



ALABAMA COURT NEWS

Newsletter of the Alabama Judicial System

Volume I - Number 1

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Automation System Expanding

Since June 1992, nine counties have been added to the centralized judicial information system—Dale, Geneva, Marshall, Shelby, Walker, Limestone, Chambers, Dallas and Cullman. AOC's goal is to have all 67 counties automated within the next 24 months. Site implementation plans for the following counties are as follows:

County	Date
Jackson	April 1993
Henry	April 1993
Tallapoosa (Dadeville)	April 1993
Franklin	May 1993
Escambia	May 1993
Chilton	June 1993
Coffee (Elba)	June 1993
Coffee (Enterprise)	June 1993
Barbour (Eufaula)	July 1993
Barbour (Clayton)	July 1993
DeKalb	August 1993
Macon	August 1993
Pike	September 1993
Tallapoosa (Alex City)	September 1993

The Criminal Fee Accounting System is now in operation in all 31 automation sites. The Civil Accounting System is being written and will be in operation by late fall/winter 1993. □

Law Day U.S.A. May 1, 1993

The 1993 theme is "Justice for All - All for Justice." The purpose of Law Day is to call the attention of every American citizen to both the principles and the practice of American law and justice. It is a day to reflect on our legal heritage, on the role of law in our society and on the rights we enjoy under our Constitution.

Please plan to participate in this day of celebration by scheduling special events and activities. □

Civil Case Filings Are Decreasing; Juvenile, Criminal Up In State Courts

Alabama is not facing a litigation explosion in civil lawsuits based on recently compiled court case load statistics. However, juvenile and criminal filings have steadily increased.

While the number of criminal cases continue to rise, civil cases filed in Alabama's circuit and district courts decreased by 4 percent last year. Court statistics show that civil case filings in circuit and district courts began to level off in 1990, and the number actually decreased last year by 3,205 cases. These figures do not include small claims filings.

Despite a record number of appeals to the state Supreme Court and the two appellate courts, the three courts were able to remain current during the year. There were 4,788 appeals filed during FY 1992, and the three courts disposed of 4,781 cases.

Even with overall increased case loads and funding cutbacks because of proration of the state general fund, judicial officials and employees have made concerted efforts to ensure that the business of the courts is handled as expeditiously and economically as possible. "The Alabama Judicial System continues to be one of the best court systems in the nation," Chief Justice Sonny Hornsby said.

An analysis of case load since 1988 indicates that cases in circuit and district courts have increased by 43,191 cases, or 6 percent. One of the most significant increases is in the criminal case load which has increased by 35 percent, up more than

53,000 cases since 1988. This increase parallels an increase in crime reported by the Alabama Criminal Justice Information Center.

Nationally, much attention has been given to what has been referred to as an explosion of civil litigation, including products liability, contract, malpractice and workmen's compensation cases. This trend is not apparent in Alabama. During 1992, civil cases decreased by 4 percent, and civil actions filed in the circuit and district courts have decreased by 3 percent since 1988. Again, these figures do not include small claims filings.

Filings in the state's juvenile courts, however, have increased 22 percent over the past five years. These cases include traditional juvenile cases, such as delinquencies, as well as child support and paternity cases. A major factor contributing to the increase of juvenile cases is the expansion of the Title IV-D child support program administered by the Department of Human Resources. Over the last fiscal year, while traditional juvenile cases increased by 5 percent, child support cases increased by 16 percent. Last year, \$75.7 million was collected and disbursed by the circuit court clerks in child support payments, and approximately \$108 million was collected and distributed by the Department of Human Resources. Alabama continues to be nationally recognized as a leading state in the enforcement and collection of child support. □

AOC is pleased to reinstate publication of a quarterly newsletter, **ALABAMA COURT NEWS**. This publication can be an important means of communication for the Alabama Judicial System. If there are specific topics, human interest stories, photographs, etc., you would like to see included, please send them to AOC's Public Information Division. □

Court Officials

Supreme Court Justice Oscar W. Adams spoke to students at Adams Elementary School (named in his honor) in Gadsden, Alabama, as part of the school's Black History Month events. Adams' wife, Ann Marie, joined him at the school and announced the continuation of a cash-awards program for the students. The Adamses began the program in 1992. On the school's awards day, one student per grade will receive \$50 for the highest grade point average, and \$50 will go to one student per grade who has shown the most improvement. "We try to challenge the students here to do their very best," said Justice Adams.

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The Court of Civil Appeals heard oral arguments in three cases in the Moot Courtroom of the Cumberland Law School, Samford University campus, on March 18, 1993. Members of the court are Presiding Judge William E. Robertson, Judge Charles A. Thigpen and Judge Sharon G. Yates.

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R. O. Hughes was sworn in as Jefferson County district judge on February 12, 1993. Appointed by Governor Hunt, he will fill the seat of former District Judge Jack Montgomery. Hughes was the senior partner in the Birmingham law firm

of Hughes and Maxey and has had 24-years' experience in both criminal and civil work. He is a graduate of Samford University and Cumberland School of Law. He and his wife, Mary Ellen, have two sons, Richard and Mark, and two grandchildren.

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Judge Hardie Kimbrough of the 1st Judicial Circuit spoke to third graders at Thomasville Elementary on February 11, 1993. Complete with robe and gavel, Judge Kimbrough impressed upon them the importance of living a wholesome life free of drugs and crime. He also explained the preparation needed for a career in the legal profession and some of the difficulties of making tough decisions as a judge. Judge Kimbrough is a mentor in Project Eagle, a community education project funded by ADECA which allows students to explore careers and form mentoring friendships with successful professionals.

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Kenneth C. Austin, circuit court clerk for the 11th Judicial Circuit, Lauderdale County, was invited recently to address Mississippi's circuit clerks at their seminar in Jackson, Mississippi. Austin spoke about computer systems within Alabama's judicial system. He was invited to address the same group later this year.

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Direct Deposit

This is a reminder that direct deposit of payroll checks is available to Unified Judicial System personnel. Application for direct deposit to either checking or savings accounts can be sent to the Payroll Office at the Administrative Office of Courts at any time. Direct deposit of a UJS personnel's payroll check will usually commence within thirty days from receipt of the application. A personalized deposit form should be sent with the application. Direct deposit applications may be requested from the Personnel Division at AOC.

Please note that once direct deposit is effective, the employee will receive a pay stub each pay day that looks identical to the payroll check. The only difference being that the stub will have the words "void void void" located where the net dollar amount would be located on the payroll check.

Trial Court Classifications Upgrade

Initial steps have been taken to implement an upward adjustment in the pay grades of trial court classifications, to be effective the pay period beginning April 1, 1993. The change will add two steps to the maximum rate for each class.

Employees who have been at the top of their pay grade (Step 18) for over one year will receive a two-step raise. Employees who will be below the new minimum rates will go to the new minimum rates. Those who are in the mid-range above entry level but not at step 18 (or above) will not receive a pay adjustment at this time but will benefit in the future by having an extended range.

Chief Justice Bonny is committed to full implementation of all pay and classification adjustments. Complete implementation is scheduled for October 1993. Providing adequate funding is secured from the legislature for FY 1993.

Revenue Transmittal Sheets

Revenue transmittal sheets were revised in October 1992 to facilitate the reporting of the increase in filing fees as a result of Act 92-227. The new transmittal sheets contain an additional line which is designated "Filing Fees—Act 92-227."

Please be advised that the line should be utilized to report only the increase in filing fees as a result of Act 92-227. Many counties

are using the additional line to separate old filing fees set prior to Act 92-227 and the new filing fees as set by the passage of Act 92-227. For example: felony filing fees were increased \$25, which made the total cost of a felony filing fee \$88. Only the \$25 increase should be reported on the line designated "Filing Fees—Act 92-227." We hope this explanation will clear up any confusion. □

In Brief . . .

Every time **Lauderdale County District Judge Deborah Paseur** sentences a first-time offender on a domestic violence conviction, she may include several penalties in the sentencing; but there is one constant—a stint in the PEACE program. Paseur said she refers a lot of people to the program and has not had one person to complete it who did not have something positive to say about it. "With the exception of two or three, I haven't seen them back in my court," she said. The PEACE program was brought to Alabama by Safeplace, a Shoals organization that offers shelter to abused spouses and their children. The local program is one of only five in the state, and the success rate has been "unbelievable," according to Paseur and others. □

The City of Madison implemented a new night-court system on April 1 to better accommodate residents and reduce the amount of time city personnel spend deciding legal matters. **Municipal Judge R. Wayne Wolfe**, presiding over night court, said they had received numerous requests from the public to change to a night-court system so residents can have their cases settled without missing a day's work. Wolfe said that splitting municipal court into six shorter night sessions a month, as opposed to four longer day sessions monthly, will reduce the amount of

time court and police personnel spend resolving cases. □

A Juvenile Justice Coordinating Council is being established in **Chilton County** to address the needs of the county's children and to develop ideas and programs to deal with the county's at-risk kids. They are also reviewing state and county agency responsibilities regarding these children's needs. □

Lee County couples seeking divorce have been recently mandated by **Circuit Judge Robert Harper** to attend a four-hour seminar to help parents understand and reduce the pain their children feel during the divorce process. "I'm interested in doing anything I can to minimize the effect divorce has on children," said Harper. The seminar is based on a nationally acclaimed Atlanta program called "Families First," and is being sponsored by Lee-SCAN, a child abuse prevention organization in Auburn, Alabama. □

Mobile's Drug Court held its first session February 10, 1993. The court is designed for first-time offenders who are charged with possessing small amounts of drugs and can opt to plead guilty and go into a 12-month drug treatment program in lieu of jail. Upon completion of the program, their guilty plea is set aside and they have no drug conviction. "Most of these people are not jail-

bound anyway," said **Circuit Court Judge Braxton Kittrell**, who presides over the drug court, adding that the program is strictly for non-violent offenders. The program is a result of more than a year's study of similar programs in other states. □

The **Early Warning Truancy Program in Baldwin County** is doing more than sending students to juvenile court; it's making a difference in their lives, said **Juvenile Court Judge Lyn Stuart**. Stuart and the county's public schools attendance supervisor, **Joe Coleman**, recently announced positive results for the first three months of the school year: 14 fewer families have been required to attend the early warning conference mandated when a student accumulates three or more unexcused absences, and average daily attendance is up by nearly eight-tenths of a percent over last year. An increase of 1 percent in a year will mean an additional \$150,000 in school funding. They attributed the decrease in the number of truant students to public awareness of the Early Warning Program as well as individual school incentive programs that encourage attendance. Stuart said the school incentive programs, which have fostered competition among the students, have "drawn rave reviews" from the parents. □

Committee on Indigent Defense Guidelines and Recoupment

In March 1993, Chief Justice **Sonny Hornsby** appointed a committee to establish statewide uniform guidelines for court officials' use in determining a defendant's indigency status. Chairman, Judge **Charles Price**, Circuit Judge, 15th Judicial Circuit, Montgomery, scheduled the first committee for April, 20, 1993. Working with Judge Price are **Hampton Brown**, Legal Aid Society, Birmingham; **T. Jefferson Deen, III, Esq.**, Mobile; **John W. Hartley, Esq.**, Montgomery; Judge **J. Michael Joiner**, Cir-

cuit Judge, 18th Judicial Circuit, Columbiana; Judge **Jack W. Meigs**, Presiding Circuit Judge, 4th Judicial Circuit, Centreville; **Bob Merrill**, Court Administrator, 15th Judicial Circuit, Montgomery; **Mary Moore**, Circuit Clerk, Perry County, Marion; Judge **Deborah B. Paseur**, District Judge, Lauderdale County, Florence; **Philip Price, Esq.**, Huntsville; **Mack Reed**, State Comptroller's Office, Montgomery; **Jean E. Riley**, Circuit Clerk, Conecuh County, Evergreen; and **C. Daniel White, Esq.**, Brewton. □



(Alabama Journal 5-9-90)

Alabama Judicial College 1993 Calendar

Date	Conference	Location
April 7 - 8, 1993	Municipal Court Seminar for Court and Police Officials	Governors House Montgomery
April 15 - 16, 1993	Municipal Court Seminar for Court and Police Officials	Radisson Hotel Birmingham
April 23, 1993	AMCCM Education Committee	Administrative Office of Courts Montgomery
April 28 - 30, 1993	AMCCM Education Certification Institute	Bryant Center - Univ. of Alabama Tuscaloosa
May 15 - 16, 1993	League of Municipalities Annual Conference Municipal Judges Meeting	Governor's House Montgomery
May 21 - 22, 1993	Court Employees Annual Conference	Radisson Hotel Birmingham
May 24 - 26, 1993	AMCCM Spring Certification Institute	Bryant Center - Univ. of Alabama Tuscaloosa
June 1 - 4, 1993	Juvenile Judges and JPO Conference	Perdido Beach Resort Gulf Shores
June 3 - 6, 1993	AMCCM Annual Conference	Lake Guntersville State Park Guntersville
June 10, 1993	AMCCM Orientation Session II-A	State House Inn Montgomery
June 29, 1993	AMCCM Orientation Session II-B	State House Inn Montgomery
July 8 - 10, 1993	Court Reporters Annual Conference	Holiday Inn Gulf Shores
July 12 - 14, 1993	Circuit and District Judges Annual Conference	Gulf State Park Gulf Shores
July 14 - 16, 1993	Circuit Clerks and Registers Annual Conference	Grand Hotel Point Clear
July 14 - 16, 1993	Judicial Assistants Annual Conference	Radisson Admiral Semmes Hotel Mobile
August 5, 1993	AMCCM Orientation Session III-A	State House Inn Montgomery
August 7, 1993	AMCCM Orientation Session III-C	Mobile
August 18, 1993	AMCCM Orientation Session III-B	State House Inn Montgomery
August 26 - 27, 1993	Circuit and District Judges Education Committee	Birmingham
September 2 - 3, 1993	Clerks and Registers Education Com.	Birmingham
September 16, 1993	AMCCM Orientation Session IV-A	State House Inn Montgomery
September 29, 1993	AMCCM Orientation Session IV-B	State House Inn Montgomery
October 20 - 22, 1993	AMCCM Fall Certification Institute	Bryant Center - Univ. of Alabama Tuscaloosa
November 1 - 3, 1993	AMCCM Fall Certification Institute	Bryant Center - Univ. of Alabama Tuscaloosa

Court Reporter Liaison Appointed

Oliver Gilmore has named Louise Nelson as the Finance Division liaison for court reporter issues. Louise will be responsible for working with the state association as well as committees appointed to deal with court reporter issues. One of the first projects to be considered is updating the Court Reporters Manual. If you have any suggestions regarding the manual or have any questions dealing with court reporters, please contact Louise. Additionally, all requests for special court reporters should be addressed as follows: Louise Nelson, Finance Division, Administrative Office of Courts, 817 South Court Street, Montgomery, Alabama 36130. □

Alabama's DWI Program Highlighted in National Magazine

Alabama was highlighted in the 1992 winter issue of *Drug Abuse Update* magazine as one of four states in the nation recognized for its "innovative and successful DWI education and treatment programs." In the article, titled "Thinking and Driving in America: A Look at Programs that Work," *Update* said the strength of the program is "based in its foundation—strong legislation, central administration, committed law enforcement, and a supportive judiciary." □



ALABAMA COURT NEWS

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MONTGOMERY, AL
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