



COUNCIL OF ACCOUNTABILITY COURT JUDGES OF GEORGIA

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ACCOUNTABILITY COURTS: CRIMINAL JUSTICE REFORM IN ACTION

On June 10, 2016, The Council of Accountability Court Judges co-sponsored an event with the Institute of Continuing Legal Education (ICLE) titled *Accountability Courts: Criminal Justice Reform in Action*. The program was held at The State Bar of Georgia and was designed to educate attorneys throughout the state on Accountability Courts. Judge Jason Deal kicked the morning off by welcoming the attendees and providing an introduction to criminal justice reform and the CACJ roles and responsibilities within the reform.



The day-long program was broken into five moderator/panelist sessions, each addressing a different perspective related to accountability courts and team member roles. The first panel represented the judicial perspective. Judges Verda Colvin, Patrick Haggard, Juanita Stedman, Nancy Bills, and Jason Deal discussed the types of courts throughout the state, attributes to consider when screening participants, and their experiences, both good and bad, from presiding over their courts. Next, a panel of prosecutors and defense attorneys discussed the different roles they take on while working in Accountability Courts as well as how they work together to help defendants (participants) in their communities. The treatment panel discussed the specific roles of the treatment providers in helping clients and changing lives. Treatment plays a major role in the accountability courts model.

Each panelist briefly discussed how treatment is broken down into phases and how each contains evidence based treatment, drug testing guidelines, case management, and other components. The next panel included representatives from Barrow County Sheriff's office and Department of Community Supervision as all accountability court participants are to receive community surveillance throughout the program.

Lastly, panelists, including Judge Samuel Ozburn, 10th District Court Administrator Tracy BeMent, Alcovy Mental Health Court Coordinator Amanda Lewis Day, and CACJ Executive Director Taylor Jones, jointly addressed what could be done if a county or judicial circuit doesn't have an accountability court. Those actions included gathering political support through local Judges, prosecutors, public defenders, the sheriff's office, local Community Service Boards, and local Department of Community Supervision divisions. Next, they suggested that stakeholders determine and identify the need in the community through prospective participants. A planning team made up of the above stakeholders can then be developed to build the basic components of the accountability court. Finally, reach out to the state. CACJ staff is available to visit courts to provide guidance to court coordinators and other stakeholders on the steps necessary to implement or refine their programs to best serve their participants and communities.

JUDGES CORNER: JUDGE DAVID D WATKINS

What was your initial interest in being an Accountability Court Judge?

I imagine it was like any other judge who is now involved: to make a deeper and more far reaching difference in the lives we have contact with and, as a consequence, achieve better job satisfaction.

Was there a specific moment/event that happened that let you know you were doing something right for your program?

Probably when it dawned on me the participants were helping me to change for the better as much as I was, hopefully, helping them. I thought, "so this is Proverbs 27:17 means." As I improve as a person, I like to think that carries over into "doing something right" as a judge.

To date, what do you think is your court's biggest program accomplishment?

I think there are two: 1) earning the hard won respect and credibility of the participants and the community; 2) having a low recidivism rate.

Does your program have any sort of special involvement in the community?

Our partnership with First Presbyterian Church and their restoration project and the 25 non-profit community service sites that we partner with for community service work.

Special events your participants take part in?

Many of our participants volunteered to participate in the viewing of a video that was shown at a venue in our community on the issues of substance abuse.

Judge Watkins, since inception, presides over the Richmond County State Accountability Court and Richmond County State Veterans Court.

Program Begin: January 1, 2012;
FIRST Participant accepted March 2012

Current Participants: 260

How many participants have graduated? 354

JUDGES CORNER DAVID R. SWEAT

What was your initial interest in being an Accountability Court Judge?

I first learned of accountability courts when running for office in 2002. At that time, a few larger communities around the nation had started drug courts. While I was not a judge, I understood the importance of solving the underlying problems which lead to criminal behavior. When I went on the bench, I saw how the combined impact of mental illness and substance abuse presented even greater challenges. I felt by starting a Mental Health Court, the courts could improve the lives of individuals, reduce criminal behavior, and also reconnect the individual to their family.

Was there a specific moment/event that happened that let you know you were doing something right for your program?

I cannot remember the first time it happened, but the experience that I value the most is when a participant comes to realize that they have improved their life and can express experiencing joy in living. When I hear someone say their life is so much better it makes me feel really great.

To date, what do you think is your court's biggest program accomplishment?

While seeing our participants become healthy is always a great accomplishment, I am particularly proud of a few of our participants who have become advocates for recovery and for improved mental health. I always feel very moved when I hear them tell their story to others.

Judge Sweat, since inception, presides over the Athens – Clarke County Treatment and Accountability Court.

Program Begin:
July 2008

Current Participants: 31

How many participants have graduated? 37

Does your program have any sort of special involvement in the community?

We have a very good relationship with Advantage Behavioral Health, our CSB. Through our partnership, I think mental health care providers at Advantage have come to understand more about the courts and how they can serve their clients better. We are also involved in the Reentry Roundtable which is a collaborative community effort aimed at improving outcomes for justice involved individuals with the goal of helping them to better reintegrate into their community.

Special events your participants take part in?

We have some participants working with our alumni group and a number of our participants attend Celebrate Recovery each year. Participants and some of our graduates have gone to the Capitol to speak to our local representatives about recovery. We've also had participants go through the RESPECT Institute, which is a 3 ½ day program designed to help participants organize, construct and customize their personal life stories so they can share them with the community in various settings.