

NEWS RELEASE

Story contact: Phil Boudewyns
Chief Court Administrator
770.822.8563

phil.boudewyns@gwinnettcountry.com

SHARING THE PAIN OF BUDGET CUTS: 21 GWINNETT JUDGES TAKE FURLOUGHS

(Lawrenceville, Ga., Jan. 27, 2010) – Gwinnett County judges have agreed to additional furlough days in 2010 to staunch the losses caused by state budget cuts.

The furloughs began last fall when nine out of 10 Superior Court judges took three days of unpaid leave after Gov. Sonny Perdue mandated across-the-board budget cuts. Although constitutional law mandates that a judge's pay cannot be cut or reduced mid-term, many Georgia judges have elected to voluntarily cut their pay, and Gwinnett County judges have been no exception.

With more state funding reductions hitting after Dec. 31, the newest round of cuts has rippled beyond the Superior Court judges. In a show of support for the Superior Court's funding woes, Gwinnett County State Court judges stepped forward and agreed to take two days of furlough to avoid layoffs or pay cuts to the Superior Court staff. Despite the fact that funding for the State Court is provided by the county, not the state, the State Court judges elected to reduce their county pay to offset the loss of state funding for Superior Court employees. Chief State Court Judge Robert Mock, Judge Pam South, Judge Joe Iannazzone, Judge Carla Brown, Judge Randy Rich and Judge John Doran are foregoing two days of pay to keep the budget of the courts intact. The judges have indicated that they will report to work but accept the pay reduction to keep the courts functioning.

“Although the shortage was created by the state budget, we agreed to help the Superior Court judges and their employees. Our goals, since we are a unified bench, are to keep the bench unified and the courts running,” stated Chief State Court Judge Robert Mock.

More assistance for Superior Court state funding losses have come from Gwinnett's Chief Magistrate, George Hutchinson, and his staff of five full time appointed judges. Judge Hutchinson, who took the bench in 2004, has agreed to forego two days of his pay to assist the Superior Court, and each full time magistrate has agreed to give up one day of pay voluntarily. The magistrates participating in the voluntary cuts are Judges Valeria Head, Mark Lewis, Laura Tate, Robert Walker and Kristina Blum.

The nine Superior Court judges who have already taken furloughs are as follows: Chief Superior Court Judge Dawson Jackson, Judge Debra Turner, Judge Melodie Connor, Judge Billy Ray, Judge Timothy Hamil, Judge Ronnie Batchelor, Judge Warren Davis, Judge Tom Davis and Judge Karen Beyers. The Superior Court judges are aware of the bleak budget forecast by the state and are weighing the possibility of additional budget cuts.

A total of 21 judges in Gwinnett County have taken voluntary furloughs in response to state budget cuts.

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