

# THE GAVEL

*The Official Newsletter  
of the Georgia Council of Probate Court Judges*

Volume 11, Number 1

March 2003

## MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT



Well, I can't believe that the year has gone by so fast. Seems like only a couple of months ago I was sworn in as President and now in less than a month my year will be over. We have been successful in several areas over the past year. Almost every court now has email capabilities, which have improved our communication abilities. We are introducing a new caseload reporting system, which I hope will include electronic reporting in the near future. Hopefully, we are closer to being elected in non-partisan elections. These and any other accomplishments are not because of your president, but because of our Council's unified effort to succeed. There are so many of you that have worked hard on

these projects.

My dedication to this Council will continue even after my year as President ends. You will never know how much it has meant to me to serve in this capacity and to have been named your Outstanding Judge of the Year last year. I love and admire you all, just like you were my brothers and sisters. Continue to count on me to work hard to make our Council the best it can be. Thanks for all of your encouragement and support during the past year.

Yours truly,

Darin McCoy  
Your President

## Procedures for Requesting Access to Vital Record Databases

1. To gain access to the Vital Record databases (Birth, Death, Marriage, and Divorce), the user must possess a valid RACFID. This may be obtained by one of the following methods:

- email request to [gcachelp@gcac.courts.state.ga.us](mailto:gcachelp@gcac.courts.state.ga.us), please include fax number.
- contact the GCAC Client Service Center @ 1-800-298-8203.
- use the Work Order/Service Request form on the Support page at <http://www.gcacsite.com>, please include fax number.

2. Once the request is received, an "Application for Mainframe RACF USERID" can be faxed or mailed to the requestor.

3. Upon receipt of the completed application, it will be processed by the State RACF Security Manager and GCAC RACF Administrator immediately. Completion of ID setup and availability takes approximately 1-2 business days. Once on-line, the GCAC Client Service Center will notify the requestor of his/her RACFID and

temporary password, along with instructions for accessing the databases.

4. If needed, please contact the GCAC Client Service Center for additional information.

Note: RACFIDs are available to Probate Judges or his/her designee only.

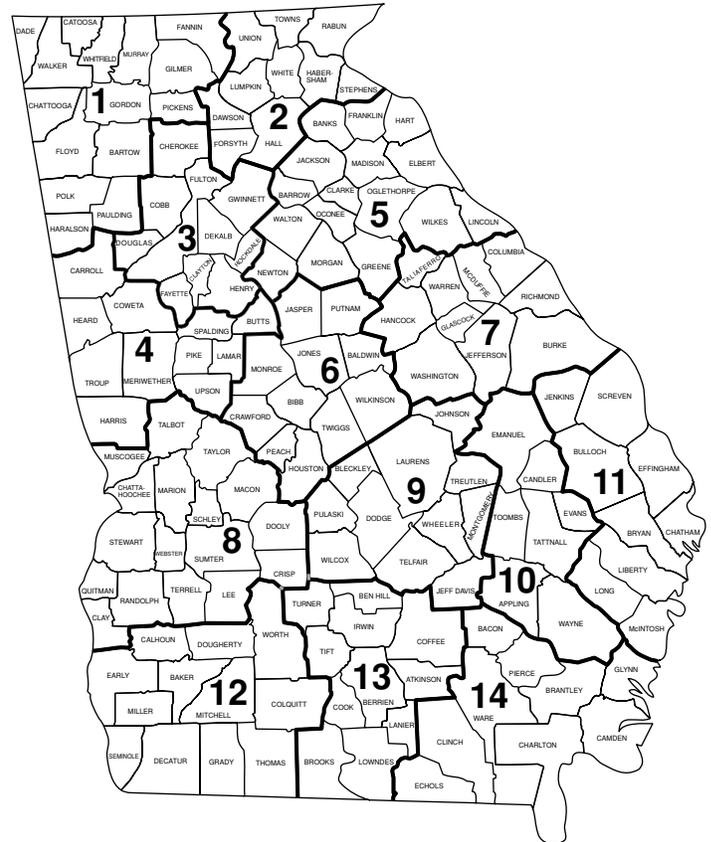
# Strategic Plan — Increase Membership Participation

The 2002 Strategic Plan adopted by the Council in November set out goals and strategies for the Council. One of those goals was to increase membership participation. The strategies identified for doing this were to 1) Develop a plan to redraw the district lines in order to improve/increase communication within the districts, 2) Draw the districts into regions to make smaller units/groups easier for meetings, and 3) present the plan to the full Council for adoption at the annual meeting.

Judge Marion Guess has chaired a committee consisting of Judge Lillis Brown, Judge Pat Hardaway, Judge LaVerne Ogletree and Judge Susan Tate. The Committee met in October and developed a new district map. This map was an attempt to adjust the district lines to make it easier for judges in a district to get together. Districts lines were drawn to make each district about 11 counties, although there were exceptions to this. In November this map was presented to the Council for review and comment. The committee received comments and, based on those comments, has made adjustment to the original proposal. Included in this newsletter is the revised map that will be proposed at the Annual Meeting in Athens. You may also view the map at [www.georgiacourts.org](http://www.georgiacourts.org)

Any of the judges on the committee may be contacted for further comments.

PROBATE COURT DISTRICTS  
Proposal #2



## Mark Your Calendar

April 16-18 • Judges Spring Seminar  
Athens

May 4-7 • Elections Seminar-Mariott  
Savannah

June 16-20 • Summer C.O.A.G.  
Brasstown Valley

August 10-13 • Traffic Seminar  
Sea Palms-St. Simons

September 23-26 • Probate Clerk's Seminar  
Comfort Inn-Jekyll Island

November 18-21 • Judges Fall Seminar/C.O.A.G.  
Hyatt-Savannah

## Update on Retired Judge Doshie Buford

Judge Doshie Buford, retired Probate Judge of Jeff Davis County suffered head injuries from a fall late last year. After several months in intensive care in a Savannah hospital, Judge Buford was released to an assisted living facility in Waycross. She is undergoing speech therapy and other treatment in the facility. She is still continuing to improve slowly. She is delighted to receive cards and well wishes from her judge friends. Please send cards and letters to: Judge Doshie Buford, c/o Baptist Village, 2650 Carswell Avenue, Waycross, GA 31503.

## Judge McCoy Meets Former President George Bush and First Lady Barbara Bush

Friday, January 24, 2003 was a special day in Evans County for the Evans County School System and for Judge Darin McCoy. Not very often does a Former President and First Lady come to Claxton, Georgia for a visit. The purpose of the visit was to kick off a teacher incentive program for two outstanding teachers in the school system. Seems that former Claxton High School graduate Jack Guy of Atlanta and Former President Bush became best friends in the war when they bunked and flew together in the Air Force. Mr. Guy, who has always supported his former high school and other "good causes" in Claxton and Evans County, start-

ed the incentive program to promote excellence in education. Mr. Guy called on his old friend Mr. Bush, to assist him in the first presentation.



**Barbara Bush, Judge Darin McCoy, Former President George Bush.**

Prior to the awards program, several elected officials in Evans County were invited to a private

reception to meet the former President and First Lady. Judge McCoy was able to spend some time talking with the Bushes. Mr. Bush was very interested in what the Probate Court does in Georgia and the election process for Judges in Georgia. Judge McCoy was very impressed with how down to earth the Bushes were. President and Mrs. Bush were glad to autograph Judge McCoy's copies of their biographies and the former First Lady presented Judge McCoy the pen she and President Bush used to autograph his books. The Former President and Mrs. Bush asked Judge McCoy and others to pray for their son and his family and our country.

---

## South Georgia Probate Judges Association

**Thursday, February 20, 2003 • Grand Island Country Club, Albany**

The Southwest Georgia Probate Judges met February 20, 2003 at Grand Island Country Club, Judge Aileen Dunn presiding. Following an inspirational message by Judge Andrews, Judge Dunn called the meeting to order. After leading a brief discussion of courts combining probate and magistrate functions, Judge Dunn noted her county was considering this change; she then announced her intention to retire at the end of her current term.

Judge Stephenson reported that the most recent bank statement listed an account balance of \$3,039.54.

The first item of business was to elect a representative from our district to the state nominating com-

mittee, and Judge Barwick agreed to continue serving in this capacity.

Judge Barwick reported that the Nominating Committee, consisting of himself and Judges Andrews and Holder, had prepared a slate of officers for 2004-2005, as follows: Judge Sadie Voyles, Chairperson; Judge Susan Taylor, Vice-Chairperson, and Judge Vickie Burnette, Secretary-Treasurer. Judge Stephenson made the motion for approval of this slate as proffered, and Judge Dunn seconded. The vote for approval was unanimous.

As several of the most participatory judges in our organization are actually not in the second district, and in fact have recently begun

attending their own district meetings, the group discussed whether or not to waive dues altogether for these judges, or to have a visiting judges' assessment of some type. Upon discussion of this issue, the group decided to table the issue, without sending any dues notices, until after the April vote on district lines. Also to be decided in April will be the enactment of by-laws for our organization.

The meeting was adjourned following dinner.

Respectfully submitted,  
Nancy S. Stephenson  
Secretary-Treasurer

## Under Reporting of Marriages and Divorces

A recent examination of the number of marriages and divorces reported to the state office of Vital Records revealed that there appears to be significant underreporting of these events. Mr. Michael R. Lavoie, Director and State Registrar of Vital Records, discovered that underreporting has occurred since 1999, and also possibly in previous years. Information about marriages is reported by Probate Judges and divorces are reported by Clerks of the Superior Courts to the state office of Vital Records. The Georgia Code requires that a report for each marriage and divorce that occurs in this state be reported to Vital Records. The information is used to construct marriage and divorce indexes utilized by the public and attorneys and for vital statistics counts.

Mr. Lavoie discovered that an apparent sizable number of marriages and divorces for nearly every county were not accounted for when he asked the Probate Judges to send him the total of marriages that occurred in their county for 1999, 2000 and 2001. He requested similar information for divorces from the Clerks. The number of marriages and divorces derived from the state indexes was compared with the number of these events furnished by the Probate Judges and the Clerks of Superior Courts. The analysis revealed consistent under reporting of marriages in most counties for the three years measured. There was even more serious under reporting of divorces for this same time period.

Census figures show that the population in Georgia dramatically increased by 26.4% between

1990 and 2000! Consequently, more births, deaths, marriages, divorces and other vital events should also show a similar rise in number. In fact the number of registered births and deaths did increase by 20%, but the analysis conducted by Mr. Lavoie shows just the opposite trend for the number of reported marriages and divorces. Personal lifestyles in Georgia have undergone remarkable change in the past ten years, but probably not enough to account for the marked decrease in reported marriages and divorces.

Georgia Code Sections 31-10-21 and 19-3-33 require an Application Supplement-Marriage Report (form 3953) to be filled out, except for items 11 and 12, when an Application for Marriage and License are completed. Once the marriage occurs and the application and license are returned to the Probate Court, items 11 and 12 on the Application Supplement can be filled in. Only then should the Application Supplement be sent to the state office of Vital Records. If a Marriage Application and License were completed but the marriage did not take place, the Application Supplement should not be sent to Vital Records. The marriage index and marriage statistics only reflect marriages that actually took place.

In a similar manner, Georgia Code Section 31-10-22 requires that a Report of Divorce (form 3907) must be completed for every finalized divorce that occurs in Georgia.

During the past few months Mr. Lavoie mailed and faxed several letters to all Probate Judges and Clerks of Superior Courts alerting

them to the under reporting problem. From that effort and the results of the analysis, it is expected that the reporting of marriages and divorces should appreciably improve for 2003.

Lastly, the Georgia Department of Human Resources, Division of Public Health and Vital Records are engaged in several projects to re-engineer Vital Records functions and activities. Two of these projects, furnishing public access to the marriage and divorce indexes and the capture of marriage and divorce information via the web, will have a direct impact on this information. For example, a person does not find their marriage (or divorce) on the index. If it was never reported, the information will need to be captured and forwarded to Vital Records to place in the appropriate index. In addition, the use of a secure Internet site to electronically enter marriage and divorce data will greatly enhance the speed of reporting and use of this information. These projects are scheduled for implementation later in 2003.

Nowadays everyone's time seems to be in short supply. Mr. Lavoie appreciates the efforts of the Probate Judges and Clerks of Superior Courts regarding Vital Records issues. At the same time, he strongly urges all Probate Judges to ensure that an Application Supplement form is completed and sent to Vital Records for each marriage. Clerks of Superior Courts are equally asked to have a Report of Divorce completed and mailed to Vital Records for each finalized decree of divorce.

*Contributed by Mr. Michael R. Lavoie,  
Director and State Registrar of Vital Records*

## New Caseload Report Form

Each probate court should have received the new Caseload Report Form from the Administrative Office of the Courts. [Another copy is enclosed with this issue of The Gavel.] The new form is the result of an effort to more fully and realistically portray, through statistical data, the true work of the probate courts in this State.

As Chair of the Caseload Reporting Committee, I want to very strongly encourage EVERY probate court to regularly and timely file these very important reports. The data presented by the various levels of courts through the caseload reports filed with the AOC are used for many, many purposes: tracking trends in court filings; compiling data regarding the use of courts in Georgia; grant applications; budget requests to the General Assembly; and many more. The data can also be useful to the individual courts at county budget hearings to support requests for additional staffing and/or funding.

Historically, probate courts have had only a poor to fair rating on compliance with the filing of these reports. Far too many probate courts never file these reports. Quite a few probate courts only occasionally file these reports. As I said in a letter sent to every probate judge with the new form, we are “our own worst enemy.” Those who have no real understanding of or appreciation for the true work of the probate courts will likely never be convinced otherwise until WE, ourselves, provide the proof — the

data — to show what it is that probate courts do for the citizens of Georgia.

I have asked this of our courts, and I restate it here. Give us six quarters of timely and complete reports — all of 2003 and half of 2004. I would love to have 100% compliance during that period of time. If, after six quarters of reporting by no less than 80% of our courts, no significant benefit to probate courts and our Council can be seen from our efforts, I will resign as Chair of the Committee and will “shut up” on this issue!

Filing is easier than ever. You can complete the form and mail or fax it to the AOC. You can complete the form in WordPerfect, Word or Excel format and email it or mail a disk to AOC. And, very soon, you will be able to complete the form online and submit your data electronically.

So, what? Do I have to beg? OK, I’m begging! (I’m also taking names of those who just ignore my pleas.)

Bill Self  
Bibb County

---

## Probate Judge Listserv

The Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) would like to send out a reminder that if you have not already subscribed to the Probate Judge Listserv to do so. This service is provided by the AOC under the supervision of Webmaster Brian Collins. Listserv’s purpose is to automatically send information to all Probate Judge Subscribers, for example: if the Probate President has urgent information, he can send an email that will automatically notify all subscribers. Please be advised, if you are not a member of this list, you will not receive important emails and you will not have access to send emails to this list. Furthermore, this list is limited to the use of Probate Judges.

The AOC and Judge McCoy strongly encourage you to subscribe to this list and if you unsubscribed, please rejoin. It is convenient, informative, and not to mention, it can be used as a great

reference when referring to past events, according to Mr. Collins. Subscribing is very easy, so easy that it only takes a telephone call or an email sent to our office. Once you have contacted us, you will receive a welcome message, providing a pass code and instructions on using the service. If you have any questions about this service, please contact Brian Collins at 404-463-0837 or [collinsb@gaaoc.us](mailto:collinsb@gaaoc.us)

It is Judge McCoy’s goal to have every Probate Judge on this list by April. Let’s meet this goal, so that everyone will always be informed on issues surrounding the Probate Courts and Judges.

**Comprehensive Caseload Summary Form (September 1, 2002)**

Civil and Criminal Caseload Report

Probate Court of \_\_\_\_\_ County

Reporting Period \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_

Compiled by: \_\_\_\_\_ Title: \_\_\_\_\_

**Part 1 CIVIL CASELOAD SECTION**

**Civil Cases**

Case Types	<b>Georgia Probate Court Standard Form</b>	<b>Total Petitions Filed</b>
<b>Administration of Decedent's Estate</b>	GPCSF 02, 03	_____
<b>Will Probate Proceedings</b>	GPCSF 04, 05,07, or 08	_____
<b>No Administration Necessary</b>	GPCSF 09	_____
<b>Year's Support</b>	GPCSF 10	_____
<b>Guardianship Proceedings</b>		
Combine Adult and Minor for TOTAL		_____
Adult	GPCSF 11, 12, or 51	
Minor	GPCSF 28, 29, 30, 31, and Petitions to Terminate	
<b>Petitions for Leave to Sell or Encumber</b>	GPCSF 13, 14, 15, or 17	_____
<b>Custodial Accounts Accepted</b>	GPCSF 22 or 23	_____
<b>Citations Issued Against Personal Representatives or Guardian</b>		_____
<b>Miscellaneous Estate/Guardianship Proceedings</b>		_____
<i>Please include the following in this Total</i>		
Petitions for Accounting or Settlement		
Petitions to resign as guardian or personal representative		
Petitions to remove guardian or personal representative		
Any other petitions or proceedings in estate/guardianship cases not listed above		
<b>Inventories and Returns Filed</b>		_____
<b>Mental Health Proceedings</b>		_____
<i>Please include the following in this Total</i>		
Petition for hospitalization or mandated outpatient treatment		
Orders to apprehend on affidavits		
<b>Petitions for Writs of Habeas Corpus</b>		_____
<b>License Applications</b>		_____
<b>Marriage</b>		_____
<b>Firearm</b>		_____
	<b>Total Civil Filings</b>	_____

**Part 2 CRIMINAL CASELOAD SECTION**

**Criminal Cases**

Case Types	Filed	Disposed by:	Cases or Citations per Defendant			
			Cash Bond Forfeiture	Nol Pros, Dismissed or other Non-trial Disposition	Bench Trial Acquitted	Bench Trial Convicted
<b>Misdemeanors</b>	_____	Guilty or Nolo Plea _____	_____	_____	_____	_____
<b>Traffic Cases</b>	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

Mail or Fax the completed form to:  
 Administrative Office of the Courts of Georgia  
 Technology and Research • Attn: Casey Jackson  
 244 Washington St., SW • Suite 300 • Atlanta, GA 30334  
 Fax:404-651-6449

# Schedule of Reporting to Ethics Agencies

The following is a summary of the reports which Probate Court judges file. It is suggested that you enter these dates on your office calendar at the beginning of each year.

This summary is intended to be a guide and should be updated if there are revisions in the law.

This summary applies only to judges already in office. New candidates have additional reporting dates following announcement for office.

## I.

**Name of report form:** Financial Disclosure Statement, Ethics in Government Act

**What is reported:** Fiduciary, business, and real estate interests and transactions with the State

**Legal citation:** OCGA § 21-5-50  
Where form is filed: Local office in charge of elections.

**Date report is due for what period of reporting:** Between January 1 and July 1 for the prior calendar year.

## II.

**Name of report form:** Campaign Contribution Disclosure Report

**What is reported:** Campaign contributions and expenditures

**Legal citation:** OCGA § 21-5-34. [For the new report due by June 30 in non-election years, see OCGA § 21-5-34 (j) (1).]

**Where form is filed:** Local office in charge of elections

**Date report is due for what period of reporting:**

*In non-election years:*

June 30 for the prior January 1 - June 30

December 31 for the prior July 1 - December 31

*In election years:*

March 31 for January 1 - March 31

June 30 for April 1 - June 30

September 30 for July 1 - September 30

December 31 for October 1 - December 31

*For run-off elections:*

Six days prior to the primary run-off

Six days prior to the general election run-off

## III.

**Name of report form:** This is no formal form. One may make up a list of extra-judicial income from personal services and entitle it: Report of certain compensation for quasi-judicial and extra-judicial services or one may file a copy of his/her federal income tax return.

**What is reported:** Income for personal services other than as regular salary.

(For example, gratuities for performing weddings; honorariums for speaking engagements; income from separate employment, such as a store owner or employee, owner of insurance company or landscaping services. Judges who are also lawyers continuing to practice law are not considered "full time" by statute and conceivably do not come under this provision but the Judicial Qualifications Commission may interpret it differently. It is recommended that a Judicial Qualifications Opinion be requested if there is concern.)

**Legal citation:** Canon 6, Code of Judicial Conduct (See IV., Code of Judicial Conduct in the looseleaf "Opinions Book of the Judicial Qualifications Commission." It can also be found on page 136 H, Section 4, State Bar of Georgia 2000-2001 Directory & Handbook.)

Where form is filed: Clerk, Supreme Court of Georgia

Date report is due for what period of reporting: Between January 1 and April 15 for personal income received in prior year.

## IV.

**Name of report form:** Notice of Intent To Run for Office.

**What is reported:** One's notice of intent to run.

Statement of which race and election a judge will run in.

**Legal citation:** Rule 27, Rules of the Judicial Qualifications Commission.

**Where form is filed:** The Judicial Qualifications Commission.

**Date report is due for what period of reporting:** As soon as you begin to run.

## V.

**Name of report forms (two):**

"Registration Form for a Campaign Committee for use by Candidate"

(Secretary of State's form) and

"Declaration of Intention To Accept Campaign Contributions" (Local Elections Office)

**What is reported:** Statement of the name of committee, candidate, chairperson, etc.

**Legal citation:** OCGA § 21-5-30.

Where form is filed: Two places:

Office of the Secretary of State and the local elections office.

**Date report is due for what period of reporting:** Prior to committee action, taking of funds, or making expenditures for the campaign.

## VI.

**Other:**

Amendments to the above reports.

File as soon as possible after incorrect or omitted information is discovered.

*Prepared for Georgia Probate Court Judges By the Internal Affairs-Legal Research Committee,*

*Council of Probate Court Judges*

*Adopted for Recommendation to Probate Court Judges, September 21, 2001*

*Amended by addition of new numbers IV and V, January 7, 2003*

# Probate Court Judges Meeting • Spring 2003

**APRIL 15 - 18, 2003 - GEORGIA CENTER, ATHENS**

Tuesday, April 15

3:00 p.m. Retirement Board Meeting  
6:00p.m.-9:00 p.m. Probate Judges Training Council Meeting

Wednesday, April 16 ( 3 Hours )

9:30 am Executive Committee Meeting  
12:00 - 1:00 Registration  
1:00 - 1:50 T B A  
# (.8 CLE Hr.)  
Either: Legislative Update *or*  
Case Load Reporting  
\* T B A

1:50 - 2:00 Stretch Break  
2:00- 4:00 CASELAW UPDATE  
# (1.2 CLE Hrs.)  
\*Professor Sarajane Love, UGA,  
School of Law  
4:10 - 5:00 COUNCIL BUSINESS MEETING  
7:00 Annual Awards Dinner

Thursday, April 17 ( 7 Hours )

8:00 - Noon JUDICIAL DECISION MAKING  
# (3 CLE Hrs.) (Includes 1 Ethics Hr.)  
\* Mr. Thomas N. Langhorne, III  
The Langhorne Group  
Richmond, Virginia

12:00 - 1:30 GROUP PHOTO & LUNCHEON  
1:30 - 4:30 VERBAL / NON-VERBAL  
# DEMEANOR  
(2 CLE Hrs.) (Includes 1 Prof. Hr.)  
\*Hon. Scott Brownell,  
Bradenton, Florida

Friday, April 18 ( 3 Hours )

9:00 - Noon T B A  
Either: Guardianship Revisions  
(depending on Legislative  
Session) *or*  
Vital Records Update and Case  
Load Reporting *or*  
Legislation  
\* Speaker: T B A

7 CLE Hours are available for this program, of which 1 is Professionalism and 1 is Ethics. If you wish to claim these hours you must pay for these hours at the seminar. The cost is \$3.00 per CLE Hour. \*If you wish to purchase the Professionalism Hour, you must pay an additional \$15.00 per hour claimed.\*

The cost breakdown is:\$21.00 for straight CLE  
\$36.00 for straight CLE plus 1  
Professionalism Hour

You MUST pay for the CLE at the seminar, no CLE money will be taken after the program is over. Please make your check payable to ICJE, and be sure to put your Bar # on the check.Please be aware that the schedule may change prior to the start of the seminar. If you plan to bring a pre-cut check to the seminar, please call me to verify the hours. Thank you.

# Weaver vs. JQC

Judge Kip McVay  
March 3, 2003

The posture of the *Weaver vs. JQC* case is that the JQC's motion for rehearing by the 11th Circuit Court of Appeals was denied. The JQC's attorney, Eric Schroeder of Powell, Goldstein, Frazer & Murphy, states that a petition for certiorari will not be filed, primarily because the attorneys did not believe the U. S. Supreme Court would take the case so soon after the ruling on judicial elections in the case of *The Republican Party of Minnesota vs. White*, \_\_\_ U.S. \_\_\_, 122 S.Ct. 2528 (2002).

To review for you, the motion for reconsideration was filed by the JQC because the 11th Circuit Court of Appeals panel not only sustained the decision of the Federal District Court but it ruled on matters which had not even been raised and went beyond holdings by the United States Supreme Court in the *White* case.

The decision, if left standing, erodes our Code of Judicial Conduct based on the First Amendment right of free speech. The effect is to allow judicial candidates, including sitting judges, to say whatever they want about the opposition when running for office, to comment on a judge's action in a case, and to solicit campaign funds directly. In other words, the campaign of a judicial candidate can be brought down to the lowest level of every other political campaign.

There is no question that the motive behind these decisions is to force States to give up election of judges and institute an appointment procedure. This type procedure, known originally as the

"Missouri plan," provides for appointment for a term. The judge then comes up for a vote as to whether he/she should stay in office. If he/she loses, then a new judge is appointed.

Our part in all of this was to provide an amicus brief, that is, a brief as friend of the court, to the 11th Circuit. It began when Superior Court Judge Steve Jones, Chairman of the JQC, indicated that he would like the support of the various judicial councils by each filing an amicus in support of the JQC's position. Ours was the only Georgia council to do so.

Judge McCoy agreed to the preparation of the amicus by the Internal Affairs-Legal Research Committee. Unfortunately, filing an amicus at that particular stage of the litigation was not something we could do without obtaining permission of the 11th Circuit. To do that required an actual petition, which requires an attorney admitted to practice in the 11th Circuit. I requested Robert S. "Beau" Stubbs III, my late husband's son and my former partner, to handle this for us and he kindly did. The final document was fourteen pages long.

To my knowledge, the only other groups asked to file an amicus were the Conference of Chief Judges, a national association of Superior Court judges; the Ad Hoc Committee of Former Justices and Friends Dedicated to an Independent Judiciary; and the Florida Judicial Qualifications Commission.

We received a letter from Judge Jones in appreciation for our Council's efforts which reads:

Thank you and the Probate Court Judges of this State for the amicus brief filed in the *Weaver* case.

As you know, the issues in the *Weaver* case are very important to the judges of this State and can have a tremendous effect on how judges are elected.

With your help, the Judicial Qualifications Commission will hopefully bring these issues in front of the entire 11th Circuit Court of Appeals panel.

Thanks again for your help.  
Sincerely,  
Steve C. Jones  
Judge, Superior Courts,  
Western Judicial Circuit

If anyone has any questions, I will be glad to follow up.

---

## Congratulations to:

Judge Bump Welch of Marion County on his wonderful Christmas present. Santa brought Judge Welch a new bride on December 26, 2002. Best wishes to Judge & Mrs. Welch. We hope they have many years of happiness together!

Judge Sallylu Hart of Thomas County on her retirement effective September 30, 2002 after 22 years of service. Judge Hart's chief clerk, Vicki Burnett assumed the duties of the office for the remainder of the term. We wish Judge Hart the best in her retirement and Judge Burnett the best of luck in office.

# Legislative Tracking

The Administrative Office of the Courts would like to take this opportunity to inform or remind everyone of the Legislative Tracking link. The link, which is a web based tracking system has been put into place and updated daily to receive input and provide information to individuals across the state regarding legislation. The tracking link also provides access to current events in the news, contact information for various organizations, and resources to aid in the search for legislation that may otherwise prove difficult to find.

When navigating the website, there are some links you may find of great importance. One of the links is the tracking level, which explains what stage legislation is

on at that present time. The other levels are self explanatory, but there are two levels that should be defined. The first level is hot legislation, which means the bills are moving and the second level is work legislation, which means there is a need for input on the Legislative Analysis form. Furthermore, the very top of the homepage you will find a bar with several link options and one important link is the calendar. The calendar link furnishes committee meeting notices and agendas which are updated throughout each day to reflect the most recent agendas.

If you have not had the opportunity to go onto the website, please take the time and do so. You will find that it is very con-

venient, informative, and reliable when tracking legislation. You may log onto the website by typing [www.georgiacourts.org](http://www.georgiacourts.org) and a blue arrow will point to the Legislative Tracking link. Debra Nesbit of the AOC is the Assistant Director of Legislative and Governmental Affairs and maintains the website with the aid of her staff and the Legislative Advisory Group. Ms. Nesbit would like for you to know if you are unable to visit the website or require more assistance, the staff at AOC will be happy to track any legislation you find of interest.

If you have any questions and/or concerns please feel free to contact Debra Nesbit at 404-651-7616 or [nesbitd@gaaoc.us](mailto:nesbitd@gaaoc.us)

---

## The Gavel

Georgia Council of Probate Court Judges  
Administrative Office of the Courts  
244 Washington Street, SW, Suite 300  
Atlanta, GA 30334

**JUDGE DARIN MCCOY**  
*Editor*

**DAVID L. RATLEY**  
*Director*

**MARLA MOORE**  
*Associate Director for  
Court Services*

**ASHLEY G. STOLLAR**  
*Graphic Design*