

The Reporter's

Notebook



The Official Newsletter of Georgia's Magistrate Court Clerks

Executive Committee 2019-2021

President:
Carla Brown, Lee County

Vice President
Cynthia Kelley, Burke County

Secretary-Treasurer:
Cheryl McMillan, Charlton County

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District 1:
Renea Daniels, Brantley County

District 2:
Kelley Maslak, Lowndes County

District 3:
Jackie Norman, Lee County

District 4:
Patricia Carreker, Rockdale County

District 5:
Tina Robinson, Fulton County

District 6:
Jan Streetman, Upson County

District 7:
Monika Welchel, Bartow County

District 8:
Bethany Tanner, Washington County

District 9:
Danette Davis, Fannin County

District 10:
Barbara Gray, Hart County



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Greetings from the President

Hello Everyone,

I have just got to say that year 2020 has been one for the books. We had a great planning session in February for our scheduled training in June then everything fell apart. I hope this letter finds you all well and coping with your courts' new way of doing things. I know that it has been taxing on each and every one of you, from maybe working a different schedule, having to deal with children out of school, to not finding all your favorite foods at the grocery store (or in our case, toilet paper), and learning to have virtual court or just rescheduling to accommodate the number of people allowed at a time in your courtroom.

We are having a planning meeting in February for our upcoming training that is scheduled for June 10 – 11, 2021, at Jekyll Island. As of now, the training for 2022 and 2023 will be in Savannah. As you know when we had to cancel our training this year, and the Savannah Marriot would not let us out of our contract without agreeing to another year. Just another note if your court paid for two clerks to attend training in 2020, then your court will have two clerks registered for 2021. So all you would need to do is pay for any additional clerks that may want to attend.



I missed getting together with everyone and learning from you. It is such a blessing to always learn something new. Please let anyone on the executive committee know if you have some topics you like for us to discuss during training. In all my years of

going to training, it has been based on what you, the Clerks want to be taught versus what we think you want, which makes our training so much better.

As many of you may know Susan Nunnally who was our contact with ICJE has moved on to another job. Our contact is Lindsey Colley, whose email is lcolley@uga.edu. I have spoken numerous times, and she is ready to get us going on having the best training.

If you haven't paid your clerks dues, please see the attached form in the newsletter and send it in to Cheryl McMillan. If you're not sure if your county has paid please email her at cmcmillan@charltoncountyga.gov This is an election year for the executive council. If you would like to run for any position, please send an email to Shelly Herndon at shelly.herndon@piercecountyga.gov.

I hope and pray that everyone has a Happy Thanksgiving and a very Merry Christmas. Stay safe, and I will see you all in June.

Carla
Carla Brown
Lee County



From Your Advisor

Hello everyone.

This has been one crazy year. With the Covid-19 and courts being shut down and no in person training for any court, it has not been easy for anyone. I do hope all of you are doing well and enjoying this beautiful Fall weather. Praying for all to stay safe and well through out this Fall and Winter.



I have had two of my clerks, Tracy Abbott, and Amy Shelton, out with serious surgeries. Tracy had surgery in February and came back in July. Amy had surgery in June and is still out. She may have to have another surgery before she is able to come back. I would ask all of you to please keep both in your prayers. Also, my Chief Deputy Clerk, Lucinda Edwards, is retiring in December. She has been with me almost 32 years and it is breaking my heart. She has always been my right hand and it will not be the same without her here. I will be hiring a new clerk that will start with us on November 9th, her name is Emily Ruark, and we are very pleased to have her. We are all like family in our court, so she will fit right in.

I hate that we missed our training this year but am really looking forward to next June for our training in Jekyll Island. As most of you know, Susan Nunnally is no longer with ICJE. We will truly miss her, but she is still in the UGA system. Susan Mason has taken

her place and we are excited to work with her this upcoming year.

Soon, your Executive committee will be hard at work with ICJE Director, Doug Ashworth, and Susan Mason, on the Curriculum for next year. We plan to meet in Forsyth in February. You will all be getting you registration material sometime early January 2021, so please make sure you plan to get your paperwork filled out and get your registration in.

I thank you, each one of you, for all you do for your Judges. We could not do our jobs without you. Remember, you are the backbone of the Magistrate Courts and we appreciate you more than you know. I really look forward to seeing you all next year in Jekyll Island and look forward to working with your Executive Committee on our training materials and instructors.

With the Holidays coming soon, I wanted to wish all of you a very Happy Thanksgiving and wish you all a very Merry Christmas and Happy Holiday Season.

Much Love and Best Wishes,

Connie Holt

Chief Judge

Magistrate Court of Morgan County
Advisor to Council of Magistrate Court
Clerks

Ocmulgee Circuit

Phone: 706-342-3088

Fax: 706-343-6364

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Membership Dues

Council of Magistrate Court Clerks, Inc.

1520 Third St, Suite B
Folkston, GA 31537

(912) 496-2617
FAX (912) 496-7045

Cheryl McMillan

EMAIL: cmcmillan@charltoncountyga.gov

Membership dues for 2021 are \$15.00 annually per clerk. Date to pay dues is July 1, 2020 to June 30, 2021 Deadline for 2021 dues will be June 30, 2021.

Amount Remitted: _____

Date Received _____

Check # _____

COUNTY: _____

CONTACT PERSON: _____

MAILING ADDRESS: _____

PHONE: _____ Fax: _____

Name of Clerks and Email:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

6. _____

7. _____

8. _____

Happenings

Rockdale County

Magistrate Court “very own” Clerk of Court Patricia Carreker nominated for Rockdale County Employee of the Year

Rockdale County is situated just 24 miles east of downtown Atlanta, with a population of over 90 thousand citizens and a thriving government. Having recently celebrated their 150th year anniversary, Rockdale County employees continue to serve the community with dedication and pride.

Patricia Carreker, Clerk of Magistrate Court, is one of thirteen employees nominated for Employee of the Year.

Patricia supports Chief Magistrate Judge Phinia Aten with the day to day operation while serving as the Clerk of Court and court administrator. Patricia's endless drive and energy to serve the citizens of Rockdale County, judges, office staff, interns, and other departments throughout the county has not gone unnoticed. She is often heard saying, "Strive for excellence in all that you do."

Undoubtedly, her efforts to provide great customer service and manage the office personnel has been challenging during this year's COVID-19 Pandemic. Nevertheless, her colleagues agree that she always maintained a professional demeanor throughout the uncertainty of this pandemic.

Talent Management Director Toni Holmes stated, "The nominating committee had an extremely hard job narrowing the winner this year and that it was a decision of just 1-2 points" between the 1st Runner-up and the Employee of the Year winner.

Patricia Carreker was named 1st Runner-up to the Employee of the Year. Congratulations to Patricia for her dedication to serve and support Rockdale County.



From left to right: Chief Judge Phinia Aten, Kymberlee Thomas, Clerk of Court Patricia Carreker, Eric Robinson, Shanique Marshall, and DaVincia Thurmon



From left to right: The 13 Nominees from left to right and Chairman Oz Nesbitt

Happenings *continued*

Lee County

2020 has definitely been a whirlwind of a year thus far. The COVID 19 pandemic has affected so many lives and our way of living. From quarantines, slowing of our economy, masks, social distancing and last but not least a shortage of toilet



paper. The health restrictions shut down so many of our businesses, restaurants and places of worship. If they remained open, they had to conform to how they could maintain the guidelines given to them by both national and local governments in attempting to help flatten the curve. It has been very stressful for all us, I know it has been for us from rescheduling court dates, limiting the number in our courtroom, health questionnaires and screening before entering court. Whew! What a relief it will be when we can hopefully get back to a “somewhat” normal! The training scheduled for this year had to be cancelled but our executive council will be discussing future topics in February for our training this upcoming June 10-11, 2021 to be held in Savannah. Encourage your Judge to allow you to attend. There is so much information to be learned from the instructors as well as the other clerks attending. Please contact your district representative for suggestions as to what you as a clerk would like to have more training or knowledge of.

Judge Thurman is recovering well after his last “heart” scare this past May. He, “Midnight” and now his new sidekick, “Pete” are

ruling Namruht Farm. We are waiting for Pete to start writing his Namruht adventures as a series to Midnight’s stories.

Judge Carla Brown and her husband Gilbert recently had their sons visit for a long weekend. Gil, who

works at Northeast Hospital in Gainesville as a Cardiac ICU Nurse and Matt, who just returned from the Middle East after 6 months. She entertained them with a chili supper and hamburgers along with blueberry delight and homemade ice cream after a day at the shooting range. She expressed how nice it was to have her family together for the weekend.

Jackie Norman is still chasing around her seven grandchildren and so thankful all of her children and grandchildren are residing in Lee County. Her one year old baby, Scout, a rescue beagle. Scout is giving her a run for her money, as well as her eleven year old French Bulldog, Booger.

Our new clerk, Burnice Reynolds joined us at the end of July. Burnice has a daughter, Savana and her husband Caleb who reside in Lee County and she is now a proud grandmother of Lincoln Earl born October 27th. She also has a son, Cole, a sophomore at LCHS who is an avid entertainer with singing and drama talents and was recently inducted into the Thespian Society.

That’s all for now folks!

COVID Response in the Magistrate Courts



by Robert Aycock, Governmental and Trial Court Liaison at the Administrative Office of the Courts

On March 2, 2020, the first confirmed cases of COVID-19 were reported in Georgia. As cases rapidly increased, it became apparent that the virus would present the state and its people with an array of difficult and unique challenges. As a vital aspect of society, courts of every level were forced to rise to meet the challenges and find ways to ensure that the administration of justice could be maintained in this crisis. One class of courts, the magistrate courts, are sometimes called the “people’s court” as they are often the public’s first point of contact with the judicial branch. These county-level courts handle a variety of issues including bond hearings, warrants, dispossession proceedings, and small claim civil cases. The following article is based on interviews with the Chief Magistrate Judges of Camden, Cobb, and Harris Counties.

Rapid Response

Like nearly every other part of society, the court system had to react to the pandemic swiftly. To protect public health, the judicial system was forced to postpone many cases and focus on its most essential services. Many of these essential services such as bond hearings are handled by magistrate courts. Because of this, magistrate judges had to find ways to continue operating throughout the pandemic. Pre-existing technology proved immensely helpful to these efforts. All three of the in-

terviewed courts already had some form of virtual hearing technology in place for either warrant applications, bond hearings, or first appearances. These tools proved invaluable in adapting to public health concerns, especially as the virus forced staff to fundamentally alter their working arrangements. At various times during the pandemic, both Camden and Harris County were forced to close their doors to the public either because of general safety concerns or due to outbreaks within the courts themselves. Cobb County was able to stay open 24/7 but rotated staff to ensure that social distancing could be maintained in court offices. Despite the stresses of the situation, at no point during the pandemic did any of the courts fail to find some way to continue operating in some form or another. Services may have been limited, and staff may have had to change how they did their jobs, but the courts never shut down and continued to serve the public.

A Continuing Crisis

During the early stages of the pandemic, many assumed that it would be a short-term event and that activities would return to normal sooner than later. However, as the weeks wore on and the virus persisted, judges and other court personnel realized that substantial and sustained changes would be necessary. To start, internal practices had to be modified. Judge

COVID Response in the Magistrate Courts *continued*

Jennifer Lewis of Camden County stated that she had a glass barrier installed on the front clerk desk and also began to run the office on a rotating skeleton crew. In regard to court proceedings, all three counties have worked to increase the use of virtual hearings but have run into an array of issues. The most common problem experienced with virtual hearings are connection issues. Judge Jennifer Webb of Harris County spoke to one instance where a litigant took the hearing videoconference in their car as they attempted to find a suitable mobile connection.

Beyond connectivity, certain case types are not suitable for virtual hearings, and not all litigants wish to argue their case over the internet. Because of this, the courts had to find a way to offer in-person hearings while safeguarding the health of both the court personal and members of the public. This focus on public health is even more imperative in courts as they can compel people to be present. All of the interviewed counties mandate that all visitors wear a mask or face covering. While such mandates have proven to be controversial, all three Chief Magistrates stated that visitors largely comply with the mandate without major incident. This fact was largely attributed to effective and consistent communication regarding the mandate and that it was for the health of everyone including visitors. On top of the requiring

facial coverings, the courts took various additional measures. Camden county spoke to sanitization efforts such as using disposable seat and table covers throughout the courthouse, and Judge Brendan Murphy of Cobb County explained how his court had replaced their traditional case calendar with a schedule that included a larger number of calendars that each have shorter case dockets.

Towards the New Normal

It is still too early to tell how long the pandemic will continue, but even when it subsides and society can return to something closer to normal, the changes brought about by COVID-19 will likely endure. All three Chief Magistrates stated that they hoped to continue using the technology they employed to improve their public service during the pandemic. A decrease in county budgets may complicate this effort for some courts, but it can be hoped that the COVID-19 crisis can lead to some sustained improvements across the judicial branch.

Regardless of how long the COVID-19 pandemic lasts, one day it will end, and the world will have the opportunity to look back and examine one of the most impactful events in recent history. When this happens it is, to quote Judge Murphy, “Imperative that we include court staff when we celebrate essential workers; they kept the wheels of justice turning.”



Left to Right: Judge Jennifer E. Lewis, Chief Magistrate of Camden County; Judge Brendan F. Murphy, Chief Magistrate of Cobb County; Judge Jennifer B. Webb, Chief Magistrate of Harris County.

A Brief Message from JC/AOC Staff

Hello,

My name is Robert Aycock, and for any of you who don't know me yet, I provide staff support to your council. In previous year I administered the intranet, but that technology was unfortunately a victim of the 2019 cyber-attack at the JC/AOC.

To replace the intranet, two main services have been utilized. The first is an updated version of your website which can be found at <https://georgiacourts.gov/cmcss/>. On that site you will find items such as the newsletter, the court directory, and a forms generator. Additionally, there is a section of the website called "Internal Resources" that is devoted only to clerks and contains further resources. That portion of the website is password protected so if you need the password please contact me.

The other service is the listserv. To join the listserv, please contact me and provide your name and email address along with information on anyone you may be replacing. If you wish to send something via the listserv you may either send me the message or email it to MAGISTRATE_CLERKS@MAIL.GEORGIACOURTS.ORG. Please note that the listserv is currently provided free of charge and any costs are being born by the JC/AOC. Costs are based on usage so the listserv will be moderated, and a message or reply may not be approved to ensure that the listserv remains cost-free to the Council. Example of items that may not be approved are messages expressing thanks for an answer or multiple messages making identical or nearly identical statements.

I look forward to seeing all of you in the future and wish everyone a safe and happy holiday season.

Robert Aycock
Trial Court Liaison, Governmental & Trial Court Liaison
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Robert.aycock@georgiacourts.gov

Visit <https://georgiacourts.gov/cmcss/> today



Upcoming Caseload Reporting and Bench Card

As we close out the year we would like to take this opportunity to remind you of the all-important case count reporting period, where the Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) asks the clerks of your respective court classes to submit caseload data for the previous year. A bench card intended to highlight best practices when you approach your court's caseload reporting.

This year's reporting period will begin on January 4, 2021 and closes on March 15, 2021.

Why is submitting caseload data important? This paragraph in the overview of the Georgia Court Guide to Statistical Reporting describes it succinctly:

The collected data is used to support state and county resource decisions and to assist in policy development. In addition, statewide caseload activity is reported to the National Center for State Courts and other national organizations that inform justice system stakeholders about Georgia's courts. The caseload data serves as a historical description of the courts. The published data is used by judicial branch agencies, state and local executive agencies, project and program managers and grant applicants to support ongoing process and operational improvements. Superior court data is also used in the assessment of judicial workload that can lead to Judicial Council recommendations to the Governor and General Assembly for additional judgeships.

To see how cases counted in your class of court, use the [Georgia Court Guide to Statistical Reporting](#) where it is broken down by class. If you have any questions, comments, or concerns contact our research department by email caseload@georgiacourts.gov.



Administrative Office of the Courts

BEST PRACTICES FOR CASELOAD REPORTING

— A Bench Card for Judges —

Caseload reporting is an important part of the administration of justice in Georgia. The Judicial Council asks all classes of courts to annually report their caseload to the Administrative Office of the Courts (see OCGA §15-5-24). These data are used to analyze the workload of Georgia's courts as well as to ensure compliance with numerous state and federal laws. The data are provided back to Georgia's courts for their use in policy and administrative decisions with the General Assembly, county commissions, and city councils.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

GET INVOLVED WITH YOUR DATA

Judges, clerks, and court administrators should all be involved in the caseload reporting process. Outreach to the district attorney and probation offices may also be necessary. Courts should work collaboratively to identify all caseload reporting stakeholders and discuss concerns as they arise.

TALK TO YOUR CASE MANAGEMENT VENDOR

All case management systems (CMS) should be able to quickly and easily create the reports requested by the Judicial Council. If you do not believe yours can, talk to your clerk and vendor about working with the AOC. Maintain regular communication with your CMS vendor to ensure reports are updated to accurately reflect Judicial Council policy.

CONDUCT TRAINING

Both judge and clerk staff should be kept up to date on the case management system. Training manuals and updates should be available through the case management system. Vendor AOC staff are available to assist with training.

REPORT YOUR CASELOAD DATA EARLY

The annual caseload collection period begins on the first business day in January and concludes on March 15. Certain superior and juvenile court data are legally required to be reported (see OCGA § 15-6-63, 15-7-30, 15-11-64(b), and 16-12-141.1(g)). Talk to your clerk about reporting data as early as possible. Early reporting allows the AOC to review the data to ensure accuracy. Submit your caseload data through the caseload reporting site caseload.georgiacourts.gov.

REVIEW DATA FOR ACCURACY

Ask your clerk to review caseload data with you. Even after submission, data can be corrected. Take advantage of the opportunity to ensure your court accurately reports its data according to Judicial Council standards. As your court reviews data for accuracy, keep the following in mind.

1. Review previous years' submissions and data from counties of similar size. If your data varies greatly from the previous year or a similarly sized county/circuit, there could be a problem.
2. The *Georgia Court Guide to Statistical Reporting* is the Judicial Council-approved standard for caseload reporting. It can always be found at caseload.aocgeorgiacourts.gov.
3. In superior and state court criminal caseload reporting, each defendant is counted as a case by the level of the most serious charge. **DO NOT REPORT CHARGES OR WARRANTS.**
4. Serious felonies are defined as the Seven Deadly Sins. Look at counties of similar size to help determine if your figures are accurate.
5. If your county has a state court, then the superior court should have relatively few misdemeanor cases.
6. Probation revocations are often overlooked. Every county should have some probation revocations. Every filed petition to revoke probation, every petition to adjudicate first offender, and every petition to adjudicate conditional discharge sentences count as a probation revocation filing.
7. Adoption and Support IV-D cases are often overlooked. Every county will have at least a small number of these cases every year.
8. If more than five percent of civil cases are listed as unknown, your court should consider reviewing these cases to determine their appropriate category. Unknown cases get very little workload credit.
9. Be careful to appropriately categorize tort cases. The type of tort will greatly impact the workload analysis.

Note: In 2021, the Judicial Council will begin to capture DUI and remanded habeas cases as a separate category in superior court, each with separate case weights. Also, in 2021, JUCO cases will begin to be counted as serious felonies.

CONTACT AOC RESEARCH STAFF

AOC Research can be reached at caseloadresearch@georgiacourts.gov or via email at caseloadresearch@georgiacourts.gov. Contact your court assigned research analyst for concerns regarding your court's data. AOC staff are here to help. Please let us know what we can do for you.

Item 2025

Council Contact List

<p><i>Council of Magistrate Court Clerks Inc.</i></p> <p><i>Executive Committee & District Representative TERM 2019-21</i></p>	<p>President: Carla Brown, Lee County PO Box 522 Leesburg, GA 31763 Work: 229-759-6016 Email: cabrown@lee.ga.us</p>
<p>Vice President: Cynthia Kelley, Burke County PO Box 401 Waynesboro, GA 30830 Work: 706-554-4281 Email: c.kelley@burkecounty-ga.gov</p>	<p>Secretary-Treasurer: Cheryl McMillan, Charlton County 1520 Third St, Suite B Folkston, GA 31537 Work: 912-496-2617 Email: cmcmillan@charltoncountyga.gov</p>
<p>District 1: Renea Daniels, Brantley County PO Box 1150 Nahunta, Ga 31553 Work: 912-462-6730 Email: danielsreneard@gmail.com</p>	<p>District 2: Kelley Maslak, Lowndes County PO Box 1349 Valdosta, GA 31603 Work: 229-671-2623 Email: kmaslak@lowndescounty.com</p>
<p>District 3: Jackie Norman, Lee County PO Box 522 Leesburg, GA 31763 Work: 229-759-6016 Email: jnorman@lee.ga.us</p>	<p>District 4: Patricia Carreker, Rockdale County PO Box 289 Conyers, GA 30012 Work: 770-278-7792 Email: Patricia.Carreker@rockdalecountyga.gov</p>
<p>District 5: Cathelene "Tina" Robinson Clerk: Fulton Co 136 Pryor Street S W, Room 106 Atlanta, GA 30303 Work: 404-613-5313 Email: Tina.robinson@fultoncountyga.gov</p>	<p>District 6: Jan Streetman, Upson County PO Box 890 Thomaston, GA 30286 Work: 706-647-6891 Email: jstreetman@upsoncountyga.org</p>
<p>District 7: Monika Welchel, Bartow County 112 Cherokee Avenue Suite 101 Cartersville, GA 30120 Work: 770-387-5070 Email: welchelm@bartowga.org</p>	<p>District 8: Bethany Tanner, Washington County PO Box 1053 Sandersville, GA 31082 Work: 478-552-3591 Email: btanner@washingtoncountyga.gov</p>
<p>District 9: Danette Davis, Fannin County 400 W. Main St., Suite 202 Blue Ridge, GA 30513 Work: 706-632-5558 Email: ddavis@fannincountyga.org</p>	<p>District 10: Barbara Gray, Hart County PO Box 698 Hartwell, GA 30643 Work: 706-376-6817 Email: bgrayhart@yahoo.com</p>

Council Contact List *continued*

Nominating Committee:	
Shelly Herndon, Pierce County 3550 Hwy 84 Ste 2 Blackshear, GA 31516 Work: 912-449-2027 shelly.herndon@piercecountyga.gov	Alecia Miller, Mitchell County 22 North Court Street Camilla, GA 31730 Work: 229-336-2077 Email: amiller@mitchellcountyga.net
Advisor:	Judge Connie Holt, Morgan County PO Box 589 Madison, GA 30650 Work: (706) 342-3088 Email: Cholt@morgancountyga.gov

THE ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE OF THE COURTS
SUITE 300
244 WASHINGTON STREET, S.W.
ATLANTA, GEORGIA 30334-5900
404-656-5171
FAX: 404-651-6449

NOTIFICATION OF CHANGE IN MAGISTRATE COURT PERSONNEL

NAME _____

POSITION (CHECK ALL THAT APPLY): CHIEF MAGISTRATE MAGISTRATE
SENIOR MAGISTRATE CHIEF CLERK DEPUTY CLERK CONSTABLE

COUNTY _____

COURT ADDRESS _____

CITY _____ ZIP CODE _____

PHONE (____) _____ FAX (____) _____

EMAIL _____ CAN WE DISPLAY PUBLICLY? _____

START DATE ____/____/____ ELECTED* APPOINTED* FULL PART TIME

ELECTION CYCLE*: PRESIDENT GOVERNOR* PARTISAN* NON-PARTISAN*

TERM FROM ____/____/____ TO ____/____/____

ATTORNEY: YES NO

ARE YOU REPLACING ANYONE? YES NO IF SO WHO _____?

IF YOU SERVE A ROLE IN ANOTHER COURT, PLEASE CHECK WHAT ROLE(S) YOU SERVE.

(CHECK ALL THAT APPLY): PROBATE JUDGE PROBATE CLERK MUNICIPAL JUDGE

MUNICIPAL CLERK OTHER _____

***If this information does not apply to you, please answer with the information that applies to your chief magistrate.**

In accordance with the Uniform Rules for Magistrates Courts: Rule 13. Notice of selection of magistrates, constables and clerks of magistrate court. Whenever a magistrate, constable, or clerk (but not deputy clerks) of the magistrate court shall take the oath required for office in O.C.G.A. '15-10-3, the chief magistrate shall forward to the Administrative Office of the Courts the name and title of the person taking the oath; the name of the person being succeeded; the term of office, if appropriate; the date assuming duties; and the address and telephone number the official wishes to use for business correspondence.

Fax or mail this form to the Administrative Office of the Courts at the contact information above.

Submitted by:

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

PHONE # _____