



Judicial Council of Georgia Access to Justice Committee Meeting

November 10th, 2021
12:00 p.m. – 1:30 p.m.

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://georgiacourts-gov.zoom.us/j/83131008772?pwd=dXREK2pCcHd1NWlpWEExHSmxRL0hYZz09>

Meeting ID: 831 3100 8772

Passcode: 759007

One tap mobile

+16465588656,,83131008772# US (New York)

+13017158592,,83131008772# US (Washington DC)

Find your local number: <https://georgiacourts-gov.zoom.us/u/kxbLvErP6>

Welcome and Introductions – 10 minutes Justice Verda Colvin

Written Reports- Summary of August 31st, 2021

SAVE THE DATES – Upcoming Events

Upcoming Tentative A2J Committee Meetings Dates: TBA, February 16th, May 11th, August 31st and November 9th, 2022

A2J Committee Project and Community Updates

- I. Annual Statewide Combined Pro bono meeting 10/22** – 10 Justice Verda Colvin
- II. A2J Landlord Tenant Webinar** - 10 minutes, Judge Cassandra Kirk and Judge Brendan Murphy
- III. CALER Committee Update** – 5 minutes John Botero
- IV. SRL Forms Working Group Update** -10 minutes, Vicky Kimbrell
- V. Deaf and Hard of Hearing Working Group Update** – 5 minutes, Jana Edmondson-Cooper
- VI. Law Library Model Project**- 5 minutes, Nancy Long
- VII. Landlord Tenant Working Group and Survey Update and Webinar** – 15 minutes, Judge Cassandra Kirk
- VIII. Legal Record Restriction Clinic** - 3 minutes, Tabitha Ponder
- IX. Old Business** – 5 minutes
- X. Grant Updates** – 5 minutes, Michelle Barclay
- XI. New Business (Vote for 2022 A2J Committee Meetings)**- 5 minutes, Tabitha Ponder

Judicial Council of Georgia

A2J Macon Roundtable

October 22, 2021

Attendees: Judge Bill Adams, Tabitha Ponder, Justice Colvin, Michael Monahan, Noelle Lagueux-Alvarez, Judge Catherine Salinas, Deborah Chapman, Mike Horner, Alex Eichenbaum, Sarah Anderson, Michelle Barclay, Michelle Lafontaine

Virtual Attendees: Dee Simms-Cri, Ashley Clark, Nancy Long, Rachel Schell, Anne O'Neil, + 2 others

Welcome and Introductions

Justice Colvin offered opening remarks and shared priorities as new Chair of the Judicial Council Standing Committee on Access to Justice, appointed by Chief Justice Nahmias. With more than 800,000 self-represented litigants passing through the courts, both the Judicial Council and the State Bar must combine resources to find solutions. Regards herself as “a cheerleader for justice”.

Mike Monahan

Began with background of the State Bar Access to Justice Committee, the mission since inception in 2000, and the role of Judge Weaver in promoting self-help advocacy. Strongly emphasized *charity is not justice* and court management is critical to access. The *Justice For All* grant was instrumental in the development of the strategic action plan in Georgia. Mike also mentioned the *Equal Justice Conference* and its work in *technology* advancement and in simplifying funding. The mission of the Georgia Civil Justice Foundation strongly supports legal-aid programs in Georgia. Another important component of access to justice work has been the contribution of Richard Zorza and the self-represented litigation network.

Mike also gave status updates on GLSP (Georgia Legal Services Program) signature projects:

record restriction - the most recent September 14th in Savannah organized by Sarah Anderson. The next is scheduled for November 19th.

consumer project - spearheaded by Rachel Schell in Macon focuses on senior issues out of court

landlord tenant project – became the Rental Assistance Program. Navigators intervened with 354 cases placed and involved 115 attorney volunteers. Alex Eichenbaum was staff liaison

disaster legal aid – leveraged law schools and large law firms to serve rural communities; integrating pro bono and access to justice

Georgia service providers did not receive LSC kiosk grants this year. GLSP grant coordinator Nicole Harris will re-apply at the next grant period.

Anne O'Neil

Indicated that the #1 priority in Athens is program space. Prior to the pandemic there were weekly court navigation clinics.

Nancy Long

Expressed the need for volunteer attorneys to back-up Dougherty County library staff, especially in the area of landlord-tenant and family law. Although broadband has improved, the #1 priority remains education.

Mike Horner

Reported that the Middle Georgia Justice Center lost volunteers during the pandemic. They are presently averaging 35 calls per day. The # 1 priority at present is funding from the Georgia Bar Foundation.

Judge Salinas

As Chair of the State Bar ATJ Committee, expressed interest in integrating the work of the committee going forward with that of self-help initiatives and state action plans.

Tabitha Ponder

Closed with a status update on the county law libraries funding. At present 6.4 million was earmarked for law libraries in ten judicial districts. Funding committee includes Judge Murphy, Judge Daphne Walker, and Judge Crosby.

Council of Superior Court Judges have approved on-line family law forms. They now include divorce with child and divorce without children. The CALER Committee continues to study best practices and access points for self-represented litigants.

DC



Judicial Council of Georgia
Access to Justice Committee Meeting Minutes
August 31, 2021

Attendees: Justice Charlie Bethel; Tabitha Ponder; Latoinna Lawrence; Vicky Kimbrell; Nancy Long; Justice Verda Colvin; Noelle Lagueux-Alvarez; Nancy Long; Judge Maureen Wood; Judge Cassandra Kirk; Tracy Johnson; Judge Jason Thompson; Judge Cynthia Adams; Michelle Barclay; Judge Bill Adams; Jessica Farah; Cynthia Clanton; Mike Monahan; LaShawn Murphy; Karlise Yvette Grier; Judge LaTisha Dear Jackson; Sharri Edenfield; Nicky Vaughan; Judge Clarence Cuthpert

Guests: Mazie Lynn Causey; Judge Daphne Walker; Jill Travis; Jennifer Lewis; Donna Marian; Tynesha Manuel

Welcome and Introductions

The meeting started promptly at 12 noon. Latoinna Lawrence conducted roll call in the background. Justice Verda Colvin, chief will enter an order designating her as the lead on this committee, Justice Bethel will continue to engage and be involved. But she will preside and take on the leadership role. The May 12, 2021, and Diversity Bars minutes were voted on for approval and passed. There were no objections.

Save the Date

Our next Access to Justice committee meeting dates will take place November 10th from 12 noon to 1:30 pm. Mike Monahan's event the Georgia Legal Services 50th anniversary Summit will take place September 17th, 2021.

Forms Working Group

The Family Law forms (divorce with and without children) are completed and uploaded onto the judicial portal. There is also a video for self-represented litigants to assist them with the process and make sure they receive all forms. Thanks to Judge Dear Jackson's help, the Superior Court judges approved and submitted the forms.

Deaf and Hard of Hearing Work Group

We are in the process of creating teaching modules to inform the courts, attorneys, court employees and judges. Currently, we are trying to find funding for ten mobile hearing devices to disperse in each Judicial District and Dr. Will Simmons will assist.

Pilot Project

The sustainability plan with the Self-Help Center is doing well., they will have a fundraiser fund in the fall. They are working with Dr. Ochi for their expungement clinic held in Albany on September 7th. They are also meeting with Georgia Justice Project to discuss a plan to hold monthly expungement clinics in Albany. They have outgrown their current location and will start a moving project on September 11th and hope to be in the new location December by the end of the year. They are receiving a lot of patrons with landlord tenant issues. Within the law libraries, they serve a maximum 100 people a month. They are serving maybe 100 or 200 every two weeks. More people are online and in person thanks to the use of technology. From the use of technology, the pilot project assisted people from 101 counties. Michelle Barclay suggested to change the name from Pilot Project to Model Project.

Landlord Tenant

This working group is continuing to meet and will roll out two new initiatives to assist with what people believe to be the onslaught of these COVID and CDC health cases. The first is a 10-question survey. Once it is approved from the Justice's, it will be distributed to the Magistrate Council. The survey will help to assess what their backlog looks like. The second initiative will be a mini lunch and learn in September. Either a metro or rural judge and a representative from the Department of Community Affairs will discuss the rollout and distribution of federal funding provide a case management modeling to assist any judges that are interested. Daphne Walker, a former chief Magistrate judge from Clayton County, will manage the DCA process for us. She has been here since May 3 and updated the program in statewide implementation in August. Per Daphne, as of September 16th, they will have 13 Regional coordinators hired. They are divided up the state into 13 districts and will be assigned to those districts and counties. She is working with Tabitha to overlay our map for the 13 districts with the judiciary map so we can make sure they're clear on the circuits that they will be assigned to. This would be the point of contact for any judge throughout the state that wants to tell us what cases are on their docket and what is needed to get payments to individuals so they can avoid eviction. She also has a partnership with Georgia legal services statewide that provides funding through DCA. Mike Monahan stated throughout the state, Georgia Legal Services is working on directorial assistance funds. They launched a pro bono project with seven Atlanta lawyers. They are placing the first 75 to 100 cases for assistance with their seven paired law firms.

Records Restriction

The clinics are still virtual. The recent clinic was held for Glynn County and the Ogeechee Circuit on August 23. We also conducted a clinic for Tifton in May. In the first week of June, Judge Adams held a clinic in Bibb County, Macon GA. These previous clinics are now in phase two. The first phase is a

town hall, an informational meeting with the public, where they learn what a record restriction is, and the different ways in which records can be restricted. This is a requirement; they must attend the first town hall meeting before they are paired with an attorney and move to the second phase. We are trying to hold a clinic in Statesboro with Sherry Edenfield. Phase one took place in Statesboro, but they are working hard to hold phase two of the clinic. Our next area will be Gainesville GA on October 4th.

Old Business

New Business

After a letter of interest to the federal Legal Services Corporation for a technology assist technology initiative grant, the Legal Services Program was invited. The concept is to put kiosks in law libraries and community centers, and we are seeking five locations throughout the state Dougherty County will have a kiosk and all kiosks will have the forms and packets available to obtain. The person behind the project is the grant writer for Georgia Legal Services program, Nicole Harris. We are working on sending out forms that is a guided interview in simple English and hopeful to produce a Spanish form which creates an English form. The costs for the kiosks are between \$1000 to \$1300. The major cost is the translation of the forms to the document to the style to the user, printing, and the assembly packet. This will cost between \$12,000 to \$22,000.

Ga Judicial Council Access to Justice Committee and
the Council of Magistrate Court Judges

Presents

Emergency Rental Assistance Resources for Courts: A Conversation with the Housing Assistance Division Director at Georgia Department of Community Affairs and former Chief Magistrate Judge Daphne Walker

November 5, 2021 Noon

Moderated By



Daphne Walker
*Housing Assistance
Division Director*



**Cobbe County Chief Magistrate
Judge Brendan Murphy**

Special Appearance By



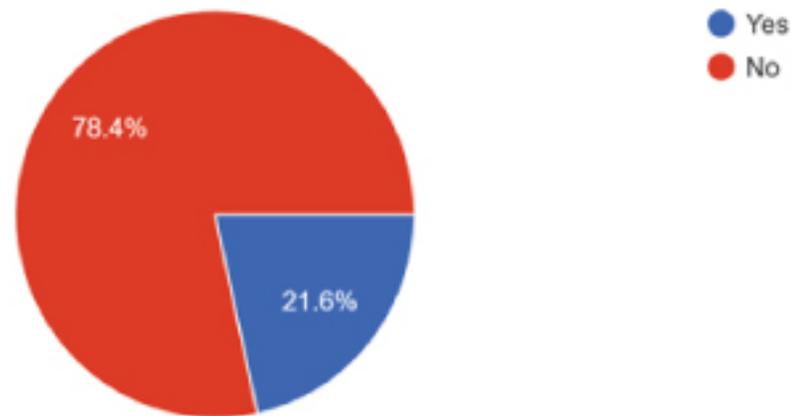
Justice Verda Colvin

For More Information and to Register visit
<https://forms.gle/nu5iKh7KpgppTGRS9>



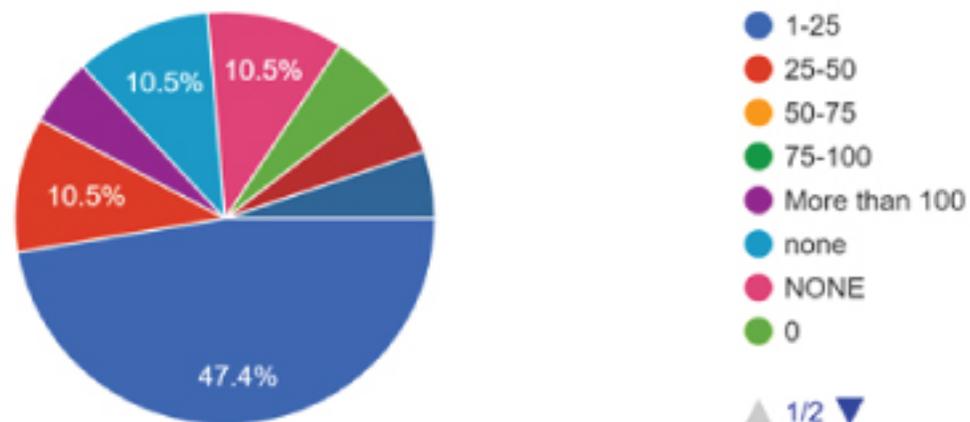
1. Do you currently have any backlog of dispossessory cases?

51 responses



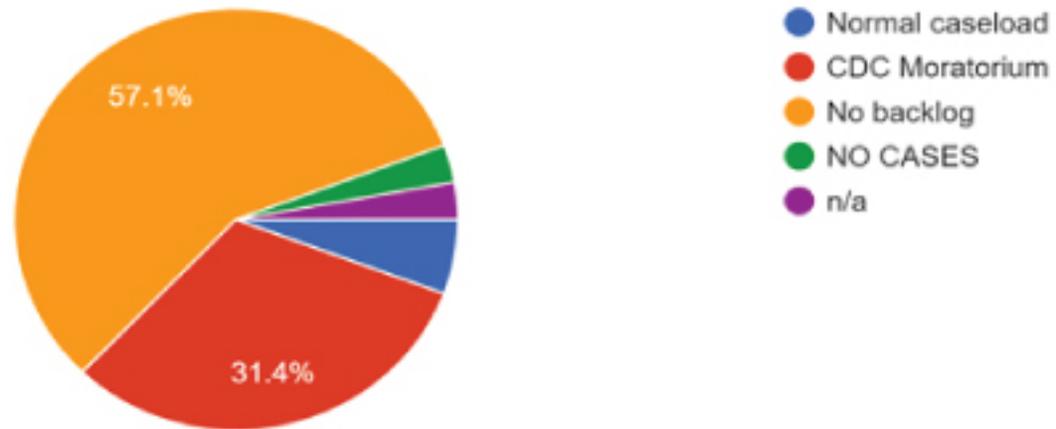
2. If so, how many cases?

19 responses



3. Are your backlog cases due to:

35 responses



Question # 4.

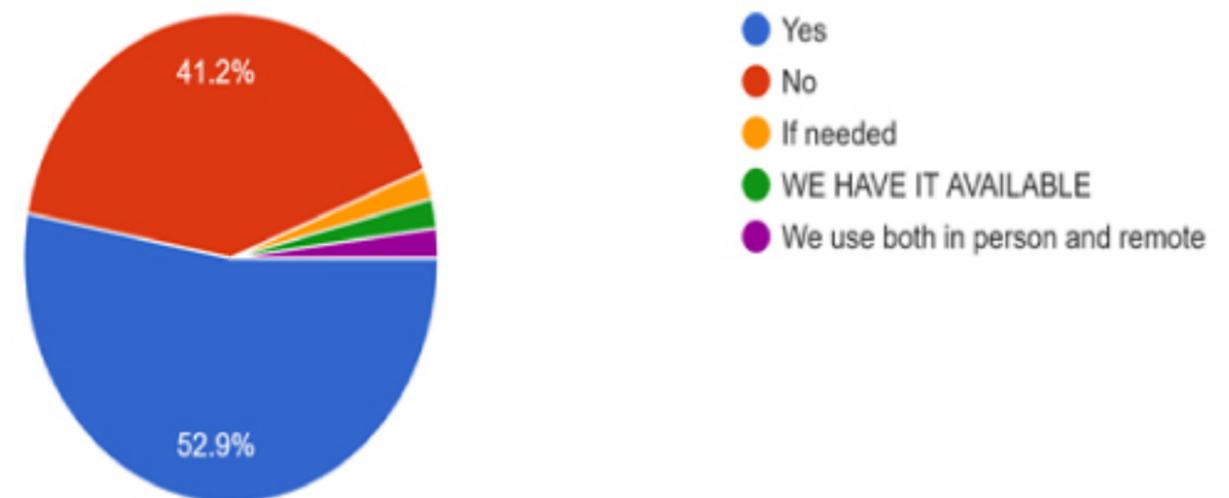
If there is a backlog, what additional resources (technology, judges staff, courtroom space, etc.), if any, do you need to efficiently tackle those cases?

Responses

- + None
- + No backlog
- + Because our backlog is relatively small, we have been very fortunate and have been able to handle the backlog just fine without additional resources
- + Courtroom space (due to social distancing issues)
- + Could use a web x system
- + Drop CDC Moratorium
- + Technology and staff
- + None. We have continued to monitor those cases with status hearings and will be scheduling them for final hearings now that the CDC Moratorium is effectively over

5. Does your court currently use remote technology (e.g., video conferencing)?

51 responses



Question #6.

Please explain any impediments to using remote technology in your court.

Responses

- + None
- + DAS
- + Some of our local citizens do not have internet access to be able to appear virtually from home if the other party is not able to appear in person. This is a fairly common issue in rural areas. In those types of circumstances we are flexible and work to ensure that their case is handled in the way that is beneficial and fair to both parties. Sometimes one party appears in person and the other appears virtually. We have also been more flexible with a request for continuances as needed to the on-going pandemic issues
- + Lack of consent between the parties, one party not having the technology or savvy
- + Parties internet speed and traveling around in cars while in virtual hearing
- + Evidence, documents
- + At this point, we have not had any major issues. However, there have been times that parties were not knowledgeable in using the technology for remote hearings and getting them to submit exhibits has been a bit challenging
- + The defendants do not have access to computers nor do they know how to use them
- + No impediments, just haven't needed to
- + We lack the staff and technology to be able to do this
- + Courthouse WiFi, party's WiFi
- + Internet connectivity in rural areas and or users being unfamiliar with the program
- + We have not had Zoom capabilities in the Courtroom. I just upgraded and purchased items needed for Zoom in the Courtroom
- + Not enough internet in our county
- + We do not have the necessary equipment
- + Zoom
- + Handling of evidence is an issue at time of hearings. We only hold remote hearings if both parties request it and agree to it
- + Funding for equipment; litigant unfamiliarity with technology
- + Participants not having reliable internet/wifi; participants not reading explanatory documents on how to use remote technology
- + Pro Se Litigants
- + None. We have used Covid-19 funding made available to our County to purchase tablets and Zoom licenses to allow us to hold virtual hearings and calendars during the pandemic and the previous Judicial State of Emergency
- + County can't afford the cost
- + Set up computers, screen, and join webex
- + Don't have access or availability
- + We do not have all of the equipment needed to conduct virtual hearings properly
- + Haven't needed yet
- + Lack of reliable and broadband internet

Question #7. If you have any 2020 landlord/tenant cases pending trial, what is your plan for handling those cases?

Responses

- + N/A
- + None
- + We have scheduled cases back on hearing calendars that were stayed due to CDC declarations being filed. Thankfully, our backlog is very small. A few of the cases already been resolved by the parties and the cases were dismissed. Some of the parties have already applied for and received rental assistance as well. It appears that some of the funding is finally coming through for parties. Very few of our backlogged cases have actually resulted in a Write of Possession being issued
- + We have handled all of our 2020 cases at this point
- + We have them scheduled, and plan on devoting 3 full weeks to resolve the background
- + All 2020 cases have been set for a hearing and/or exposed of
- + We have approximately 25 CDC cases remaining, and we plan to schedule those for final hearings throughout October 2021
- + Schedule them for a hearing ASAP based upon the status of the case when the stay was put in place
- + Hearings will be held in our courtroom. Our established COVID-19 safety protocol shall be strictly enforced
- + We have placed them all on the calendar over the last 5 weeks and will have them resolved next week
- + All of the 2020 Dispossession cases are on upcoming calendars
- + Get them scheduled for a hearing
- + Handling within a week, all COVID cases

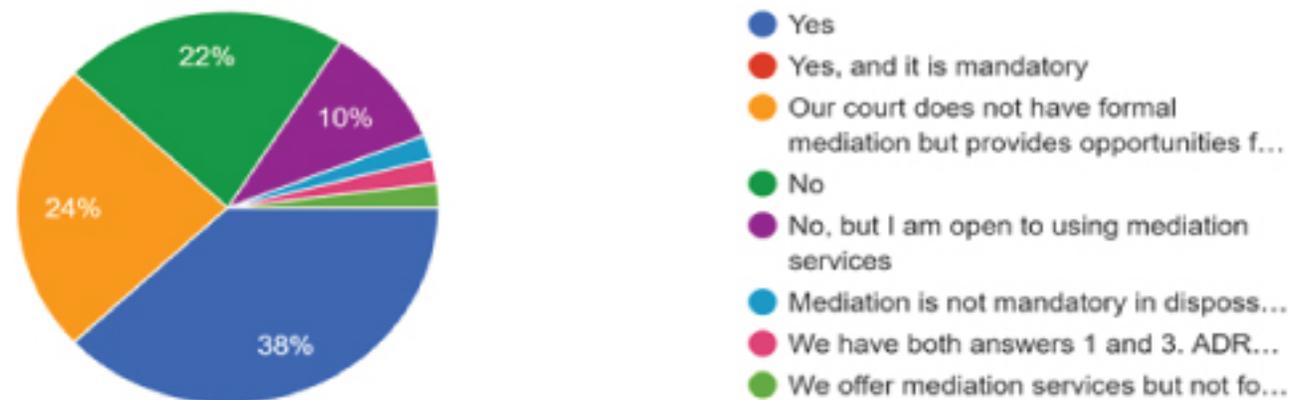
8. Would you like any suggestions or best practices for handling backlog cases?

43 responses



9. Does your court offer mediation services?

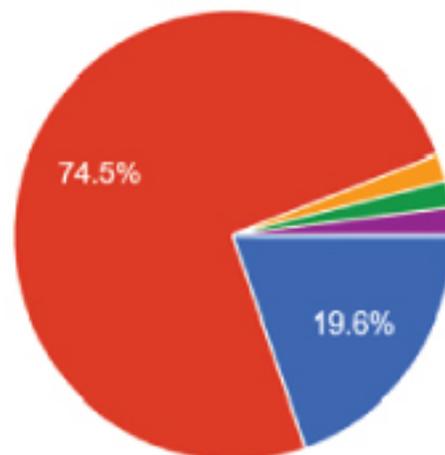
50 responses



10. Every county in Georgia has access to federal emergency rental assistance funding either directly or through the Department of Community Affairs.

Do you need additional resources to assist litigants in accessing this funding?

51 responses



- Yes
- No
- We received several complaints regarding the ability to understand and know how to apply for the federal emergency funding. As a court, we try to remain neutral and do not have the staff or ability to offer any type of assistanc...
- DCA = utter fail.
- I am unsure at this time.

Additional Comments

We have rental assistance at each hearing date meeting with litigants.

It would help us if I could give landlord/tenant litigants more information on what to expect from the GRAProgram with respect to information they will need to fill out the forms and the time table that it will take for each stage of the process up to and including the landlord receiving payment of back rental obligations & the payment of current rental obligations as they become due.

I understand that these timelines will just be approximations, but if a landlord understands what the approximate timeline is going to be, they may be willing to wait for that process instead of evicting the current tenant and not qualifying for that rental assistance.

My count for backlogged Dispossession cases starts in February 2020. I was unsure of how far back the count needed to go. I assumed that since the first Supreme Court Order was issued in March 2020 that the count needed to start within that time frame.

Thank You

