

Building Justice: A Business Case Study

Presented to

Atlanta Business Roundtable

September 18, 2025

Cassandra Kirk,
Chief Magistrate Judge

Inform, Engage and Empower Our Community





START UP PHASE:

Research &
Understand the
Challenge

Gather * Tinker * Refine



Market Opportunity & Strategic Foundation

- Carved from existing County resources
- Market size: 70,000+ cases annually
- Target: \$1 M people in Fulton County
- Accountability, accessibility, efficiency
- 2014 Governor Deal appointed Cassandra Kirk as Chief Magistrate
- The Chief designation does not alternate throughout the four-year term;
- Chief Magistrate Judge was Elected by Fulton County voters in a contested election May 2018 and in uncontested election May 2022;
- Chief Magistrate Judge Election occurs every 4 years



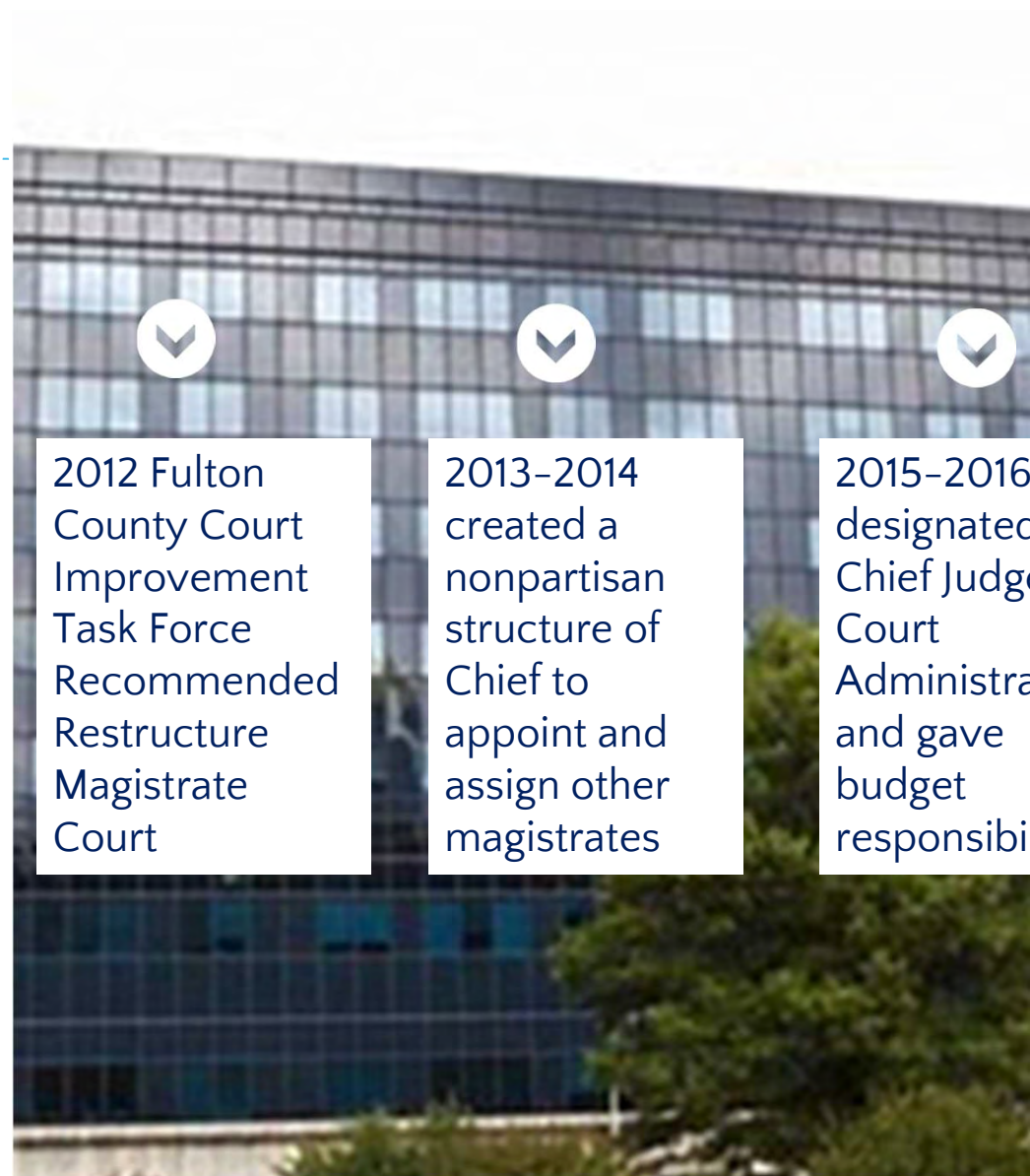
2012 Fulton County Court Improvement Task Force Recommended Restructure Magistrate Court



2013-2014 created a nonpartisan structure of Chief to appoint and assign other magistrates



2015-2016 designated Chief Judge Court Administration and gave budget responsibility





Resources: January 2016

DETAIL BREAKDOWN OF GENERAL FUND ITEMS IN "JANUARY 4th RECOMMENDATIONS" COLUMN

REVENUE

Adjustment for 2015 Tax Payments
Received Earlier Than Anticipated

(6,000,000) Decrease revenue budget for FY2016

EXPENDITURES

- Transfer of funds for two positions
- Fund one Senior Investigator position transferred from the Police Department
- Fund one Administrative Coordinator II position in the Office of Diversity & Civil Rights Compliance
- Funds for Senior home improvement
- Funds set aside for Justice Reinvestment Consulting fee
- Funds to be transferred to South Fulton Fund as Contribution
- Funds for increase of transportation capital projects budget
- Funds for increased funding for facilities maintenance and partial funding of pay parity

(220,000) Decrease Non-Agency budget
150,000 Increase District Attorney's budget
70,000 Increase County Attorney's budget
250,000 Increase Aging and Youths' budget
1,000,000 Increase Non-Agency budget
2,000,000 Increase Non-Agency budget
3,000,000 Increase Non-Agency budget

TOTAL

DETAIL BREAKDOWN OF GENERAL FUND ITEMS IN "JANUARY 15th RECOMMENDATIONS" COLUMN

EXPENDITURES

- Personnel transactions in the Chairman's office
- Abolish 1 vacant position
- Transfer funds to fully fund 1 temp position
- Funds required to complete transfer of positions and funding for Health Billing & Collections
- Funds transferred to Finance Department for Billing and Collections functions
- Fund 39 positions for Magistrate Court's functions assumed by the Clerk
- Transfer 39 positions for functions transferred to Clerk of Superior Court
- Funds for shortfall of lease payments
- Funds for shortfall of indigent defense budget
- Transferred funds for indigent defense and Public Defender's office lease payments
- Required funds to cover shortfall for the new County Attorney's salary and benefits
- Transfer 1 position from Real Estate Asset Management to County Manager's budget
- Transfer 1 position to County Manager's budget from Real Estate Asset Management
- State mandated salary increase for Magistrate Court Judge
- State mandated salary increase for Probate Court Judge
- State mandated salary increase for Solicitor General
- State mandate salary increases for Juvenile Court Judges
- Required funds for State mandated salary increases
- State mandated salary increases for State Court Judges

23,787 Increase Board of Commissioner's budget
(24,767) Decrease County Manager's budget
24,767 Increase Clerk to the Commission's budget
44,559 Increase Finance Department's budget
(44,559) Decrease Health & Wellness Department's budget
2,306,228 Increase Clerk of Superior Court's budget
(2,306,228) Decrease Magistrate Court's budget
45,400 Increase Public Defender's budget
200,000 Increase State Court's budget
(245,400) Decrease Non-Agency budget
50,000 Increase County Attorney's budget
78,739 Increase County Manager's budget
(78,739) Decrease Real Estate Asset Management
5,220 Increase Magistrate Court's budget
8,009 Increase Probate Court's budget
8,009 Increase Solicitor General's budget
48,056 Increase Juvenile Court's budget
(69,282) Decrease Non-Agency budget
80,093 Increase State Court's budget

84,000 cases in 2016

FY 2018: 2.45M
Budget

\$2,306,228 Transfer

- Transfer 39 positions for functions to Clerk of Superior Court
- Decrease Magistrate Court's budget
- Fund 39 positions for Magistrate Court functions assumed by the Clerk

Business Model & Infrastructure

Court Jurisdiction (Service Portfolio)

CIVIL



- ▶ Civil cases less than \$15,000
- ▶ Garnishment actions
- ▶ Post-judgment collection
- ▶ Landlord/Tenant cases



- ▶ Search and arrest warrants
- ▶ First appearance hearings
- ▶ Warrant application hearings
- ▶ Misdemeanor Mental Health Court
- ▶ Preliminary hearings
- ▶ *By designation*, provide Judicial Assistance to Superior Court in the Non-Complex Division

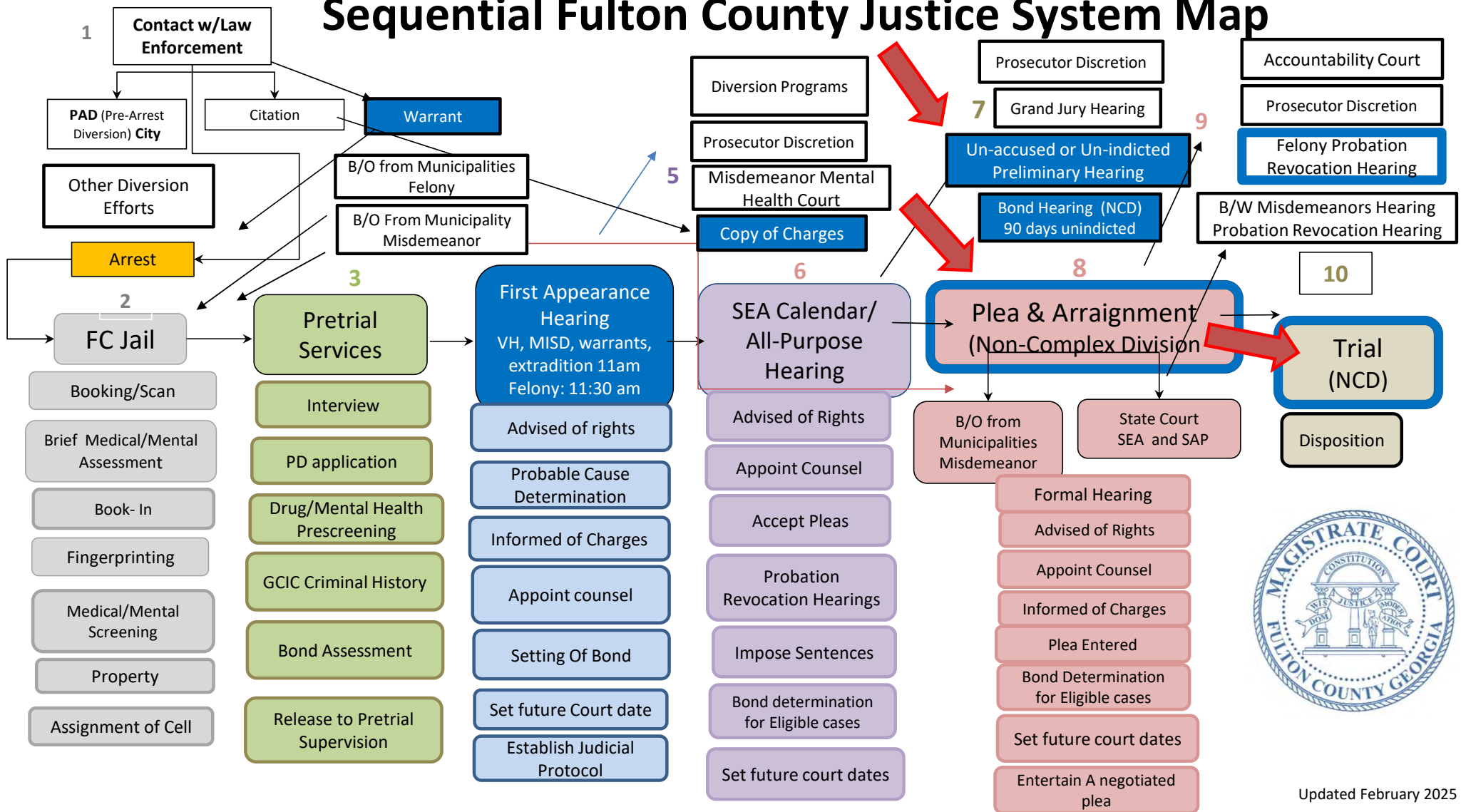
CRIMINAL

- ▶ Operate 24 hours / 7 days
- ▶ Jurisdiction: Civil & Criminal
- ▶ Locations: North (1) and South (1) Annex, Central (6), & Jail (1)
- ▶ 5.2M budget 2025
- ▶ 1 Chief Magistrate Judge (Elected)
 - ▶ 10 Full Time Magistrate Judges
 - ▶ 16 Part Time Magistrate Judges
 - ▶ 7 staff, 3 Court support
 - ▶ 1-4 interns



Court Structure (Assets)

Sequential Fulton County Justice System Map



Fulton County 2021-2025 Strategic Plan

Priorities that align with Magistrate Court:



1. Justice and Safety

- a. Magistrate Court plays a crucial role in ensuring accessible and equitable justice for all residents.
- b. To fulfill our mission to inform, engage, and empower the community, we must meet the rising demand in both civil and criminal matters.

2. Open and Responsible Government

- a. Efficient case management directly supports Fulton County's goal of delivering high-impact services.
- b. By processing cases more efficiently, we reduce backlogs and delays, ensuring that justice is timely and effective, which is critical to maintaining public trust in both civil and criminal matters.

3. Delivering Good Customer Service

- a. critical aspect to provide personalized and timely assistance to meet the increasing demands of our community.
- b. assisting residents in navigating the legal system, processing orders efficiently, and ensuring that each interaction with the Court is positive and productive.
- c. This supports the County's vision of being a government that is trusted for its effectiveness and responsiveness.

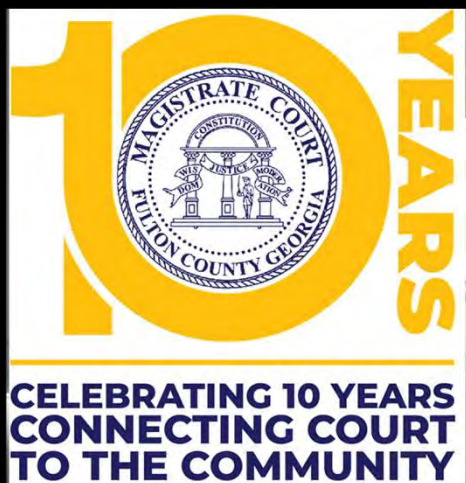


**CELEBRATING 10 YEARS
CONNECTING COURT
TO THE COMMUNITY**

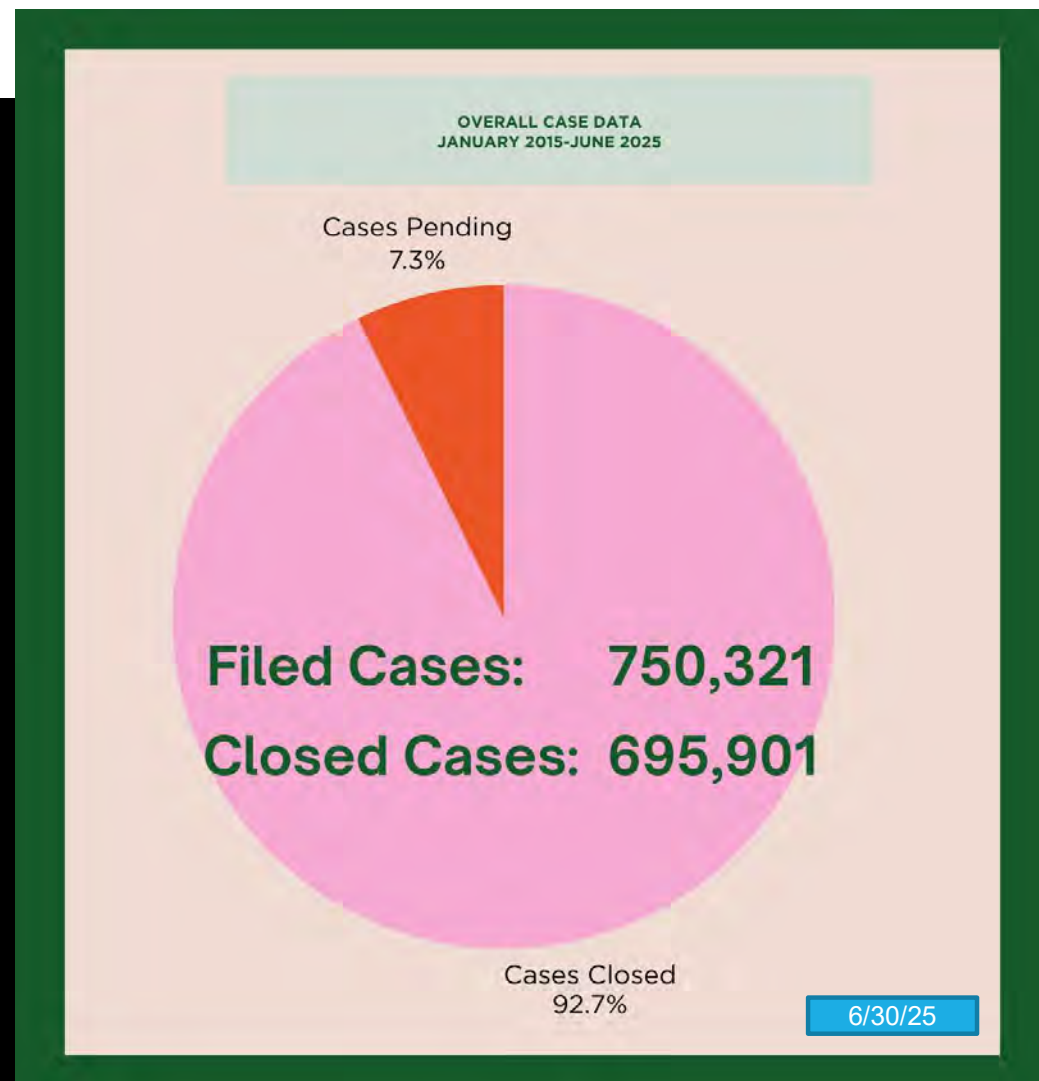
DESIGN AND
INNOVATE

Gather * **Tinker** * Refine

Market Position



Inform, Engage, and Empower Our Community



Misdemeanor Mental Health Court Graduations

October 19, 2018 December 21, 2018
 February 22, 2019 April 19, 2019
 June 28, 2019 October 19, 2019
 December 20, 2019 July 10, 2020

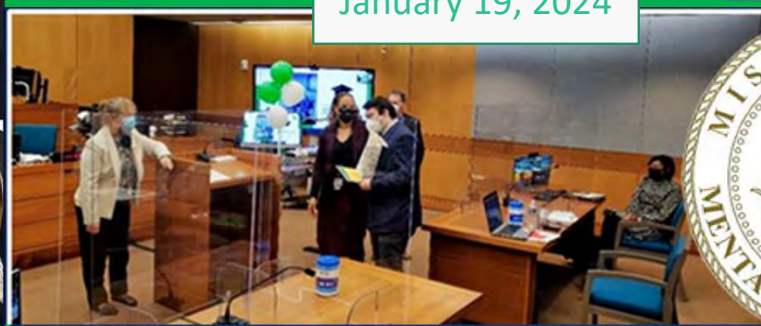
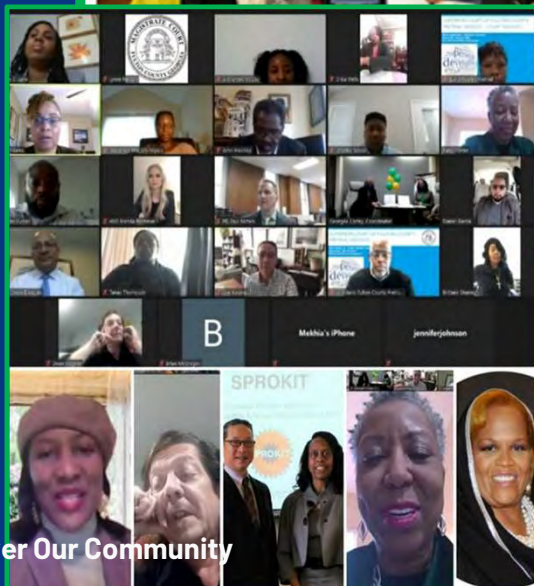


February 5, 2021
 May 21, 2021
 August 27, 2021
 December 10, 2021
 March 25, 2022
 June 24, 2022
 September 23, 2022
 March 17, 2023
 January 19, 2024

71 Graduates



72%



Our Purpose

Rapid Education Assistance
Court Help (R.E.A.C.H.) Clinic

To provide guidance, resources,
and support to help self-
represented litigants:

- **Understand** their legal rights,
- **Navigate** the court system,
- **Represent** themselves.



Our Cases

Rapid Education Assistance
Court Help (R.E.A.C.H.) Clinic



Small Claims

A person sues another person for money damages
of \$15,000 or less.



Garnishments

A court order that lets a creditor take money from
a debtor's paycheck or bank account to pay off a
debt.



Warrant Applications

A court order that lets a creditor take money from
a debtor's paycheck or bank account to pay off a
debt.



Our Services

Rapid Education Assistance
Court Help (R.E.A.C.H.) Clinic

- **Provide** legal information
- **Refer** community resources
- **Find** court forms
- **Complete** court papers
- **Prepare** for court hearings
- **Refer** legal aid providers
- **Conduct** trainings across Fulton!

Our Impact

Rapid Education Assistance
Court Help (R.E.A.C.H.) Clinic



Efficiency

Increases efficiency of court



Public Trust

Builds public trust in the court system



Access to Justice

Help people who are representing themselves in
court understand and follow the legal process.





CIVIC EDUCATION, COURT OBSERVATION, AND JUDICIAL ENGAGEMENT!

It is with great pleasure that we extended a warm welcome to Carver Early College, our distinguished guests for the month of May. Let the **LEARNING** and **FUN** begin!

MAGISTRATE COURT OF FULTON COUNTY &
CHIEF MAGISTRATE JUDGE CASSANDRA KIRK

Present

BANG THE GAVEL



A COURT DAY LUNCH & LEARN SERIES

Sponsored by The Rashad Richey Morning Show **V103** **1380 WAOK**

Together We Welcome



MONDAY
MAY 13TH, 2024
09:00AM-1:30PM



Inform. Engage. and Empower Our Community



Impact: **381 students** as of 07/30/24

Magistrate Court 101

An Educational Series

How to Handle

- ▶ Small Claims
- ▶ Garnishments
- ▶ Warrant Applications

The Magistrate Court of Fulton County, Fulton County Library System, and Chief Magistrate Judge Cassandra Kirk present:

Magistrate Court 101



An educational series on small claims, garnishments, and warrant applications. Come learn how to represent yourself in court and navigate the court system.

APR 24	1:30-2:30	SOUTH FULTON
MAY 7	1:30-2:30	ADAMS PARK
MAY 19	2:30-3:30	CASCADE
JUN 9	1:30-2:30	ADAMSVILLE
JUN 26	2:30-3:30	NORTHWEST
JUL 21	6:00-7:00	SOUTHEAST
AUG 11	6:00-7:00	WASHINGTON PARK
AUG 16	10:30-11:30	MLK, JR.
AUG 28	1:30-2:30	NORTHSIDE
SEP 4	1:00-2:00	EAST POINT



Hon. Cassandra Kirk
Chief Magistrate Judge
Presenter and



Eric Cho, Esq.
Senior Staff Attorney
Presenter



MagistrateFulton.Org



(404) 613-9307



Tackling Backlog: Landlord-Tenant Working Group



Magistrate Court Update

What

- By law, a landlord may demand payment of past due rent into the Court Registry, if a case cannot be heard within two weeks.

Motion to Compel Payment of Rent into the Registry

Who

Parties with open Landlord - Tenant cases in Fulton County.

How

- Tenant has 14 days to pay into the court registry.
- Payments can be made through money order, cash, cashier's check, debit or credit card at 136 Pryor Street SE, 1st floor, Suite J2-103, Atl.
- Online: <https://pages.fivepointpayments.com/checkin/fulton>

What

Tenant will be required to pay into Court Registry rent owed before and after the Landlord files the dispossessory affidavit.

Tenant's failure to pay rent per the order will result in Landlord being entitled to Writ of Possession of the property.

Magistrate Court of Fulton County & Big Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church Host a
LEGISLATIVE TOWNHALL
On New Housing Laws

Thursday, June 27, 2024
6:00 PM - 7:30 PM

Topics

- Safe at Home Act
- Georgia Squatters Reform Act
- New Court Procedures
- Magistrate Court Update
- Rental Assistance

Speakers

- ✓ Cassandra Galt, Chief Magistrate Judge
- ✓ Marshall Morris McElree, Marshal of Fulton County
- ✓ Randall Hughes, Jr. Esq., Attorney at Law
- ✓ Margaret L. Kinross, Esq., Senior Attorney/Tenant Advocate, Director, Atlanta Legal Aid Society, Inc.
- ✓ B. Kyle Williams, Founding Partner, Williams Teasnik, LLC
- ✓ J. Miles Williams, Esq., Managing Attorney, Fowler Hain, Chestwood & Williams P.A.

INFORM, ENGAGE, EMPOWER OUR COMMUNITY.

Magistrate Court presents



WHO

Landlords and tenants with filed cases in Magistrate Court of Fulton County

WHAT

We are implementing a mandatory mediation calendar, followed by a trial within two days

HOW

You will receive a subpoena telling you where and when to report.

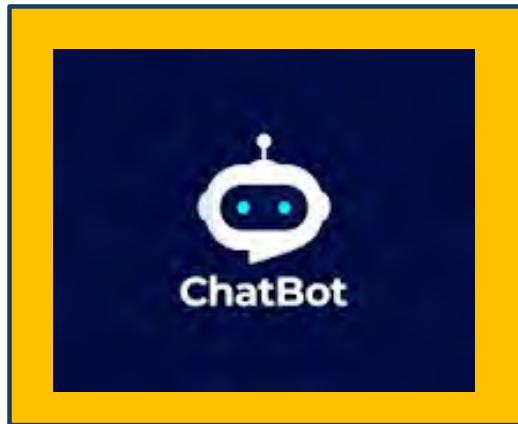
WHERE

Magistrate Court of Fulton County

Mediation then Court



Customer Service 2024



Maggie, our Chatbot, processed **21,956** conversations 2024.
Maggie handled **73%** of those conversations
3,688 were transferred to our team.

Civic Plus estimates a cost savings of \$5/conversation that chatbots handle. Using that figure, the chatbot saved the Magistrate Court **\$91,340** in 2024.



Senior Staff Attorney: over **3,000** interactions

Assistance via email, phone, and in person

Supported by interns



EXECUTE & EXCEL

Overcoming
Challenges with
Excellence

Gather * Tinker * **Refine**



Comparative Budgets Across Justice

COURT	2022 ACTUAL BUDGET	2023 ACTUAL BUDGET	2024 ADOPTED BUDGET
MAGISTRATE	4,211,403	5,055,839	4,645,677
Juvenile	15,620,623	16,031,434	16,845,058
Probate	4,085,126	4,958,590	5,683,601
State - General	7,458,289	7,995,149	8,700,422
State - Judges	6,158,432	6,523,446	6,900,659
Superior - General	22,000,729	22,576,085	24,420,117
Superior - Judges	9,104,485	9,666,890	9,824,079
Superior & Magistrate Clerk	19,983,861	21,557,910	21,942,346

JUDGES
30
7
2
10
20
0

2025 Comparative Budgets Across Justice

Court		Budget (Fulton FY2025 Budget Book)
Magistrate		5,161, 258
Juvenile		18,150,397
Probate		6,482,323
State: General	9,232,810	16,414,221
Judges	7,181,411	
Superior: General	26,804,150	37,083.077
Judges	10,278,927	
Magistrate and Superior Clerk		23,526,563



Current Staffing Level

10 full time judges, 16 part time judges

7 staff positions across Court
Administration

3 staff designated for Court support

Support Staff Roster		
1	0120510	Senior Staff Attorney
2	0129597	Senior Staff Attorney
3	0018879	Court Support Manager I
4	0129600	Judicial Assistant
5	0145997	Judicial Assistant
6	0129601	Court Operations Specialist
7	0145995	Administrative Assistant II

Magistrate Court Organization Chart

Administration



Court operations severally affected:
No longer operating 240-400 cases a day
Case delays beginning **August 22, 2024**



The economic impact on communities is substantial

Landlord-Tenant Cases

- ▶ 10,500 open cases (approx. Nov. 16, 2024)
- ▶ Assume Monthly rent amounts of \$850, \$1,250, and \$1,500)
- ▶ Cost to landlords per month
- Low: $10,500 \times \$850 = \$8.925M$
- Medium: $10,500 \times \$1,250 = \$13.125M$
- High: $10,500 \times \$1,500 = \$15.75M$
- ▶ Affects housing stability
- ▶ Impacts both landlords and tenants

Small Claims

- ▶ 14,273 pending cases (as of Nov 16, 2024)
- ▶ Assume damages or claims of \$7,500
- ▶ \$107M in held claims
- ▶ Affects small businesses
- ▶ Delays justice for individuals

Warrant Applications

- Pre-September: 67.21% closure rate
- Post-September: 21% theoretical maximum closure rate
- 46.21% reduction in closure capability **due to reduced hearing capability**
- **Open cases** as of 11/25/24: **394**

Abandoned Minor Child:

- Pre-September: 70.37% closure rate
- Post-September: 22% theoretical maximum closure rate
- 48.37% reduction in closure capability **due to reduced hearing capability**
- **Open cases** (as of 11/25/24): **166**

Please note that caseload data increases daily.



Volume (2025 Case Metrics)

<u>Year (9/16/25)</u>	<u>Total # of Cases Filed</u>	<u># of Cases Closed</u>	<u># of Cases Open</u>	<u>Percentage Closed</u>
2019	80,093	80,085	8	99.99%
2020	49,437	49,414	23	99.95%
2021	61,786	61,015	771	98.75%
2022	76,847	74,245	2,602	96.61%
2023	81,895	75,791	6,104	92.55%
2024	70,803	54,309	16,494	76.70%
2025	59,252	29,337	29,915	49.51%
	480,113	424,196	55,917	88.35%

2024 Magistrate Court Cases (as of 9/16/2025)

<u>Case Type</u>	<u>Total # of Cases Filed</u>	<u># of Cases Closed</u>	<u># of Cases Open</u>	<u>Percentage Closed</u>
Small Claims (Trials, Status, M&D's)	22,420	13,752	8,668	61.34%
Landlord-Tenant	35,235	31,363	3,872	89.01%
Garnishments	6,449	3,628	2,821	56.26%
Abandoned Motor Vehicles	4,152	3,086	1,066	74.33%
Environmental	215	190	25	88.37%
Copy of Charges	253	242	11	95.65%
Warrant Applications	1,595	1,583	12	99.25%
Abandoned Minor Child	484	465	19	96.07%
Total	70,803	54,309	16,494	76.70%



Performance: Case Metrics Over Time

<u>Year To Date (9/16/25)</u>	<u># of Closed Cases As Of This Week in 2025</u>
2019	106
2020	166
2021	185
2022	538
2023	4,086
2024	17,091
2025	29,337
Pre-2019 ORCA AMV Cases	619

Total

52,128

26,011 arrest warrants 08/05/25 4,574 search warrants 08/05/25 10,342 Writs 07/31/25

Snapshot: 1/1/2019- 9/16/25

Our Mission



*Inform, Engage, Empower
Our Community*

IG: [fultonmagistrate](#) www.magistratefulton.org

404-613-9071



Questions?

404-613-9071 @magistratefulton

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