



## Judicial Council of Georgia Access to Justice Committee Meeting

June 30, 2022

12:00 p.m. – 2:00 p.m.

**Join Zoom Meeting**

[https://georgiacourts-gov.zoom.us/j/83616989951?  
pwd=MTR2VDVybVhnSGdxNlI0b1BpaTJxZz09](https://georgiacourts-gov.zoom.us/j/83616989951?pwd=MTR2VDVybVhnSGdxNlI0b1BpaTJxZz09)

**Meeting ID: 836 1698 9951**

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One Tap Mobile: +13126266799,,83616989951#,,,\*648920# US (Chicago)

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**Welcome and Introductions** – Justice Verda Colvin- 10 mins

**Written Reports**- Summary of February 16th, 2022

### ***SAVE THE DATES – Upcoming Events***

**2022 Equal Justice Conference in Minneapolis, Minnesota, May 12-14<sup>th</sup>, 2022**  
**(Pre-conference beginning May 11th)**

**Diversity of Bars Annual State Bar of GA Meeting** June 4<sup>th</sup>, 2022

**Valdosta Georgia A2J Town Hall:** June 18<sup>th</sup>, 2022, online

**Wilcox County A2J Town Hall:** June 27<sup>th</sup>, 2022, online

**Upcoming A2J Committee Meetings Dates:** August 31<sup>st</sup> and November 9<sup>th</sup>, 2022

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

- I. **A2J & State Bar's ATJ joint retreat**-Justice Colvin-10 mins (See attached minutes)
- II. **A2J Landlord Tenant Working Group Update** - Judge Cassandra Kirk- 10 mins (see attached flyer)
- III. **CALER Committee Update** – Justice Colvin – 5 mins
- IV. **SRL Forms Working Group Update** -Vicky Kimbrell- 10 mins (See attached flyer)
- V. **Deaf and Hard of Hearing Working Group Update** – Will Simmons- 5 mins
- VI. **Law Library Model Project/ White paper**- Nancy Long/Michelle Barclay- 10 mins
- VII. **Legal Record Restriction Clinic** - Tabitha Ponder- 3 mins
- VIII. **Old Business** – 5 mins
- IX. **New Business (2022 Diversity of Bars Meeting Notes)** – Justice Colvin



## February 16<sup>th</sup>, 2022 Meeting Minutes

**Committee Members:** Justice Verda Colvin; Tabitha Ponder; Judge Lisa Blount; Karlise Grier; Nancy Long; Nicki Vaughan; Mike Monahan; Vicky Kimbrell; Angie Davis, for Judge Walter Davis; Judge Belinda Edwards; Jana Edmondson-Cooper; Judge Cassandra Kirk; Judge Cynthia Adams; Judge Clarence Cuthpert; Judge Bill Adams; Misty Peterson, replacing Judge Mike Jacobs (Stonewall Bar Association); Sherry Edenfield; Judge Shawn Rhodes; Judge Sara Doyle; Will Simmons

**Guests:** Latoinna Lawrence; Michelle Barclay; John Botero, Cynthia Clanton; Herbert Gordon; LaShawn Murphy; Noelle Lagueux-Alvarez; Paula Myrick

Justice Verda Colvin opened the meeting. Judge Mike Jacobs, State Court in DeKalb County, will be stepping down from the committee to focus of COVID cases. Misty Peterson, a member of the Stonewall Bar Association, taking Judge Jacobs' place. The Annual ABA Equal Justice Conference will take place in May of 2022. Tabitha Ponder officiated introductions.

### **Landlord Tenant Working Group**

A webinar was scheduled that was open to all magistrate judges throughout the state. Judge Daphne Walker supplied everyone with a list of regional contacts for everyone across the state to reach out to at DCA. Discussions about citizens in rural areas having issues loading documents was discussed. There are \$900 million dollars available in the state for Landlord/Tenant assistance and around 60% of tenants are turned down because they do not know how to upload documents. Tabitha spoke with the President of the Georgia Association of Paralegals; they want to be involved with Access to Justice work, along with the DCA. They have people throughout the entire state who can act as legal navigators to help citizens upload documents. A flyer is in the works, to help spread the word about applying for Landlord/Tenant assistance.

### **CALER Committee**

Latoinna Lawrence created a report that highlights the information from the survey results. This committee will work on creating another survey related to finances for law libraries. When the final survey regarding finances is completed, they will go back to Billie Jean Kaufman with Mercer Law to discuss the survey for completion, and lastly the survey will be distributed. Judge McBurney reached out to Access to Justice about the forms, as having statewide forms is a big issue from the survey.

Mike Monahan discussed moving forward in the statewide adoption of forms that are essential to Access to Justice and filling the justice gap. The State Bar of Georgia gathered more data on where lawyers are in Georgia. There are seven counties with zero lawyers inhabiting those counties. Once a draft map is created, it will be shared with the group.

### **SRL Forms Working Group**

The Divorce with and without Children forms are up and running on the A2J portal website. There are two sets with general instructions and a video that walks people through each set of forms and how to fill them out. For publicity, perhaps the State Bar could feature this information in a journal article. We could also interview Justice Colvin; creating a Q&A and share the information. We could also bring in Judge Art Smith, Council of Superior Court Judges, to make the Q&A a collaborative effort as these forms have been approved by the Council of Superior Court Judges. The next step is to start working on Custody and Legitimation forms. Judge LaTisha Dear Jackson is on the Council of Superior Court Judges Access to Justice. She has essentially agreed to work with the custody and legitimation forms. Judge Dear Jackson's next steps will be to get the forms through the committee, then present it to the executive committee for them to vote on it.

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

We were successful getting the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Bench cards out to judges. The ongoing project with Deaf and Hard of Hearing is to provide assisted listening devices. The goal is to have one in every courthouse in Georgia, or one accessible for courts who may not have the technology in their courthouse. The new effort is to look at ARPA funds that the counties received, Will Simmons will be at the court administrator's conference next week next month (March), she will mention to remind them to speak with their county officials about securing funds for their courthouses to have an assistant listening device. Michelle Barclay sent out a survey. From the survey only four courts in the state have a need for the listening devices.

### **Law Library Model Project**

In the last six months the Law Library has had great accomplishments. They received a \$5,000 grant from United Way to promote diversity. Judge Hodges helped them to obtain a grant for \$15,000. They are in the process to move into their new location, due to their IT department having COVID, there was a delay. They connected with Miss Patterson from the Eviction Prevention Services, their staff was trained on the eviction prevention services and how to upload and help people with those applications. They are in the process of planning two fundraisers; the Self-Help Center Board and the Law Library Board are meeting together. The target dates are April of 2022, and August of 2022. Tracy Kelly, a co-worker, sent a letter of inquiry to the Rockefeller Foundation, which if they are invited will allow them to apply for a \$400,000 grant. They are also sending a letter of inquiry to the MacArthur Foundation to apply for a grant in the amount of \$625,000 and they are seeking smaller grants through the MacArthur Foundation. They are working closely with their partners on February 22, to have an expungement day at Albany State University. On May 5, they are going to have an expungement clinic with Mount Zion

Baptist Church. There is a need for a Spanish interpreter as this will enable them to reach out to the Hispanic community. Lastly, once they move into their new location, they will have a press release.

### **Legal Record Restriction Clinic**

There is \$20,000 left in the Record Restrictions grant. Now, all clinics are still virtual. Tabitha has been contacted by a judge in Fort Valley and contacted by the DA office in Dougherty County for a clinic in their week of Law Day in May. This committee may consider Valdosta, Gainesville, Tifton and the Statesboro areas to provide Record Restriction assistance. Sarah Anderson, with Georgia Legal Services in the Savannah office, will host a records restriction clinic in Statesboro on March 17<sup>th</sup> or so. She is preparing a resource that we can push to all self-help centers and prepare a video on the website with step-by-step videos to help people fill out their applications and possibly PDF fillable forms online.

### **New Business**

### **Old Business**

Discussions about the headcount, hotel rooms, scheduling and more for the March A2J Montgomery Alabama retreat was discussed.

The Henry County DA Office reached out to Tabitha, asking her to show them everything that we did to have the services created via a portal system. They have an expungement portal in Henry County, so the DA's office has it up and running.

So far, six people from Georgia Legal Services will attend the ABA Equal Justice Conference. It's intended to be an in-person conference; however, it may be hybrid.

## **Summary of the March 9, A2J/ATJ Retreat**

After introductions, Justice Colvin reflected on the museum visit and discussed reading recently that we should not use the term access to justice because it is overused too much. Justice by itself means access. You can't have justice if there is no access—let us use that thought to inspire us to come up with tangible actions for this next year.

Judge Salinas reported on the State Bar of Georgia's ATJ Committee's work items: (1) improving communication especially for lawyers re opportunities and activities and that's mainly through pro bono work (2) recognition of the lawyers, paralegals, organizations and staff doing good work—but also making more people aware of it—expanded the State Bar's Honor Roll, allowing self-reporting (3) improving the website which was just completed (4) pro bono awards—but we need to nominate more people. (5) Taken over the Georgia Free Legal Answers website and expanded people working in that space by allowing attorneys to get their 50 pro bono hours easily (again—more communication around this effort is also happening). Judge Salinas would like to come out of this retreat with some real initiatives and we, as a group, write articles, make content for those initiatives, work to create content, recycle articles and talking points. The ATJ puts on pro bono roadshows with CLEs and professionalism credits—working to drum up encouragement for pro bono work—could be an opportunity to focus on new priorities. Also, let's work to involve law schools and law students who can help us foster creativity, communication and energy. Finally, let's work in some road trips this year to the self-help centers around the state. And maybe we should change our names to the Justice Committees.

Michelle reported out for the A2J Committee: the Judicial Council A2J Committee has worked on a lot of products—including a toolkit for judges on serving self-represented litigants, an Unauthorized Practice of Law laminated card approved by the State Bar of Georgia to let people know how they can help self-represented litigants without proacting law. Tabitha also helped Albany acquire grant funding for their Self-Help Center which is located in their Court Law Library. Since the Self-Help Center in Albany got started in 2018, it has served thousands of people from over 109 counties. Pop-up Record Restriction Clinics have been provided since 2019 starting with a grant from the State Justice Institute.

Nancy Long from the Albany Self-Help Center: We have an impact report which can be made available publicly. Since 2018, the Center has served over 36,000 people, staffed by 2 full-time employees and 2 part-time employees. It costs approximately 300,000 annually to run the Center. The Center has over 40 partners in Southwest Georgia and works to reduce litigation and streamline services for the courts by ensuring that the packets and help we give are complete before any document goes to the clerk of the courts. Our goal is that all the judge has to do is sign the papers after appropriate review. We have a list of low-cost resources for patrons and attorneys to access when needed. We are able to help patrons file their paperwork through the Odyssey and Peach Court systems. We've sat with patrons who are unable to read and have helped them navigate through their court procedures. Most recently, we helped a patron who was working with the Innocence Project to get justice for her son. We've helped patrons access the federal depository not just in Georgia but also in Florida and Alabama. We've worked with the Georgia Justice Project on record restrictions for our patrons. We've reached out to pregnancy centers to let women know about our help for legitimation and paternity procedures. We are working with patrons by referring them to rental assistance programs so they can get so to help with the housing insecurity. We are working with patrons by referring them to rental assistance programs so they can get so to help with the housing insecurity. We are centrally located all our attorneys who have used our

resources are very happy because we're centrally located to Alabama, Georgia and South Carolina. We've handled a lot of mental issues as well as legal issues and we've learned a lot about the resources available. We have a good working relationship with the judicial districts in southwest Georgia. And many of the judges and those people in the legal communities will now send people to us. During the pandemic, the staff work remotely serving patrons at various locations, meeting patrons outside the courthouses and other places to help them navigate and continue to navigate through their legal problems. We've reached out to religious leaders as part of the faith initiative so these leaders know that our services exist for their and our communities. In FY 2022, we've dealt with 8313 issues, made 6041 referrals and provided 3193 court services in addition to all the outreach services, and we're not even finished with the year.

Attorney Gerald Williams discussed sustainable funding. Gerald is making a request of the local Law Library for 150K. Getting sustainable funding to keep the Center alive is still a problem and grant funding is still relied upon.

Based on the retreat discussion and the after-retreat surveys, multiple priorities emerged:

1. Sustainable funding for Self-Help Centers could be transformational for GA's justice system. We should focus on obtaining state funding, but be careful to watch the strings attached to such funding which could prevent justice from being obtained. One argument is that several strategically placed Self-Help Centers should serve more than just the immediate county, especially with technology. We should focus on the rural counties, especially the legal deserts. We know 10 counties in Georgia have zero attorneys. 25 to 30 counties have 10 or fewer attorneys. Many of these are the poorest counties. We need to document this problem and include it in our conversation.
2. A public relations plan is essential to moving forward. Like the Accountability Courts, we need to tell a story about the good that can be provided by improving justice with Self-Help Centers.
3. Standardized court forms are good for self-represented litigants. Work on standardized court forms should continue and technology-assisted forms should be explored asap.
4. Education and CLE about improving justice in Georgia should continue with opportunities to create content for public relations

Next steps:

1. Staff should write a white paper making the case for sustainable grant funding to be administered by the Judicial Council of Georgia. Our focus initially will be on serving the rural communities and especially legal deserts.
2. We should set up a meeting with a PR firm or professional to create a campaign for 2023. A PR firm has been engaged. We'll work to set up a date in May asap.
3. We should seek a way to do a ROI (return on investment) study to show what each dollar invested into a Self-Help Center provides.
4. We should actively seek opportunities for CLEs about improving access to justice including monthly lunch and learns over Zoom and expanding the annual Pro Bono Conference to include an Access to Justice day or track (planning for Oct 2022). Michelle and Judge Salinas are meeting with GSU's Access to Justice Professors to talk about a monthly or less CLE zoom opportunity to be provided by GSU.
5. We are going to reach out to faith leaders to help us with PR and next steps.

6. Please allow us to sign you up on the Georgia Self-Represented Litigant Network listserv to keep you informed and to share articles/content. Let us know if you wish to opt out.



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These forms have been approved by  
the Council of Superior Court Judges  
Forms Committee for use in Georgia  
Courts.

## **Judicial Council of Georgia Standing Committee on Access to Justice**

### **Diversity of Bars Meeting at State Bar Annual Meeting Saturday, June 4, 2022 12:30 p.m. – 2 p.m.**

#### **Open Remarks by Justice Verda Colvin,**

Justice Colvin opened the meeting welcoming all and noting that diversity is important because we “walk though this world together” and inclusion means not only that all are allowed to participate, but that all are valued. She rounded out her opening remarks by saying, “we can do the impossible by working together.”

#### **GABWA Report by Shiriki Jones**

- Working on building bridges to partner with other voluntary bars
- Noted “we’re stronger together”
- Co-sponsored environmental justice CLE yesterday
- “Gabby Talks & Power Hour” first Wednesday of every month. Next one on Wednesday, 6/8, at 8am virtually
- General Meeting 3<sup>rd</sup> Thursday of every month

#### **GLSP Report by Ira Foster**

- Servicing those going thru the “twin plague” of domestic violence and COVID
- Their services are provided in all but the 5 big metro counties. Their service area spans 56,000 square miles.
- Their Kinship Care program is thriving. Grateful for those Kinship Care state funds that flow to them by contract with the Judicial Council/Administrative Office of the Courts
- They have developed a medical/legal partnership started in Waycross where there are legal service providers at public health departments

#### **Justice Bethel on Kinship Care**

Justice Bethel noted that Kinship Care is a program to divert children out of foster care by placing them with family (loosely defined) with whom they already have a relationship. Providing legal services, e.g. guardianship, to facilitate such a placement saves the state money and offers children more stability.

### **GAWL Report by Judge Angela Brown**

Just held its Annual Dinner where Justice Colvin swore in the new board and which featured Judge Beasley as the key note speaker. During her remarks, Judge Beasley posed the question, “who better than lawyers to lead?”

### **State Bar of Georgia Inclusion Program Report by Halima White**

- Recently held a panel discussion on lawyers with disabilities who have a thriving legal practice
- Judicial Reception on 6/28/2022, 5:30-7:30 p.m. free and all are welcome
- In July, hosting their annual high school pipeline program. There is still room to apply. Application deadline is 6/20. If your organization would like to host kids for lunch during this program, there is still room to do so, please reach out.

### **Georgia Hispanic Bar Association**

- Hosting 30 law students in their Judicial Legal Internship Program this summer
- Offering training for law students on 8/6 and 8/7
- “Cocktails Around Latin America” event will be on Saturday, 8/20/2022

### **Closing Remarks by Justice Colvin**

- Upcoming Record Restriction Clinic serving the Valdosta area. Town Hall information sessions during Juneteenth community events on 6/17 and 6/18. The in-person clinic will be on 7/29.
- Allow yourself time to give back by mentoring