

Welcome to Georgia's Court System

Through its roles of interpreting law, administering justice, and regulating disputes, Georgia's Judicial Branch serves the state daily.

Everyday our lives are affected by the business that is conducted throughout the judicial branch. The decisions that are made, both at the trial court and appellate levels, impact the citizens of Georgia.



Yet few citizens are familiar with the basic functions and responsibilities of the state's courts, the judges who preside in them, and the various professionals who work to ensure the business of the judiciary is fairly and efficiently carried out.



Did You Know?

There are two levels of court in Georgia: TRIAL COURTS and APPELLATE COURTS. Each court's jurisdiction — the power to hear and determine a case — is outlined in the state's constitution.

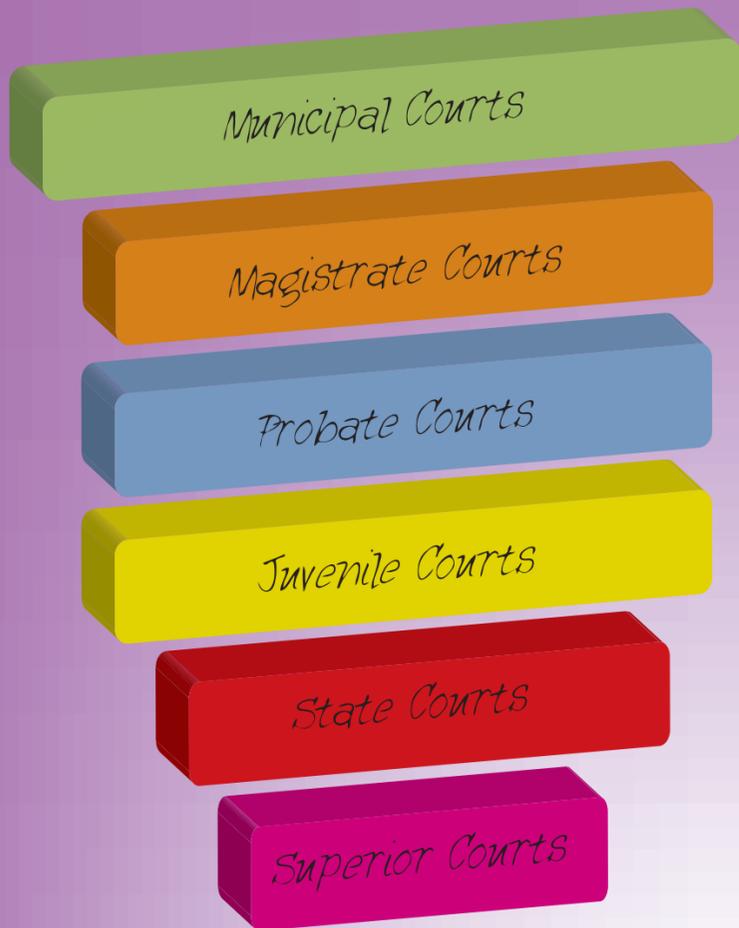


Georgia's courts hear both criminal and civil cases. Criminal proceedings are brought against those who are believed to have broken the law; while civil matters involve disputes between individuals or corporations.



Find out more about your court system inside!!

What Do The Courts Do?



Trial Courts

Different courts are set up to do different things. Georgia's courts hear cases based on the subject matter jurisdiction they are given, this may be broad or limited.

MUNICIPAL courts, or city courts, hear cases that involve violations of city ordinances. A small claims case would be heard in the MAGISTRATE court. A person looking to obtain a marriage license would go to the PROBATE court. In many counties, traffic cases are heard by the STATE court. Cases involving children, those under the age of 18, are dealt with in the JUVENILE court. Felony and divorce cases are heard in SUPERIOR court.

Some general jurisdiction trial courts hear appeals from limited jurisdiction courts.

Appellate Courts

The COURT OF APPEALS OF GEORGIA and the SUPREME COURT OF GEORGIA review cases tried in the state's limited jurisdiction courts.

The State Judicial Building in Atlanta houses courtrooms for both appellate courts.



- MAGISTRATE COURTS**
 - Small claims (\$15,000 or less)
 - Minor criminal offenses
 - County ordinance violations
 - Preliminary hearings
 - Arrest & search warrants
 - Check fraud
 - 159 courts, each county has a magistrate court
- MUNICIPAL COURTS**
 - Violations of city ordinances
 - Issuance of criminal warrants
 - Preliminary hearings
 - Traffic violations in city limits
 - 400 courts in Georgia cities.
- PROBATE COURTS**
 - Wills, administration of estates appointment of guardians, involuntary hospitalizations
 - Marriage and firearm licensing
 - Traffic in some counties
 - 159 courts, each county has a probate court
- JUVENILE COURTS**
 - Delinquent juveniles under age 17
 - Deprived, unruly juveniles under age 18
 - Juvenile traffic cases
 - 159 courts, each county has a juvenile court
- STATE COURTS**
 - Misdemeanor violations - traffic & civil actions
 - Felony preliminary hearings
 - Review limited jurisdiction court decisions
 - 71 counties have state courts.
- SUPERIOR COURTS**
 - Felonies
 - Divorce proceedings
 - Title to land, equity
 - Juveniles who commit serious felonies
 - Correct errors from county courts
 - 159 courts, each county has a superior court.

Why Appeal? Georgia's courts of review are set up to correct legal errors or errors of law made at the trial level. No trials are held at the appellate level - instead, judges review written records and briefs and hear oral arguments from attorneys.

Appellate Courts

- COURT OF APPEALS**
 - Appellate jurisdiction over lower courts in cases in which Supreme Court has no exclusive appellate jurisdiction
 - 12 judges, 4 panels of 3 judges
- SUPREME COURT**

Reviews cases involving:

 - Death Penalty
 - Divorce
 - Constitutionality of law
 - Treaties
 - Wills
 - COURT OF LAST RESORT
 - 7 justices

Who Are Georgia's Judges?

There are approximately 1,300 judges that serve the state of Georgia. From municipal court judges to Supreme Court justices, Georgia's judges come from all walks of life. Many of the men and women who serve on the bench are native Georgians. Others have moved here from different states or from other countries. The judges of the State Court of DeKalb County (below) illustrate how diverse Georgia's judges are.

Judge J. Antonio DelCampo
Born in Lima, Peru
Enjoys Traveling & Playing Guitar

Judge Johnny Panos
Speaks English & Greek
Born in Atlanta, GA

Judge Barbara J. Mobley
Enjoys Photography
Attended Savannah State University

Judge Janis C. Gordon
Ran a Marathon in Antarctica
Speaks English & French

Judge Wayne Purdom
Author of Four Law Books
Can read Ancient Greek

Chief Judge Edward E. Carriere, Jr.
Grew up in New Orleans, LA
Served in the Army

Judge Alvin T. Wong
Born in Hong Kong
Speaks English & Chinese

Judicial Selection

A person can become a judge in one of two ways: APPOINTMENT or ELECTION.

APPOINTMENT – The Governor may appoint a qualified candidate to fill a vacancy on the appellate courts, superior court, or state court. To remain on the bench, an appointed judge must run for the office in future elections.

ELECTION – A sitting judge must run for re-election at the end of each term of office. Challengers may run against the incumbent for the seat. If a judge is retiring at the end of a term, the seat is considered "open," and a new judge will be elected from the announced candidates.

Judicial Elections

Most judges in Georgia run for office in elections which are nonpartisan, meaning candidates are not affiliated with any political party.

Justices of the Supreme Court and judges of the Court of Appeals are elected to six-year terms. Judges of the Superior, State, Probate, and Magistrate courts serve four-year terms.

What Do Judges Do?



Newly appointed gubernatorial appointees are sworn-in by the Governor.

The judge's role in a TRIAL COURT is to review and determine relevance of evidence as it is presented. During a BENCH TRIAL, the judge hears evidence then determines guilt and sentencing.

APPELLATE JUDGES must review materials from cases that have been tried in the trial courts and determine if procedural errors have occurred and if a new trial is warranted.

Who Are Your Judges?

Superior Court:

State Court:

Juvenile Court:

Probate Court:

Magistrate Court:

Municipal Court:

Who's at the Courthouse?

The complex nature of the state's judicial system requires the expertise of many professionals whose roles are essential for the judiciary to function efficiently and properly. Here are a few of those professionals you are likely to encounter at your county courthouse.

Judge

presides over cases and makes rulings based on evidence presented; renders verdicts in some cases.

Court Administrator

manages the business and daily operations of the court



Court Clerk

preserves and maintains the records of the court

The Jury

Citizens are sometimes called upon to serve on juries on both criminal and civil trials. The jury's responsibility is to listen to testimony and arguments made by each side in a case. The jury must determine guilt (criminal trial) or liability (civil trial) and pass sentence, if appropriate.

Attorney

represents the interest of a client in a case.

PROSECUTORS

(District Attorney or Solicitor)
Acts on behalf of the state in prosecuting those believed to have broken the law.

PLAINTIFF'S ATTORNEY

Advocates for a person who brings a case to civil court.

DEFENSE ATTORNEY

Advocates for persons accused of committing a crime or respondent in a civil case. Indigent defendants, those with limited financial resources, may be eligible for a PUBLIC DEFENDER.

Sheriff's Deputy

provides security for courthouse and maintains order in courtroom.

Court Reporter

records testimony at trials or in depositions.