

Improving Access to Justice . . .



Georgia Council of Magistrate Court Judges



Georgia Council of Magistrate Court Judges

- Provide direct support to local Courts to enhance the administration of justice
- 500+ Judges across the state
- Magistrate Courts created by the State of Georgia Constitution as a Court of limited jurisdiction in each county
- Represent the Magistrate Courts on the Georgia Judicial Council

A vision of “Justice for All”

- Improving access to Georgia’s Courts
- Providing Self-Represented Litigants an educational and procedural tool
- Tool should “level” the field by making sure the correct information is provided in the accurate way
- Eliminate “trial by ambush”
- Improves judicial efficiency

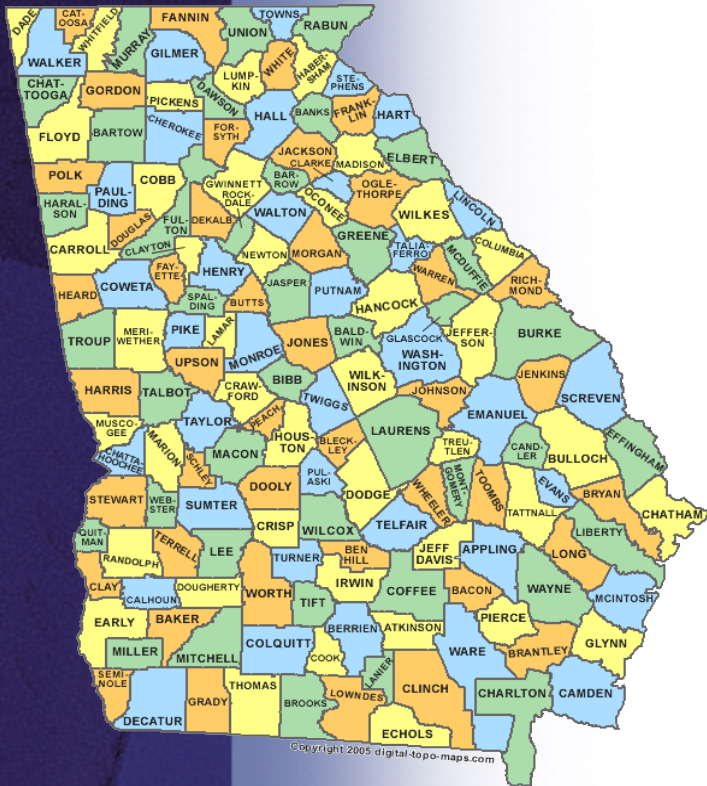
An idea is born . . .

- Transforming the Magistrate Court filing process to improve justice for all.
- Free public tool to equalize the playing field
- Goals:
 - Uniformity
 - Education
 - Consistency
- Fiscal Responsibility to the State & Local Governments

Where to start?

- Georgia has a non-unified judiciary
- Buy-in at every level of state and local would be key
- Had to be web-based
- Had to be accessible anywhere in the world
- Had to be at no cost to user

Members of the Development Committee



- Judge Michael Barker, Chatham County
- Chief Judge Mike Greene, Jones County
- Chief Judge Bob Turner, Houston County
- Judge Betsey Kidwell, Heard County
- Chief Judge Phinia Aten, Rockdale County
- Chief Judge Allen Wigington, Pickens County
- Chief Judge Jennifer Lewis, Camden County
- Judge Alan Harvey, DeKalb County
- Sharon Reiss, Executive Director CMCJ

From IDEA to REALITY

- July 2012 – Brainstorm ideas
- July 2013 – Draft Interviews
- December 2013 – Vendor Selected
- January 2014 – Program Development Began
- May 2014 – Final Program Review
- August 2014 – Program Live



tyler
technologies



Program Demonstration

georgia-stage.tylerhost.net



Guide & File Interviews

Welcome

Select Interview Complete Interview Review Summary Submit Filing

General Statement of Claim

The Magistrate Court only accepts civil cases with a maximum claim of \$15,000.

If your actual claim is more than \$15,000, you cannot voluntarily reduce your claim amount, or sue for only a part of that claim, in order to file your case in the Magistrate Court.

Generally, civil cases, including those filed in a Magistrate Court must be filed in the county where the defendant lives.

Info: The person suing is the Plaintiff, and the person being sued is the Defendant.

The plaintiff must fill out the original claim form in order to begin the lawsuit. This interview will help you prepare the Statement of Claim to begin your lawsuit.

Exit Go to Start Page Next

You can also...

Sign up to save your work

Already signed up? Log in

- Where to Get Help
 - Georgia Legal Services
 - Georgia State Bar Legal Aid
 - Georgia Legal Aid

Legal Assistance

- How does a Statement of Claim filing work?

Learn More...

odyssey guide & file

Results of Program



- Self represented litigants can complete the interview process, print a completed form and file with the court
- Free for public use and adaptable to any future statewide e-filing projects
- Adaptable for any court forms

Support from the Supreme Court



"This project is a wonderful tool that anyone can use to more easily navigate the court system. It is such a simple idea but a necessary one, allowing all equal access to our courts."

– Chief Justice Hugh P. Thompson,
Georgia Supreme Court

Validating our progress

- **2,999 Unique Users** have accessed the interviews
- **2,620 Georgia Residents** - others from surrounding area (possibly landlords and other companies doing business in GA)
- 2,774 users came directly from georgiacourts.org, gamagcouncil.org, georgiamagistratecouncil.com or georgiacourts.gov **underscoring the importance of technology in access to justice**
- **1,758 documents were produced** as a result of the interviews. *(The disparity between the 2,999 users and 1,758 documents produced is likely that the interviews triaged the people out of the interviews, where the interviews were not the right solution for the filers.)*

Results from the Interview Survey

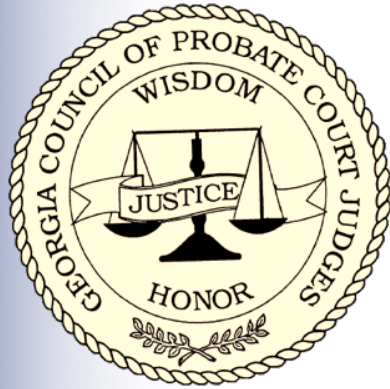
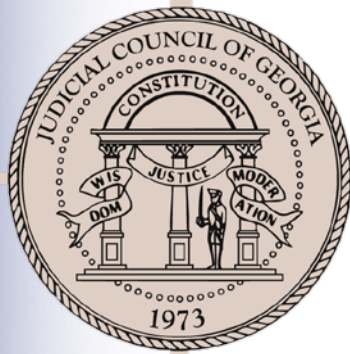
- Of the **251** surveys answered:
 - 93% of responders were first time users
 - **88.6% of respondents were pro se filers**
 - 11% of respondents were attorneys
 - 55.74% of respondents learned of the interviews from the Magistrate Council website
 - 20% came straight from a search engine, like Google, Bing or Yahoo
 - 17% of respondents were referred to the interview from courthouse, clerks office, or legal services
 - 84.49% of people found the interviews to be easy or very easy.
 - 85.95% of people found the interviews to be helpful or very helpful
 - **44.56 % of respondents reported a household income of less than \$ 50,000**
 - 21.76% of respondents had income of less than \$25K; another 22.8% of respondents had income of less than \$50K

What is Next?

- Make the interview tool ADA compliant
- Translate it into Spanish for Spanish speaking constituents of Magistrate Court
- Add additional court filing types
- Share with other Courts across the country



Application Across Other Courts



- Presented to Georgia's Judicial Council and offered help to any other class of courts that may wish to adopt
- Presented and met with Georgia Probate Court Council to review developmental steps
- Presenting at the 2015 NCSC's National Court Technology Conference in September, to share the program with leaders of other courts across the US

Acknowledgments

This project would not have been possible without the encouragement, commitment and investment by partners across every branch of State government and the State Bar.



State Bar
of Georgia





Georgia Magistrate Courts

FREE Forms Generator



Georgia Council of Magistrate Court Judges