

# Probate Court Overview - Changes to Justify New Employee

## Probate Court becomes a Passport Acceptance Office

- In FY 2019, the Probate Court grew to **eight** total employees by adding one employee and becoming a U.S. Department of State Passport Acceptance Office.
- We are one of the only passport acceptance offices around that allows citizens to “walk-in” without an appointment between 8:30 a.m. and 3:30 p.m. Monday through Friday to process their application.
- All the revenue derived from our passport service is paid to the City.
  - FY26 Projected Revenue \$60,000.

# Probate Court Overview - Changes to Justify New Employee

## Probate Court biggest historic deficiency until last year. - Fiduciary Compliance

- Probate Court has been deficient in guardianship fiduciary compliance since before I came to the court in 2006. I had been losing sleep about this issue for over a decade.
- The Court had no employee focusing exclusively on monitoring the actions of guardians and conservators to make sure they upheld their legal responsibilities to their wards.

## FY25 Major Improvement – Reclassified License Clerk to Law Clerk/Fiduciary Compliance Officer

- Hired Carleton Coleman – over 30 years experience in the field
  - Mr. Coleman's work has led to a significant improvement in guardian/conservator compliance and better identification of non-compliance.
    - For example, comparing the six months before he was hired to the six month since Carl's hiring, Personal Status Report compliance has improved by 162%.
- Carl has created more work for the judicial officers – more hearings (but that is a good thing.)

# Mistakes Were Made! (Actually, I made a mistake)

- BASED UPON AN ANTICIPATED REDUCTION IN GUN PERMITS (WCL), I THOUGHT I COULD GET AWAY WITH ONLY ONE LICENSE CLERK. (There had been legislative talk about giving WCL jurisdiction to the superior court clerk's office)
- Projected decrease in licenses did not happen –
- WCL more or less constant - Calendar Year 2023 = 1929, Calendar Year 2024 = 1852
- Increase in marriage - Calendar Year 2023 = 1466, Calendar Year 2024 = 1662.

Couldn't move employee to Estate/Passports – Always need 2 license clerks

- Probate Court has significant public interaction - first impressions matter
- Created vacancy on Estate Paralegal/Passport Clerk
- Need new employee to shift current License Clerk over to Estates/Passports side

# Mistakes Were Made!

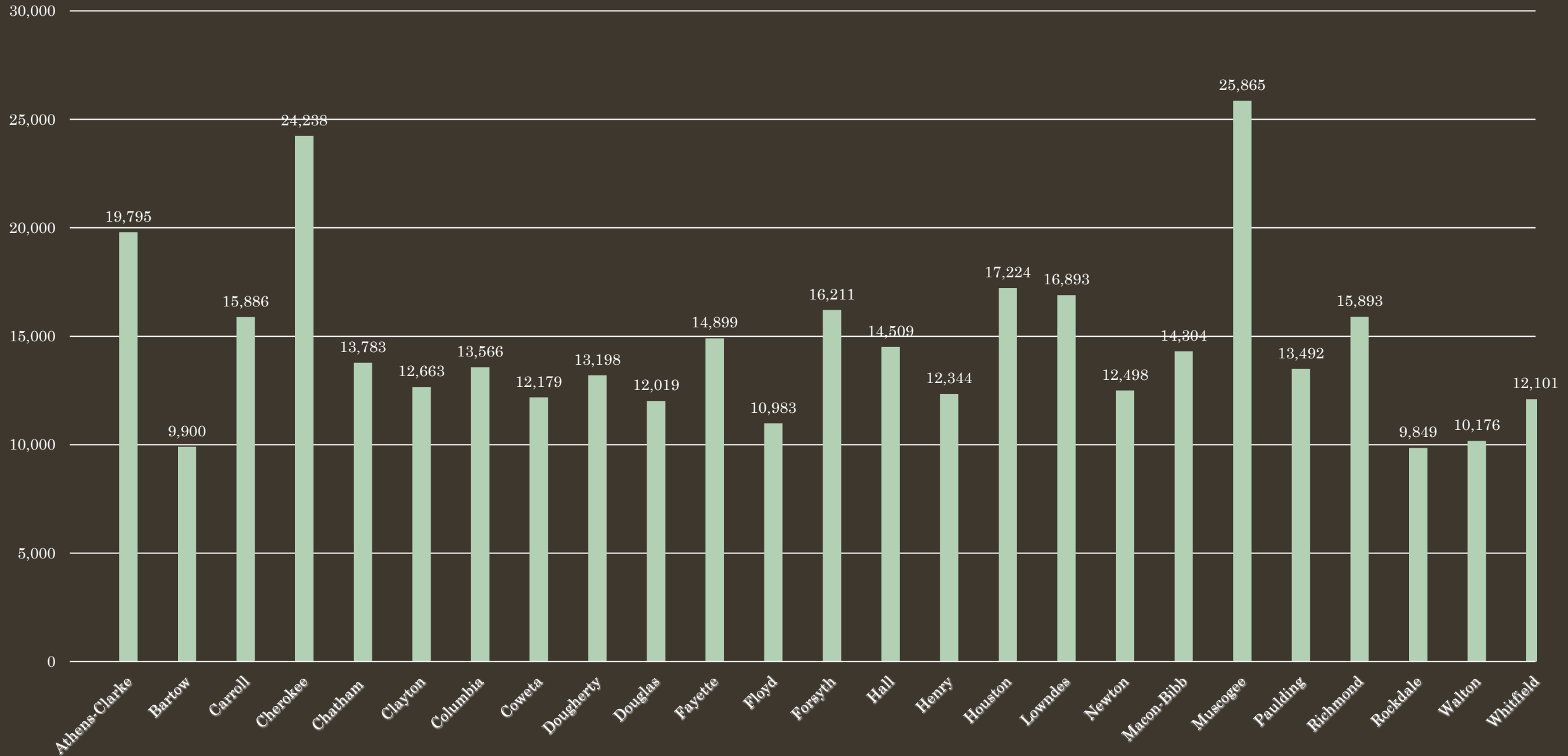
- Unintended consequences
  - Carleton Coleman, the Law Clerk/Fiduciary Compliance Officer, often must work as a relief license clerk.
  - Probate Court is struggling to efficiently process estates and meet the increased demand for passports.
    - Passport demand is up, and estate filings are constant
    - When the estate/passport clerk is out, Judge Siegel must serve as a passport clerk. (WCL clerks can't touch passports and visa versa because both are valid ID)
  - I have acted as an estate clerk when very short staffed.
- Problem - Although I like showing my staff that I am willing to do anything I ask of them, judges working as clerks creates potential ethical issues related to exparte (only talking to one side in a contested case) communications. The Judicial Qualifying Commission is very concerned about exparte communication.

# Probate Court Staffing

- Because the Muscogee County Probate Court has smart employees, the Court operates more efficiently than comparably sized probate courts. Smaller is better but ...
- **The Muscogee County Probate Court has the highest population to staff ratio among Georgia Article Probate Courts in counties with populations between 85,000 and 300,000.**
  - Specifically, the Muscogee County Probate Court presently has one employee per 25,865 citizens.
  - The average among comparable probate courts **is one employee per 14,636 citizens.**
- Even with an additional employee, the Muscogee County Probate Court will still have one of the highest ratios. One employee per 22,991 citizens.

# POPULATION PER PROBATE COURT EMPLOYEE

FOR COUNTIES WITH POPULATIONS GREATER THAN 85,000 and LESS THAN 300,000



ARTICLE 6 - PROBATE COURTS IN GEORGIA (excluding Fulton, DeKalb, Gwinnett and Cobb)

COUNTY	POPULATION (2020)	Additional Jurisdiction	JUDGE(S)	STAFF ATTORNEY or LAW CLERK	CLERKS	TOTAL STAFF	POPULATION PER EMPLOYEE
Athens-Clarke	128,671		1	1.5	4	6.5	19,795
Bartow	108,901	Traffic, Vital Records	1	0	10	11	9,900
Carroll	119,148		1	0	6.5	7.5	15,886
Cherokee	266,620		2	0	9	11	24,238
Chatham	289,463	Mental Health-AOT	2	1	19	21	13,783
Clayton	297,595		2	1	20.5	23.5	12,663
Columbia	156,010	Traffic, Vital Records	1.5	0	10	11.5	13,566
Coweta	146,158	Vital Records	1	0	11	12	12,179
Douglas	144,237	Vital Records	1	1	10	12	12,019
Fayette	119,194	Vital Records, Passports	1.5	0	6.5	8	14,899
Floyd	98,854	Traffic	1	0	8	9	10,983
Forsyth	251,283	Vital Records, Passports	1	2	12.5	15.5	16,211
Hall	203,136		2	1	11	14	14,509
Henry	240,712	Vital Records	2	2	15.5	19.5	12,344
Houston	163,633	Vital Records	1	0	8.5	9.5	17,224
Lowndes	118,251		1	0	6	7	16,893
Newton	112,483	Traffic, Vital Records	2	0	7	9	12,498
Macon-Bibb	157,346		1	1	9	11	14,304
Muscogee	206,922	Mental Health-AOT, Passports	2	1	5	8	25,865
Paulding	168,661	Vital Records	1	0	11.5	12.5	13,492
Richmond	206,607	Mental Health-AOT	1	0	12	13	15,893
Rockdale	93,570	Vital Records	1.5	0	8	9.5	9,849
Walton	96,673	Traffic	2	0	7.5	9.5	10,176
Whitfield	102,864	Traffic	1	0	7.5	8.5	12,101
POPULATION PER EMPLOYEE — AVERAGE							14,636
If budget request is granted							
Muscogee	206,922	Mental Health-AOT, Passports	2	1	6	9	22,991

# Big Picture – Cost vs. Benefits

- Probate Court net cost to the City is a small percentage of the City's whole budget.
  - Projected Revenue = \$445,000 (Actual Calendar Year 2024 = \$431,336.41)
  - General Fund Expenses (FY26 Budget Requests) = \$760,684
  - $\$760,684 - \$445,000 = \text{Probate Court projected operating loss for FY 2026} = \$315,684$  .
  - Based upon \$716,630 equaling FY 26 CCG Operating Day, **the Probate Court's annual cost to CCG is less than half of one reserve day**
  - New Probate Court Employee FY26 = \$50,391
  - **Therefore, my ask is for slightly over an hour and half of a reserve day (101 minutes) to solve the Probate Court's staffing problem.**
- In return citizens receive valuable quality services including intangibles that are hard to quantify
  - Not having to get an appointment for a passport because of "walk-in" passports service
  - Improved customer service
  - More tourism through weddings (The Muscogee County Probate Court is the only court that offers regularly scheduled court weddings within 90 miles around)