



# Judicial Council of Georgia Access to Justice Committee Meeting

12:00 p.m. □ 1:30 p.m.

**Join Zoom Meeting**

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**I. Welcome and Introductions** □ 10 minutes Justice Bethel

**II. Written Reports-** Summary of February 10<sup>th</sup>, 2021 minutes

***SAVE THE DATES*** □ *Upcoming Events*

**Upcoming Tentative A2J Committee Meetings Dates:** August 11 and November 10, 2021 from 12 noon to 1:30 p.m.

**2021 Annual State Bar Meeting Hybrid** June 10- 13, 2021, Wild Dunes Resort, Isle of Palm, South Carolina.

**2021 Annual Diversity Bar Meeting Hybrid** June 12, 2021 12:30 □ 1:30 p.m., Wild Dunes Resort, Isle of Palm, South Carolina

## **A2J Committee Project and Community Updates**

**III. New Standing Committee CALER Update** □ 10 minutes, Justice Bethel

**IV. SRL Forms Working Group Update** -5 minutes, Vicki Kimbrell

**V. Deaf and Hard of Hearing Working Group Update** □ 5 minutes, Jana Edmondson-Cooper

**VI. Self-Help Toolkit** -5 minutes Tabitha Ponder

**VII. Landlord Tenant Working Group and Mobile App Update** □10 minutes,  
Judge Cassandra Kirk, Tracy Johnson and Judge Brendan Murphy

**VIII. Pilot Project Update** - 2 minutes, Nancy Long or Gerald Williams

**IX. Free Legal Record Restriction Clinic** - 3 minutes, Tabitha Ponder

**X. Old Business** □5 minutes

**XI. New Business** □5 minutes

# **Judicial Council of Georgia**

## **A2J Committee Meeting Minutes**

Wednesday, February 10<sup>th</sup>, 2021

**Attendees:** Justice Bethel; Tabitha Ponder; Judge Clarence Cuthpert; Judge Verda Colvin; Judge Bill Adams; Judge Kristina Blum; Jana Edmondson-Cooper; Terica Ganzy; Judge Cassandra Kirk; Tracy Johnson; Judge Maureen Wood; Mike Monahan; Vicky Kimbrell; Nancy Long; Judge LaTisha Dear Jackson; Sara Doyle, Karlise Grier; Gerald Williams; Nicki Vaughan;

**Guests:** Latoinna Lawrence; Meisa Pace; Noelle Lagueux-Alvarez; Michael Lucas; LaShawn Murphy; Cynthia Clanton; Michelle Barclay; Paula Myrick

### **Welcome and Introductions**

Justice Bethel started the meeting at 12:00 noon, Latoinna Lawrence conducted roll call while the meeting was in session.

### **Written Reports**

Justice Bethel discussed briefly on the summary from November 2020 meeting minutes, there was no objections. The upcoming A2J meetings will take place May 12, August 11 and November 11th of 2021.

### **New Standing Committee CALER Update**

As of now, data is still being gathered. There was a productive conversation with the staff and Judge McBurney with some representatives from the Pew. They have an ongoing project working in multiple states around Access to Justice as it relates to legal resources, accessing the courts, forms information, and some barrier assessment issues. They are committed in helping with the process of gathering the correct data. They are continuing to gather information and are working with the law library and law students at Mercer for assistance. They received a draft survey that Mercer students are working on with regards to sending it out to all the judges in the state. The explanatory case for what the Caler Committee will see in the survey but the ongoing process of trying to determine in 159 counties, what is the process when it comes to law libraries, access points, the resources that are made available to members of the public who are unrepresented when they arrive at court.

### **SRL Forms Working Group Update**

The SRL Working Group is still in the process of creating a series of forms. Divorce without children (form and videos) are completed and have been placed on the Judicial portal website. Next, they are starting on the complicated forms, Divorced with Children. A draft of this form has been dispersed out to the subcommittee. They are in the process of drafting the instruction sheet, and the script that AOC will record and upload into the judicial portal. The goal is to keep the forms as consistent as possible and keeping the language simple. In our victim Legal Assistance Network and Georgia advocates, they are linking to the judicial portal. From your computer you can search using Google pull up our site, or the Atlanta Legal Aid site and others, they will all send you to the link to the judicial portal, where everybody can use the forms.

### **Deaf and Hard of Hearing Working Group Update**

The Deaf and Hard of Hearing group are working on two initiatives. First, members of the group were approached about helping to facilitate a deaf sensitivity training for short for judges and members of the bar. There is a gentleman who conducts these trainings, it's already put together, it's just a matter of facilitating it. They are getting in contact with ICJE & ICLE. The second initiative has been in the works for quite some time. A couple of years ago, the State Bar member who is deaf and hard of hearing contacted the bar with an Access to Justice concern, that concern was referred over to the Supreme Court Commission on Interpreters, (which Jana serves on). They determined at the commission, that it would be best appropriate to refer to this committee. The raise of concern that Georgia would benefit from technology upgrades to make sure that Deaf and Hard of Hearing attorneys, litigants, judges, whomever court participants we can make ensure that they are having meaningful access to our courts. Through research, all Georgia courts have hearing loops, which is a device that can be placed into the courtroom, and it will amplify sound in a specific manner to help those who have hearing aids. It is also beneficial for people who may not necessarily have to use hearing aids. They are in the process to find funding because the determined cost would be about \$48,000, to get hearing loops into each Judicial District or at least at least one loop per hearing per district (larger districts would receive two). They are currently looking to apply for a national grant from the National Center for state courts. State Justice Institute routinely provide grants, technical assistance grants, to access to justice stakeholders. The Deaf and Hard of Hearing Working group are getting the grant application together with a goal of submitting it by the end of this month (February 2021). They have requested letters of support from both the Commission on Interpreters and the State Bar of Georgia and are waiting to hear back with regard to those requests. Once they we hear back, Justice Bethel has already provided a letter on behalf of this committee. The next wave of applications is due by May 1<sup>st</sup>. The earlier you get it in the better shape with receiving funds. The grant applicant will be Judicial Council of Georgia, Administrative Office of the Courts.

### **Self-Help Toolkit**

This is the same self-help toolkit we developed in 2018. We received funds to print a updated version. A grant from the Georgia Civil Justice Foundation helped for print production costs. Judge Cassandra Kirk took the lead on this working group and updating the toolkit. It is almost ready for print. We are working on a Spanish translation version, available in an electronic copy only.

### **Pilot Project Update**

They had a total number of patrons of 28,732. Since the program began, the number of patrons since the last access to justice meeting in October, totaled 2653 during the month of November, December and January, they are still doing probate and domestic relations, issues, some contracts, some appeals from judgments, they are beginning to see more landlord tenant issues. They are continuing to do the ongoing work that was referenced during our last meeting. Maurice King made an oral presentation to the Georgia Court of Appeals last week. They thanked the IT workers of Dougherty County for helping them out. Now they can get the word out to the attorneys and they hold more hearings. Also, there is an initiative they started with the Albany police department (community officers). They will pass out their Self-Help flyers. They held a discussion about the alternate dispute resolution, Judge Lockett's clerk has been in contact with Tracy Johnson, and the clerk is going to be the point man for Dougherty County. The proposal was submitted to the Dougherty county commission on February 3, 2021. The Commission approved this, and Judge Lockett and he said he will convene the members of the governing board to begin implementation of the ultimate alternative dispute resolution. Chism has been named as

the ADR attorney in this area. They are working with an immigration attorney in Tifton, Arnie Sharize. Our immigration issues are referred to the technology center for translation from various languages to English. They are going to be a part of the landlord tenant issues, holding a class on how to keep utility bills down. Hopefully, this class will inform the patrons of their rights and responsibilities as renters. The board is beginning to move towards doing what is necessary concerning, sustainability.

### **Free Legal Record Restriction Clinic**

Let us give thanks to the Chief Justice Commission on Professionalism for giving us a grant, we received \$15,000 more dollars to continue our efforts with the virtual record restriction clinics. Our community partners are still all in place. Georgia Legal Services are a big part of the program. We are asking them to take on another role. We are waiting on a final yes from Mike Monahan on that. We are looking to hold the next tentative clinic in Statesboro. Our contact in that area will be Sharon Edenfield. Next, Tifton and then Macon. Tabitha is following up with Judge Adams on assisting with the Macon clinic.

### **Old Business/CJE Training Update**

Judge Jacobs was not in attendance for this meeting. Per Justice Bethel, we will send him a note to reach out to him. If there is a substantive report we need in the interim, we will send that out to the A2J Committee via email.

### **New Business/Landlord Tenant Working Group and Mobile App Update**

Judge Cassandra Kirk is reviewing the report that was sent out November 13<sup>th</sup>, 2020. The Georgia Tech students were identified as needing a break. At this point, they have not come together to observe either Fulton or Gwinnett, we are still waiting on that to happen. The purpose of them coming to observe is for them to be able to see how our landlord tenant processes works. We have pamphlets and websites that they can review but it is best for them to see it physically in action. Regarding the app, Michael Lucas is on board. There was a gentleman that was housing or managing their housing court assistance clinic, which is housed down in our magistrate court clerk's office. That gentleman received a grant to work on an app that was specifically landlord tenant. Judge Kirk is attempting to contact him to see if he can give us that basic information so that we can transfer it to our Georgia Tech students, and they will have a starting point as opposed to starting from scratch. Terica and Vicki are helping to put together a list of statewide resources (hotline numbers). Also, the seven centers list have been finalized and they are on our website now. Vicki will share the most updated list with Tabitha just in case there are additional places that were not on the original list.

**(Judge Bloom)** The program in Gwinnett that she created with one of our commissioners in Gwinnett has been wildly successful. They have used targeted approaches and interceded in active eviction cases and passive eviction cases meaning the pre-evictions through a low barrier/high impact program. We had our county kept hung on to the Cares Act funding, and today we've spent about \$3 million keeping over 1000 people in their homes. They are targeting specifically the pre-evictions, meaning down 50% evictions from last year. They initially gave her 2 million, but it was going so well, they gave us another three. They are still spending out the initial 5 million. Through the partnership with the county, it has been going well. It covers up to six months of past due rent.

**(Judge Kirk)** The difference in Fulton and DeKalb is obviously we have the housing court Assistance Center, but we do not have the support that Gwinnett has from their county commission. That has been integral so while we have in Fulton as well as in Cobb, I know that we have some community partners that have come in the program that is in Gwinnett is next step in terms of being able to really ground level get people at the front end, so we are counting on community partners.

**(Tabitha Ponder)** In regard to the Maryland app, which is the statewide app for Access to Justice, she met with Pamela Ortiz, who is the Access to Justice Director in Maryland. She very instrumental in creating their initial app. After speaking with her, she learned that they tweaked their app. They are going to schedule me to meet with Christian Noble, who is responsible for the current state of their mobile app and Judge Bloom.

**(Michael Lucas)** My predecessor, Marty Ellen, sends his regards, asked Justice Bethel and Judge Kirk if he can help on the landlord tenant working group, as they have so many intersections already working on including tracking down the former contract employee of ours.

- **(New Business, Judge Bloom):** She was on the interview committee for their new law librarian. They hired a level 10 Dynamo employee. For any future of Pilot Projects, please keep her in mind because she is very confident that the person, they put in this new position is going to be someone whose name you will know in the Access to Justice world.