



Council of Accountability Court Judges

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PRESS RELEASE

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For Immediate Release

The Council of Accountability Court Judges Announces Award Recipients at Annual Training Conference

Athens, GA --- While hosting their annual training conference, the Council of Accountability Court Judges (CACJ) announced the 2026 recipients of the prestigious Star Awards, Judge Tommy Day Wilcox Award, Judge Stephen S. Goss Award, and Model Court Recognition at the awards ceremony on Monday, September 14, 2026.

Star Awards

The CACJ distinguishes accountability court professionals across the state for their hard work and dedication to the programs they serve. Award recipients are nominated by their fellow team members, and CACJ selects and recognizes one person from each team role to receive the Star Award.

This year's Star Award recipients are:

- *Judge: The Honorable Jason B. Thompson, Fayette County DUI and Veterans Treatment Court
- *Coordinator: Jourdan Crawford, Fayette County DUI and Veterans Treatment Court
- *Case Manager: Olivia Figueira, Cobb County Mental Health Court
- *Defense Attorney: Clair Reeves, Colquitt County Adult Felony Drug Court
- *Prosecutor: Neekisia Jackson, Fayette County DUI and Veterans Treatment Court
- *Probation Officer: Megan Johnson, Douglas Judicial Circuit Mental Health Court
- *Treatment Provider: Josh Nation, Douglas Judicial Circuit
- *FTC Parent Attorney: Charlotte Fleming, Chatham County Family Treatment Court
- *DFCS Case Manager: Arryn Evans, Western Judicial Circuit Family Treatment Court
- *CASA Advocate: Susan Ryncavage, Chatham County Family Treatment Court
- *Peer Support Specialist: Tabatha Moss, Muscogee County Courts
- *Law Enforcement Officer: Mikal Montford, Fayette County DUI and Veterans Treatment Court

*Veteran Mentor Coordinator: John DiRenzo, Appalachian Circuit Veterans Treatment Court

Legacy of Excellence Award

The CACJ opened a new award category this year to all non-judge accountability court team members who have a minimum of 10 years of service in an accountability court role. The award not only recognizes an individual's years of service within accountability courts but also his/her significant contributions to substance use and mental health treatment within his/her community.

This inaugural winner is Heather Herrington, Director of the Northeastern Judicial Circuit Accountability Courts. Over a distinguished 20-year career within Hall and Dawson Counties, Ms. Herrington rose from a frontline Substance Abuse Services Assessor (2006) to Hall County Drug Court Lead Counselor, Dawson County Treatment Court Coordinator, Hall County Drug Court Coordinator, Assistant Director, and ultimately Director, where she has served since 2022. Along the way she has touched thousands of lives, raised and trained several accountability court judges, and set a standard of excellence for all around her to emulate. Her leadership has helped shape programs that not only hold participants accountable but also offer hope and a path toward meaningful change. She leads with integrity, compassion, and an unwavering belief in the mission of accountability courts.

Judge Tommy Day Wilcox Leadership Award

Judge Tommy Day Wilcox was the first accountability court judge in Georgia, and he presided over the Macon Drug Court. Sadly, the accountability court community lost him in 2020 but continue to recognize his efforts. Previously, the Judge Tommy Day Wilcox Award was awarded to the STAR Award nominee that received the highest overall score. However, the CACJ transitioned this award to honor Judge Wilcox's pioneer spirit as the first accountability court judge in the State and to recognize his long-term commitment to accountability courts. This year, the award goes to a judge who has a minimum 10 years of service in an accountability court, including time spent on an accountability court team as a judge and within other roles, such as prosecutor and defense attorney, along with his/her contributions within his/her community.

This year's award goes to the Honorable Jason J. Deal of the Northeastern Judicial Circuit and his 21 years of service with accountability courts. Judge Deal has dedicated more than a decade to the bench, presiding over the Hall County Drug Court and Dawson County Treatment Court, and has demonstrated a level of service and leadership that has transformed lives and strengthened the Hall County and Dawson County communities. He approaches every participant with the belief that people are capable of change while maintaining the integrity and accountability that are the foundation of the Circuit's accountability court programs. Judge Deal's influence extends far beyond Hall and Dawson Counties. Through his leadership, the Circuit's court programs meet the evolving needs of the community, creating opportunities for recovery that simply did not exist two decades ago. His humility has made every member of the team feel valued, regardless of title or role.

Judge Stephen S. Goss Award

In memory of the late Honorable Stephen S. Goss, the CACJ created an award to honor his life and legacy as a nationally recognized expert on mental health. In 2002, Judge Goss founded the Dougherty Superior Court Mental Health & Substance Abuse Treatment Program. It served as one of four learning sites for mental health courts as designated by the United States Bureau of Justice Assistance and was the first mental health court created in the state of Georgia. His contribution to the field of mental health courts is felt nationwide, as well as in Georgia.

The 2026 winner of the Judge Stephen S. Goss Award is Dr. Andrew Cox, a treatment provider with 12 years of service to the Muscogee County Accountability Courts. For more than a decade, Dr. Cox has served as the Clinical Supervisor for the Chattahoochee Judicial Circuit Accountability Courts, providing exceptional leadership, clinical expertise, and unwavering advocacy for individuals living with mental illness and co-occurring substance use disorders. Dr. Cox has dedicated his career to improving mental health services within accountability courts while mentoring the next generation of professionals who will carry this mission forward. His expertise has been recognized well beyond his local community. Dr. Cox was invited to present the success of Muscogee County Drug Court at the prestigious Oxford Round Table, highlighting the program's innovative approach to treatment and recovery before an international audience. What truly distinguishes Dr. Cox, however, is his compassion. He consistently meets participants with dignity, respect, and hope, helping them recognize strengths they often cannot see in themselves.

Model Court Recognition

The goal of Georgia's Accountability Court Model Court program, supported by the CACJ, is to recognize the great work of accountability courts across the state, as well as identify strong programs that may serve as mentors for other courts. Programs identified as Model Courts are those that have met and exceeded adherence to Georgia's Standards as dictated by strong performance on certification and peer review processes.

This year, the CACJ reviewed adult mental health courts and DUI courts who applied to be considered for model court status. The Nominations Committee judges reviewed all applications and specific criteria to include length of program operation, judge tenure, coordinator tenure, certification scores, peer review findings, treatment fidelity, etc. Model court designation is for three years, and the courts are asked to mentor new courts and existing programs that request assistance.

The CACJ is proud to recognize the 2026 Model Mental Health Courts:

Program	Presiding Judge(s)	Years of Operation
Cherokee County Mental Health Court	Judge Shannon Wallace	10 Years
Clayton County Mental Health Court	Judge Shana Rooks Malone	6 Years
Cobb County Mental Health Court	Chief Judge Ann B. Harris	13 Years
Dawson County Mental Health Court	Chief Judge Jason J. Deal	20 Years

Forsyth County Mental Health Court	Presiding Judge Christopher W. Willis	12 Years
Fulton County Mental Health Court	Judge Emily K. Richardson	20 Years
Hall County Mental Health Court	Judge Clint Bearden Judge Kelley M. Robertson	22 Years
Henry County Mental Health Court	Judge Chaundra Lewis	17 Years
Muscogee County Mental Health Court	Judge John T. Martin	3 Years
Thomas County Mental Health Court	Chief Judge James L. Prine	4 Years

The CACJ is proud to recognize the 2026 Model DUI Courts:

Program	Presiding Judge(s)	Years of Operation
Clarke County DUI Court	Chief Judge Charles E. Auslander	25 years
Cherokee County DUI Court	Chief Judge W. Alan Jordan	21 years
Cobb County DUI Court	Chief Judge Eric A. Brewton	18 years
Dekalb County DUI Court	Judge Kimberly K. Anderson Judge Ana M. Martinez	22 years
Fayette County DUI Court	Judge Jason B. Thompson	10 years
Fulton County DUI Court	Judge Wesley B. Tailor Judge Robert Wolf	19 years
Hall County DUI Court	Chief Judge Larry A. Baldwin	23 years
Lowndes County DUI Court	Judge Ellen S. Golden	9 years

Next year, the CACJ will review and select a new round of veterans treatment courts and family treatment courts.

There are 190 certified accountability court programs in Georgia, and the mission of the CACJ is to provide a unified framework that promotes and improves the quality, accessibility, and administration of accountability courts with a vision to make accountability courts work for all Georgians. Established in 2015, the CACJ fulfills this mission through certification, standards, peer review, data collection, training, treatment fidelity monitoring, and grants.

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