

Michelle Smith

Subject: FW: 2019 Probate Court Funding

To all:

Pls read the memo below from Wendy Williamson (Reid's better half) to Probate Court Practitioners regarding the proposed reduction in funding of the Probate Court next year. Immediately below is the email I sent to Chairman Scott and the other Commission Members yesterday. Many attorneys who practice regularly in that court have forwarded it on to the Commission also with their support of the full funding request. Should you feel inclined to do so also, the email addresses are as follows:

'Chairman@chathamcounty.org'; 'District1@chathamcounty.org'; 'District2@chathamcounty.org';
'District3@chathamcounty.org'; 'District4@chathamcounty.org'; 'District5@chathamcounty.org';
'District6@chathamcounty.org'; 'District7@chathamcounty.org'; 'District8@chathamcounty.org'

Thank you for your consideration. Feel free to forward this on to anyone else who has an interest in Probate Court matters.

Russ Simpson

Subject: RE: 2019 Probate Court Funding

Chairman Scott and Members of the Commission,

As some of you may know, I have practiced trust and estate law in Chatham County for over 30 years. During that time, I have never seen the Probate Court so over-worked, under-staffed and cramped in its quarters. In addition to a large caseload of matters brought by members of the Bar, the Probate Court is the people's court. Many taxpayers go there without legal counsel for marriage licenses, concealed carry permits, probate and guardianship matters. I frequently have observed the staff courteously, laboriously trying to explain legal procedures to non-lawyers and assist them in fulfilling their needs. However, that level of service requires an enormous amount of human resources. Also, due to the cramped space, folks often have to conduct their business (other than legal hearings) in the sight and hearing of many others. That should not be.

Additionally, the Probate Court is trying to upgrade its computer system to better accommodate electronic access. In the long-run this will save human resource time and be of a huge benefit to practitioners, but, for now, it is a drain on Probate Court resources.

I request and urge that you give full funding to the Probate Court for its staff and expansion. I feel sure that many of the other members of the Bar who frequently practice there will join me in this request.

Thank you for your consideration.

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Dear Probate Court Practitioners:

In recent months, with contingency funding from the County Commission, we have grown the Probate Court staff to fifteen (15) full-time employees, worked overtime and purchased needed equipment. Only nine (9) of our current employees are permanent staff; six (6) employees are temporary. With the additional staff, time and equipment, we are **current** on processing weapons carry applications, we have correctly filed hundreds of documents and we have made headway in moving probate matters more efficiently.

Our budget request for Fiscal Year 2019 [which begins on July 1, 2018) requests sixteen (16) permanent full-time employees and one (1) part-time employee. The County Budget Office and the County Manager's Executive Team have recommended a staffing budget that is **25% less** than needed to maintain our current staff. In fact, the recommended staffing budget is **less than** the 2017 staffing budget which supported seven (7) permanent and two (2) part-time employees. On Thursday morning, June 14, 2018, at 10:00 am, Judge Bordeaux and I will appeal to the full County Commission to budget for adequate Probate Court staff to accomplish the work required by the Georgia Constitution and applicable statutes. It would be devastating to lose the staff we have built and return to a staff size inadequate to do our job.

Additionally, we have been told that the Probate Court offices will be renovated in the next year. Having a modern office designed for workflow and safety is a necessary priority.

I have attached a summary of the presentation we will be making to the County Commission regarding our staffing budget. ***Please contact the County Commissioners to ask them to properly fund the Probate Court staff and to renovate the Probate Court offices.***

We, the Probate Court staff, desire to serve you well into the future and we need enough hands on deck to make that reasonably possible.

Wendy Williamson, Esq.

Chief Clerk
Probate Court of Chatham County
(912) 652-7270 (direct)