

CLERK OF SUPERIOR &
JUVENILE COURTS
FILED FOR RECORD

IN THE SUPERIOR COURT OF COLUMBIA COUNTY

2025 SEP 18 AM 11:11

STATE OF GEORGIA

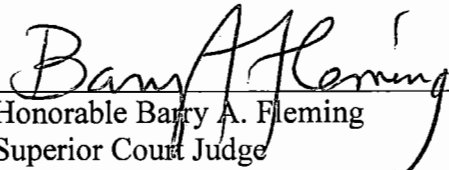
CINDY HASSON, CLERK
COLUMBIA COUNTY GEORGIA

IN RE: GRAND JURY PRESENTMENT FOR THE MARCH TERM 2025

The Grand Jury having returned the attached presentment for the March Term 2025, and the same having been reviewed and accepted by the Court on September 18, 2025, it is now

ORDERED that the same presentment shall be filed in the Office of the Clerk of Superior Court for Columbia County, and that it shall be published once in The Columbia County News-Times, the legal gazette for said County.

It is so ORDERED this 18 day of September 2025.



Honorable Barry A. Fleming
Superior Court Judge
Columbia Judicial Circuit

RECORDED & SCANNED IN
MINUTES CJW 9/18/25

CLERK OF SUPERIOR &
JUVENILE COURTS
FILED FOR RECORD

2025 SEP 18 AM 11:11

CINDY HANSON CLERK
COLUMBIA COUNTY GEORGIA

TO: The Honorable Barry A. Fleming
Judge, Superior Court

FROM: Columbia County Grand Jury
March Term 2025

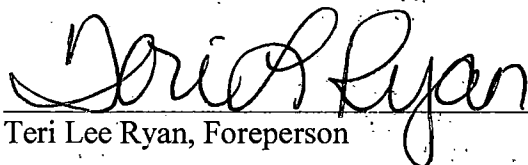
DATE: September 18, 2025

RE: Grand Jury Presentment

We, the members of the Columbia County Grand Jury, for the March Term 2025, having been duly sworn by the Honorable Sheryl B. Jolly on the 24th day of March 2025, submit our presentment on the 18th day of September 2025, our last day as an official body of Grand Jurors.

To discharge our sworn functions, as prescribed by the laws of the State of Georgia, we met on twelve (12) occasions during our term and acted upon Bills of Indictment presented to us by staff of the District Attorney. A Sub-Committees was formed to inspect the following Columbia County Departments: the Columbia County Clerk of Court, the Columbia County District Attorney's Office, the Columbia County Finance Department and the Columbia County Probate Court.

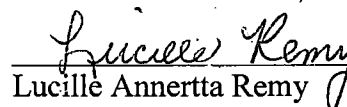
Respectfully, we present this presentment on the 18th day of September 2025 and request that it be published.



Teri Lee Ryan, Foreperson

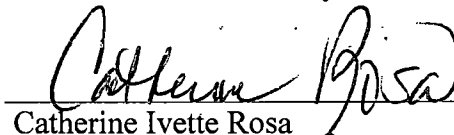
Hiral Patel

Denise Alison Jacobs, Assistant Foreperson



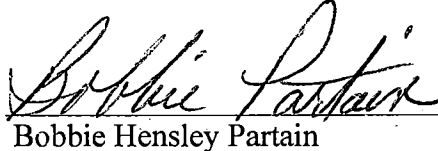
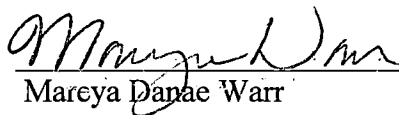
Lucille Annertta Remy

Jakelia Elkatenia Martin



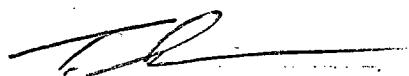
Catherine Ivette Rosa

Mareya Danae Warr



Bobbie Hensley Partain

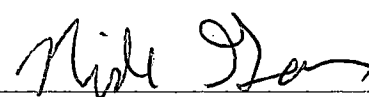
Thomas Dale Sickman

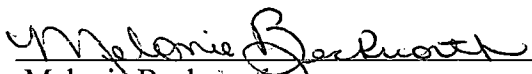


Gillian Page Friedman


Kingsley Bertrand Coleman


Devin Jay Travis/Clary


Nicole Lee Gease


Melonie Beckworth

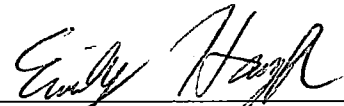
Michael Iskandar

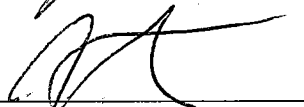

Sandra Lee McKetrick



David Alfred Driggers


Glenn Everette Jenkins, Alternate

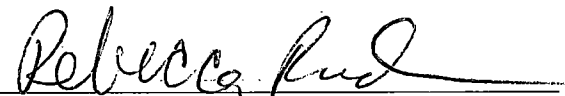
Charles Eric Jackson


Emily Jean Hough


William Charles Armstrong


Paril Amin


Roger Corey Bonsant


Rebecca Susan Rudman

Isabel Cristina Haro, Alternate

Prakash Thakur Aildasani, Alternate

CHILD ABUSE PROTOCOL COMMITTEE

Annual Report

County: Columbia

Judicial Circuit: Columbia

Date of Submission: June 26, 2025

Pursuant to OCGA 19-5-2(i) the protocol committee shall issue an annual report no later than the first day of July.

The Committee makes the following findings:

1. Over the past 12 months, the Circuit remains in compliance with the Child Abuse Protocol.
2. Significant progress has been made with the establishment of the Sexual Assault Response Center (SARC). We are proud of their efforts and commend the addition of four SANE-Ps now serving our community. We are also encouraged by the expansion of the Attorney General's Human Trafficking Unit, which now includes a local office in Augusta.
3. The following areas have been identified as key goals for continued improvement during 2025–2026:
 - a. Increasing public and first responder awareness regarding Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC) issues.
 - b. Enhancing multi-disciplinary case review team participation from certain mandated partners.
 - c. Developing standardized policies and procedures for accessing forensic interviews related to dependency hearings.
4. In April 2025, the Circuit successfully hosted a Child Abuse Awareness Conference, with plans to make this an annual event to continue professional education and public engagement.
5. This Committee has expressed concern regarding the current response to CSEC, including reporting procedures and protocol. These concerns are heightened due to the recent announcement of the elimination of funding for the CSEC Response Team through CACGA. As a result, portions of our local Child Abuse Protocol and the statewide model protocol are now outdated. We plan to reconvene in the final quarter of 2025 to review and revise our local policies and procedures related to CSEC in light of these changes.

Kari Viola-Brooke
Chair, Child Abuse Protocol Committee
Child Enrichment
2300 Walden Drive
Augusta, GA 30904
706-737-4631
Kviola@childrenrichment.org

Report Submitted to:

County Commission of Columbia County

The Grand Jury for the September Term in Columbia County

The Office of the Child Advocate, 7 Martin Luther King, Jr. Drive, Suite 347, Atlanta, GA 30334

Judge Sheryll Jolly, Chief Judge of the Columbia Judicial Circuit

**SUB-COMMITTEE OF THE MARCH 2025 TERM GRAND JURY
REPORT ON THE COLUMBIA COUNTY CLERK OF SUPERIOR AND
JUVENILE COURTS**

Site Visit Summary: On July 24, 2025, a Sub-Committee of the March 2025 Term Columbia County Grand Jury undertook an official visit to the Columbia County Clerk of Superior and Juvenile Courts, located at 640 Ronald Reagan Drive, Evans, Georgia. The delegation arrived at 11:00 a.m. and was formally received by Ms. April Keys, a member of the District Attorney's staff, who served as the committee's liaison throughout the visit. The delegation was met by Ms. Cindy Mason, Clerk of Superior Court and Ms. Jennifer Willis, Chief Deputy, who provided the briefing.

Superior and Juvenile Courts Description: The Columbia County Clerk of Superior and Juvenile Courts, led by the elected Clerk Ms. Cindy Mason, serves a vital institutional role in preserving integrity, transparency, and legal compliance of the county's judicial and administrative processes. Operating from within the Superior and Juvenile Court systems, the Clerk's Office is tasked with maintaining comprehensive records—spanning real estate transactions, court proceedings, and legal documentation—while also ensuring their accessibility to authorized stakeholders.

Functioning as an essential nexus between the judiciary and the public, the office facilitates the legal operations of judges, attorneys, litigants, and county agencies through an extensive array of support services. Clerk Mason and her staff administer significant fiduciary responsibilities, including the management of multimillion-dollar receipted funds, all while upholding high standards of professional accountability.

The office comprises a dedicated team of 23 personnel, of whom 11 are formally trained in court-specific procedures. This workforce supports statutory obligations across diverse practice areas, including civil, criminal, family, juvenile, appellate, and real estate law. Despite facing increased workloads, rapidly evolving legal mandates, and the growing expectations of a digitally engaged public, the Clerk's Office remains committed to accuracy, service excellence, and operational transparency.

Innovation is central to the office's forward-looking approach. The recently upgraded website now enables constituents to search case records, request certified documents, consult court calendars, and access public legal notices online. Additional advancements, such as mandatory electronic filing in civil and domestic cases, enhanced financial oversight mechanisms, and strategic cross-training of staff, underscore the office's resilience and adaptability within a dynamic legal environment.

Core Responsibilities of the Clerk's Office: The Columbia County Clerk of Superior and Juvenile Courts fulfills a diverse and integral set of statutory and administrative functions that underpin the integrity of the county's legal and public record infrastructure. The primary responsibilities of the Clerk's Office staff include:

1. **Judicial Record Management** Filing, processing, and maintaining records for all criminal, civil, domestic, juvenile, and appellate matters brought before the court.
2. **Real Estate Documentation** Recording, indexing, and safeguarding official documents related to deeds, liens, plats, cancellations, and trade names, thereby ensuring legal transparency in property transactions.
3. **Board of Equalization Administration** Serving as the Appeal Administrator for non-judicial property tax disputes, thereby facilitating due process in property valuation challenges.
4. **Sentencing and Corrections Coordination** Preparing comprehensive sentencing packages for submission to the Georgia Department of Corrections and processing applications for sentence review.
5. **Financial Oversight and Stewardship** Administering the collection, accounting, and disbursement of court-related fees, fines, and funds associated with real estate transactions across multiple financial accounts.
6. **Public-Facing Legal Services** Providing services such as issuing notary certifications, furnishing official court records, and maintaining eFiling portals to support pro se litigants and public access.
7. **Regulatory Compliance and Reporting** Ensuring timely transmission of mandated judicial records to agencies including the Georgia Crime Information Center (GCIC), Department of Driver Services (DDS), and appropriate appellate courts.
8. **Transparency and Civic Engagement** Facilitating public access to court-related information via the office's website, social media platforms, and in-person assistance, thereby promoting institutional transparency and civic literacy.
9. **Human Capital Development** Advancing staff proficiency and retention through cross-training initiatives and strategic personnel development, essential to maintaining service quality amid sectoral competition.

Operational Duties of the Clerk's Office: The Columbia County Clerk of Superior and Juvenile Courts manages an extensive suite of operational responsibilities that support judicial efficiency, public service delivery, and compliance with state-mandated procedures. The following delineates the principal functions and metrics of the Clerk's Office during the current reporting period:

1. **Organizational Structure and Staffing** The office comprises 23 personnel, including 11 trained court professionals who provide direct courtroom support and manage front counter operations. Daily public-facing activity includes processing approximately 45–50 notary oaths, assisting 55–60 pro se e-filers, accepting fine payments, and responding to court record requests.
2. **Real Estate Division** From June 2024 through June 2025, the division recorded 22,173 deeds and 6,112 liens, totaling 28,285 instruments. Additionally, 35 trade name registrations were processed during this period.
3. **Criminal Division** Year-to-date case activity includes 1,625 criminal filings, 1,026 warrants issued, 1,631 sentences processed, and 15 jury trials convened.
4. **Civil Division** The division reported 1,408 civil case filings and processed 133 garnishments within the current calendar year.
5. **Domestic Division** Recorded 1,464 domestic case filings, including 716 divorce actions.

6. **Adoptions** A total of 126 adoption cases have been finalized year to date.
7. **Juvenile Division** Activity includes 821 total filings, with specific categorization as follows: 93 CHINS (Children in Need of Services)/guardianship/dependency matters, 68 traffic cases, and 660 delinquency filings.
8. **Appeals Division** Responsible for the compilation and transmission of appellate records to the Georgia Court of Appeals and the Georgia Supreme Court, encompassing civil, criminal, and domestic case types.
9. **Board of Equalization (BOE) Administration** The Clerk serves as the Appeal Administrator for property tax disputes, certifies BOE members, schedules hearings, and reports findings. To date, 572 parcel appeals have been received and 51 hearings have been conducted.
10. **Financial Administration** The office manages several dedicated financial accounts with current balances as follows:
 - Criminal: \$144,000
 - Real Estate: \$705,000
 - Jury: \$32,000
 - Civil: \$59,000
 - Special Account: \$813,000
 - Traffic Bond: \$37,000
11. **Courtroom Personnel Responsibilities** Staff duties include managing jury selection, documenting verdicts, maintaining minutes, and preparing sentencing documentation.
12. **Notarial and Public Services** The office processes an average of 657 notary applications annually and provides daily assistance through its electronic filing portals and walk-in services.
13. **Technology Integration and Public Outreach** Recent enhancements to the Clerk's website offer access to certified records, court calendars, fee schedules, legal forms, and public notices. Social media platforms are utilized to disseminate jury updates and other legal communications to the public.

Respectfully Submitted by
Sub-Committee Members

Teri Ryan, Foreman
Mareya Warr
Gillian Friedman

**SUB-COMMITTEE OF THE MARCH 2025 TERM GRAND JURY
REPORT ON THE COLUMBIA COUNTY DISTRICT ATTORNEY'S OFFICE**

Site Visit Summary: On July 10, 2025, a Sub-Committee of the March 2025 Term Columbia County Grand Jury undertook an official visit to the Columbia County District Attorney's Office, located at 630 Ronald Reagan Drive, Evans, Georgia. The delegation arrived at 11:45 a.m. and was formally received by Ms. Kelly Campbell, a member of the District Attorney's administrative staff, who served as the committee's liaison throughout the visit.

Office Staffing and Leadership Update: The Columbia County District Attorney's Office is authorized for twenty-two staff positions, of which twenty-one are currently filled. The personnel distribution includes ten attorneys, six administrative support employees, three victim advocates, and two investigators. The sole vacancy at present is for an Assistant District Attorney.

The office also incorporates up to three intern positions during both the summer and academic year. Internships during the school year are designated for high school students participating in work-based learning programs at their respective institutions, through which they earn graduation credits. Summer internships are allocated to college students pursuing degrees within the legal field, offering practical exposure to prosecutorial processes and office operations.

Presently, District Attorney Bobby Christine has been mobilized for military service and appointed to lead the Judge Advocate General's Office in Washington, D.C. During his tenure of active service, the responsibilities of District Attorney will be assumed by Assistant District Attorney Natalie Payne, who will serve in an acting capacity.

District Attorney elections are held quadrennially. The upcoming term will be included on the 2026 election ballot, with the elected candidate commencing their official term in 2027.

Case File Management and Digital Transition: The Columbia County District Attorney's Office currently maintains approximately 1,000 active case files. Five years of documentation are retained on the premises with all other documented cases are retained at an alternate location, as they may be required during parole hearings or subsequent judicial proceedings. To date, no case files have been destroyed, reflecting a commitment to archival integrity and long-term accessibility.

A strategic goal of the current District Attorney is to transition the office's filing system to a fully paperless model. Office administrators are actively working to implement this initiative, though the conversion process is recognized as both complex and time-intensive due to the volume and sensitivity of legal documentation involved.

Technology Integration and Evidence Management: Law enforcement agencies operating within Columbia County have adopted the use of AXON software to enhance operational efficiency in evidence management. This advanced digital platform enables improved search functionality and facilitates comprehensive documentation of body-worn camera footage, including transcript generation capabilities.

The AXON system also provides secure linkage between the District Attorney's Office and individual law enforcement officers, thereby enabling shared access to case notes, evidentiary materials, and investigative updates. This technological integration promotes streamlined workflows, fosters timely collaboration, and strengthens the integrity of case preparation and prosecution.

Respectfully Submitted by
Sub-Committee Members

Teri Ryan, Foreman
Jakelia Martin, Secretary
Nicole Gease
Mareya Warr
Gillian Friedman
Michael Iskandar

**SUB-COMMITTEE OF THE MARCH 2025 TERM GRAND JURY
REPORT ON THE COLUMBIA COUNTY FINANCE DEPARTMENT**

Site Visit Summary: On July 10, 2025, a Sub-Committee of the March 2025 Term Columbia County Grand Jury conducted an official visit to the Columbia County Finance Department, located at 630 Ronald Reagan Drive, Building C, Third Floor, Evans, Georgia. The Sub-committee was accompanied by Ms. Kelly Campbell of the Office of the District Attorney, who provided coordination and support throughout the visit.

The Sub-Committee arrived at 11:15 a.m. and was welcomed by Ms. Angie Russell, Finance Office Manager. Ms. Russell facilitated a 15-minute introductory briefing and guided tour of the department's facilities, during which she provided an overview of key departmental functions and operations.

Overview: The Columbia County Finance Department is authorized to employ twelve personnel, of which eleven positions are currently filled. One vacancy remains open for the role of Deputy Director. The existing staff is composed of highly experienced professionals, most of whom have served in the department for over two decades. Notably, the Finance Director, Ms. Leanne Reece, possesses over thirty years of financial and administrative expertise.

The department is responsible for the oversight of various financial operations, including the formulation and management of county budgets, administration of employee payroll, processing of vendor purchase orders, procurement and contract negotiations, and planning of capital improvement projects. The fiscal year for Columbia County spans from July to June; at present, department staff are engaged in closing out the financial records for the preceding fiscal year.

During the tour, sub-committee members raised inquiries regarding the volume and nature of customer service calls received by the department. Staff provided a briefing indicating that these communications typically concern unidentified account charges, recreational program payments, municipal water billing questions, and general inquiries related to community leisure services.

County Budget Overview: The Finance Department conducts a comprehensive review of prior fiscal expenditures and develops projections for future allocations across various governmental departments within Columbia County. As part of the budgeting process, the department also delineates expected revenue streams, including taxes and fees, which serve to finance the county's facilities and public services.

During the tour, sub-committee members requested information regarding the County's total annual budget. In response, staff reported that the projected fiscal budget exceeds \$400 million.

Employee Payroll Administration: The Finance Department is responsible for the administration and oversight of compensation and benefits for all county employees. These responsibilities are executed in strict adherence to the parameters established by the approved county budget. The department ensures that payroll operations are conducted with fiscal accountability and compliance, supporting the overall financial stability and workforce wellbeing of Columbia County.

Contractor Procurement and Vendor Payments: The Finance Department facilitates the operational needs of Columbia County through the procurement of services and products from pre-approved contractors and vendors. These purchasing activities are governed by established procurement guidelines to ensure transparency, cost-efficiency, and alignment with county objectives.

In support of modernization and administrative efficiency, the department is currently implementing a new digital payment system for vendors. This initiative aims to streamline payment processes, reduce processing time, and enhance financial tracking and reporting capabilities.

Capital Project Planning and Oversight: The Finance Department is tasked with managing the financial planning and oversight of capital projects throughout Columbia County. These projects encompass the construction of new governmental facilities as well as the expansion, renovation, and modernization of existing infrastructure. All capital undertakings are strategically aligned with the county's approved fiscal budget to ensure responsible stewardship of public funds and adherence to long-term development goals.

Respectfully Submitted by
Sub-Committee Members

Teri Ryan, Foreman
Jakelia Martin, Secretary
Nicole Gease
Mareya Warr
Gillian Friedman
Michael Iskandar

**SUB-COMMITTEE OF THE MARCH 2025 TERM GRAND JURY
REPORT ON THE COLUMBIA COUNTY PROBATE COURT**

Site Visit Summary: On July 24, 2025, a Sub-Committee of the March 2025 Term Columbia County Grand Jury undertook an official visit to the Columbia County Probate Court, located at 640 Ronald Reagan Drive, Evans, Georgia. The delegation arrived at 12:25 p.m. and was formally received by Ms. April Keys, a member of the District Attorney's staff, who served as the committee's liaison throughout the visit. The delegation was met by Judge Alice Padgett who provided an overview.

Probate Court Overview: The Probate Court maintains jurisdiction over a diverse array of legal and administrative matters, including the probate of wills, the appointment and removal of executors and administrators of decedents' estates, and the establishment or termination of guardianships and conservatorships for both adults and minors. Additionally, the Appling Office is entrusted with the maintenance of vital records. Beyond these functions, the court is responsible for issuing marriage licenses, weapons carry licenses, and adjudicating traffic citations, among other miscellaneous statutory duties. The court processed 1,287 probate cases in 2023 and 1,494 cases in 2024.

Office Personnel: The Probate Court operates with a dedicated team of professionals. The main office, located at 640 Ronald Reagan Boulevard, is staffed by seven employees, while the Appling, Georgia location employs three individuals. Judge Padgett presides over the court, supported by one part-time Associate Judge.

Weapons Carry Licenses: The court administers the issuance and regulation of weapons carry licenses. This process encompasses the evaluation of license applications, execution of background checks, and the management of renewals and modifications to existing licenses. A total of 2,365 licenses were issued in 2023, increasing to 2,617 in 2024.

Marriage Licenses: The Probate Court oversees the issuance of marriage licenses, ensuring applicants satisfy all legal prerequisites, including age and relational eligibility. Upon solemnization of the marriage, the parties return the executed license for final processing. The court issued 1,733 marriage licenses in 2023 and 1,795 in 2024.

Respectfully Submitted by
Sub-Committee Members

Teri Ryan, Foreman
Mareya Warr
Gillian Friedman