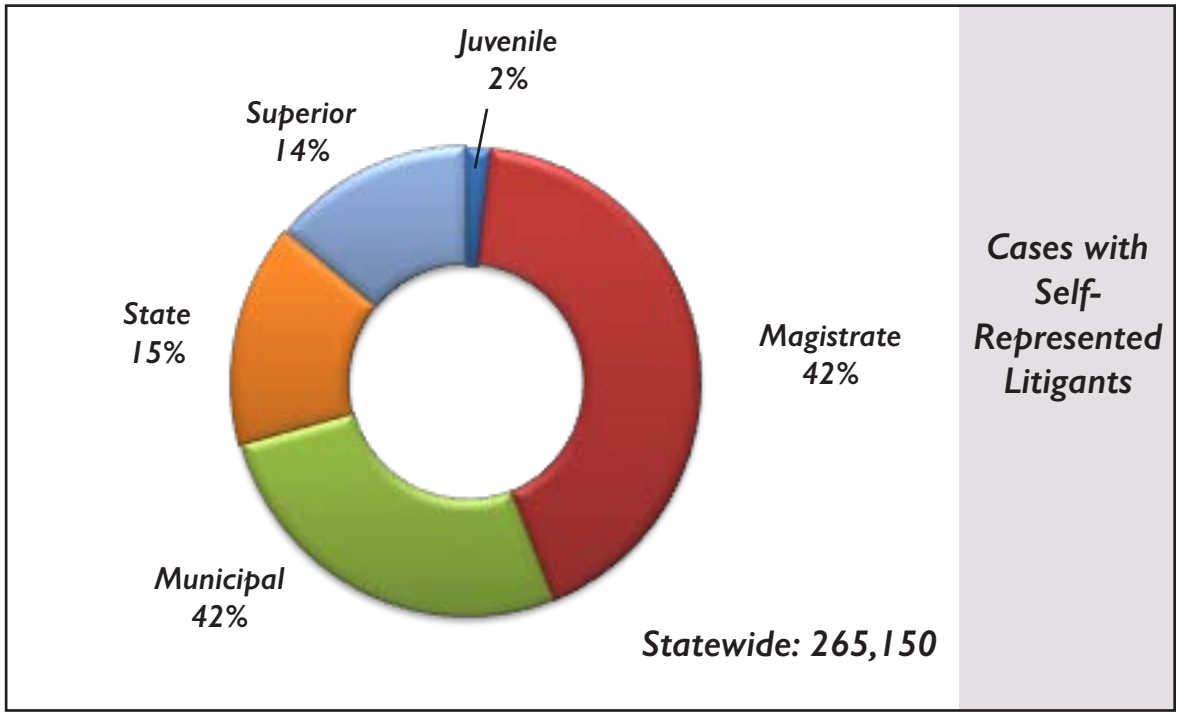
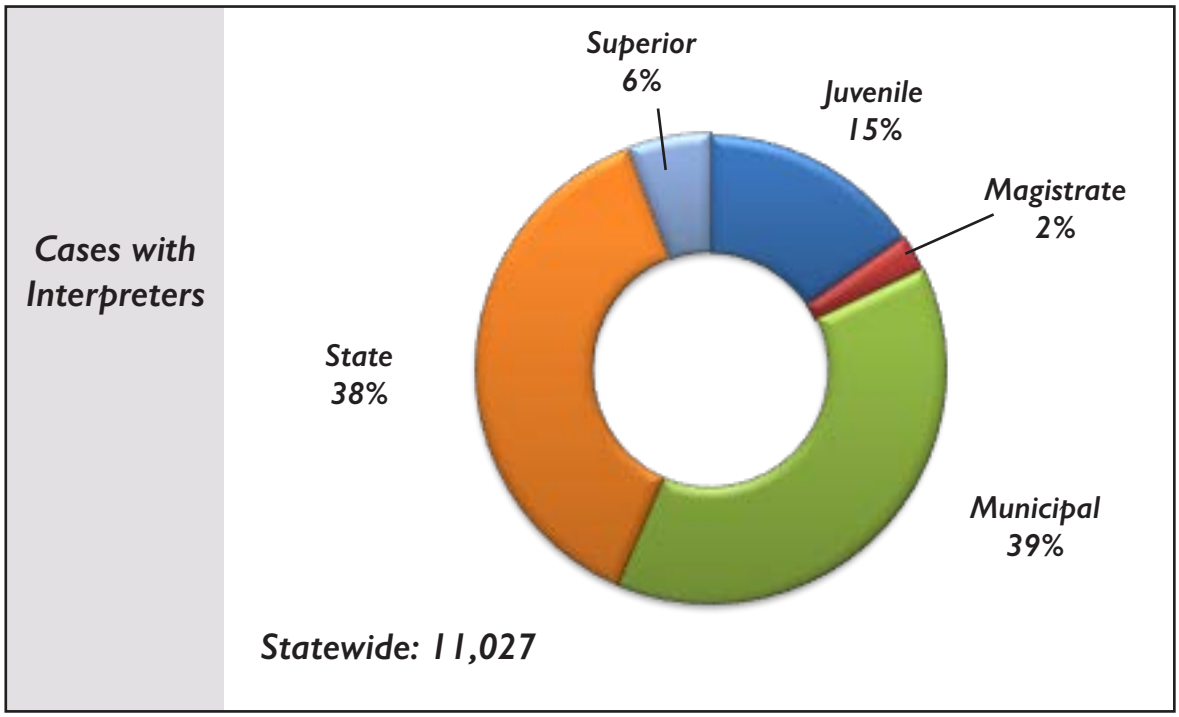
Cases with Special Characteristics for CY 2014*

The percentage of cases that involved a self-represented litigant or an interpreter are shown in the graphs below. Self-represented and limited English proficiency participants impact court resources across all classes of courts. Use of court interpreters and litigant assistance in completing forms and following court business processes are challenges that many courts face.

Probate courts are not included the graph as they did not provide data on case characteristics.

Since 2014 was the first year in which Research asked courts to provide such data, it is believed that court participation and data quality will improve in the future.





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Superior Courts — Appointed

Thomas Baxley	12/17/14	Pataula Judicial Circuit
Dean Bucci	01/07/15	Paulding Judicial Circuit
Alison Burleson	01/14/15	Ocmulgee Judicial Circuit
Brenda Holbert Trammell	01/14/15	Ocmulgee Judicial Circuit
Travis Sakrison	02/06/15	Coweta Judicial Circuit
J. Kelly Brooks	02/26/15	Waycross Judicial Circuit
Chris Phelps	03/04/15	Northern Judicial Circuit
Jean-Paul Boulee	06/29/15	Stone Mountain Judicial Circuit

Superior Courts — Elected

Ann Harris	01/01/15	Cobb Judicial Circuit
Meng Lim	01/01/15	Tallapoosa Judicial Circuit
Jim Wilbanks	01/01/15	Conasauga Judicial Circuit
Jane Barwick	01/01/15	Atlanta Judicial Circuit
Brian McDaniel	01/01/15	Southern Judicial Circuit

State Courts — Appointed

Ralph Powell	07/07/14	Worth County
Ellen Golden	09/03/14	Lowndes County
Shawn Bratton	09/03/14	Gwinnett County
Jackson Cox	12/10/14	Burke County
Michael Jacobs	06/04/15	DeKalb County

State Courts — Elected

Herbert Benson	01/01/15	Tift County
Josh Bell	01/01/15	Grady County
Daniel Bennett	01/01/15	Pierce County
John Dennis	01/01/15	Chattooga County

Magistrate Court — Appointed

Cassandra Kirk	01/01/15	Fulton County

Georgia Tax Tribunal

Larry O'Neal	04/30/15	Statewide