



Georgia Commission on Dispute Resolution Meeting

Wednesday, February 25, 2026

11:15 – 12:30 p.m.

Via Zoom

AGENDA

- I. Swearing-In Ceremony: Justice John J. Ellington
- II. Recess (10 minutes)
- III. Welcome: Judge Carrie Markham
- IV. Roll call
- V. Meeting Minutes from December 10, 2025: *Approved via email*
- VI. Standing Committee Reports:
 - a. Budget and Personnel Committee: Judge Markham
 - b. Ethics Committee: Ms. Carole Griffith
 - c. Training and Credentials Committee: Judge Rebecca Crumrine Rieder
 - d. Outreach Committee: Mr. Hal Gray
 - e. DV Rules Committee: Ms. Tracy Johnson
- VII. Special Committee Report:
 - a. Judicially Hosted Settlement Conference Working Group: Judge Pandora Palmer
- VIII. 2023 & 2024 Data Presentation: Mr. Andres Bosque
- IX. GODR Report: Ms. Johnson & Ms. Karlie Sahs
 - a. Strategic Projects update
 - b. Upcoming Conferences:
 1. Georgia Council of Court Administrators, March 9-11
- X. Chairman's Report: Judge Markham
- XI. New/Old Business
- XII. 2026 Commission Dates: May 13 (*virtual*); August 19 (*virtual*); and December 9 (*in-person*)
- XIII. Adjournment



Georgia Commission on Dispute Resolution

Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, February 25, 2026

Chair Judge Carrie B. Markham called the meeting to order. In addition to Judge Markham, Commission members and Office staff present were:

Justice John J. Ellington; Crystal Taylor Cooper; Judge Rebecca Crumrine Rieder; Presiding Judge Sara L. Doyle; Hal Gray III, Esq.; Donald Horace, Esq.; Judge Quinn Kasper; Chief Judge M. Cindy Morris; Patrick T. O'Connor, Esq.; Judge Pandora E. Palmer; Peggy Roth; Judge Jason B. Thompson; and Randall Weiland. Senior Judge Jack Partain observed via livestream.

Tracy B. Johnson, Executive Director, and Karlie A. Sahs, Deputy Director.

JC/AOC staff members present were: Andres Bosque, Lead Data Analyst; Carole Griffith, Staff Attorney; Noelle Lagueux-Alvarez, CCFC Division Director; Amber Range, Court Tools Manager; and Bruce Shaw, Communications & Outreach Specialist.

The following guests were in-person: Rebecca Lew, Cobb County Superior Court ADR Program; Lindsay Mobley, Coweta Judicial Circuit ADR Program; Liesl Owen, 6th JAD ADR Program; Kathleen Sterne, Esq., Clayton Judicial Circuit ADR Program; and Travis Strickland, Coweta County Information Technology. The following guests observed the meeting virtually: Shelby Allen, Cobb Judicial Circuit Magistrate ADR Program; Lynn Ansley, 7th JAD ADR Program; Vanessa Billings, Eastern Judicial Circuit ADR Program; Abby Carter, Gwinnett Judicial Circuit ADR Program; Lakesiya Cofield, Fulton County ADR Program; Buster Cooper; Kristen Cushman, Atlantic Judicial Circuit ADR Program; Cathy Dravis, JC/AOC; Jan East, Dublin Judicial Circuit ADR Program; Melissa Heard, Justice Center of Atlanta; Ellen Lahtinen, Kennesaw State University; Kizmet Lester, DeKalb County Dispute Resolution Center; Libby Letourneau, Chatham County Juvenile Court; Valerie Lyle, 9th JAD ADR Program; Jody Overcash, Blue Ridge Judicial Circuit; Carlene Redmond, Cobb County Juvenile Court; Lee Robbins, The Mediation Center of the Coastal Empire; Shannon Watts, Southern Judicial Circuit ADR Program; and Sylvia F. Wilson, Fayette County State Court.

I. Swearing-In Ceremony

At approximately 11:15 a.m., Chief Judge Morris introduced Justice John J. Ellington to swear in the incoming chair and new members. Justice Ellington gave brief remarks, then administered the oaths of office to Judge Carrie B. Markham as the new GCDR chair and new members Crystal Taylor Cooper, Donald Horace, and Judge Jason B. Thompson.

II. Recess

Following the swearing-in ceremony, the meeting took a 10-minute recess.

III. Welcome

Judge Carrie B. Markham called the meeting to order at 11:35 a.m.

IV. Roll Call

Judge Markham asked Ms. Karlie Sahs to conduct the roll call of GCDR members.

V. Meeting Minutes from December 10, 2025: *Approved via email*

The minutes of the December 10 Commission meeting were approved via email vote on February 13, 2026.

VI. Standing Committee Reports:

a. Budget and Personnel Committee: Judge Carrie Markham

The most recent FY26 budget report was included in the meeting materials. Judge Markham noted that total revenue is driven largely by ADR Institute and registration fees, with year-to-date expenditures meeting the expectation for this point in the fiscal year. Revenue and expenditures are expected to continue to balance as the fiscal year progresses. Operating expenses reflect the reservation and payment of contractual obligations, including the contract for services with the Administrative Office of the Courts. Personnel services are tracking at approximate 58% of the annual amount, which also aligns with expectations. Of the total annual budget, Special Projects account for approximately 84% and include support for ScheduleADR maintenance, mediator training initiatives, office travel, and other statewide ADR efforts. The increase in expenditures reflects planned project activity occurring in the first half of the fiscal year. ADR Institute expenditures are fully encumbered and actuate 100% of the revised budgeted amount.

The overall pattern of fee balance from revenues is consistent with prior fiscal cycles, remaining sufficient to support budgeted obligations.

b. Ethics Committee: Ms. Carole Griffith

The Committee on Ethics last met on February 18, 2026.

Ms. Carole Griffith provided the report on behalf of committee chair Chief Judge Renata Turner. Ms. Griffith noted that, since the last GCDR meeting, the Ethics Committee resolved three complaints; two (2) complaints were dismissed and one (1) resulted in a private reprimand.

The Committee also reviewed two (2) applications for continued neutral registration; both applicants were determined not to meet the requisite standards and, thus, have been deregistered.

There are no pending appeals.

The Ethics Committee will meet next on April 8, 2026.

c. Training and Credentials Committee: Judge Rebecca Crumrine Rieder

The Committee on Training and Credentials last met on January 14, 2026.

Judge Crumrine Rieder provided that the Committee reviewed four (4) inactive reinstatement request; three (3) neutrals were required to complete additional continuing education hours, view GUMA training videos, and complete a live child support worksheet training. The one (1) remaining request was denied due to the neutral's failure to complete previously required training within the given timeframe, resulting in deregistration.

The Committee also considered one (1) waiver to exempt educational requirements for the Domestic Relations Mediation category. The request was denied because the applicant did not meet the minimum education standards for registration in that category.

There are currently no outstanding appeals.

The Committee will meet next on March 18, 2026.

d. Outreach Committee: Mr. Hal Gray

The Outreach Committee last met on February 12, 2026.

Mr. Gray reported that, at its last meeting, the Outreach Committee focused primarily on standardization and outreach efforts, discussing developing a repository of model mediation forms that could be used across court-connected ADR programs. This would initially include mediation guidelines, mediator reports, and mediation agreements, with an emphasis on supporting consistent data collection. Ms. Johnson and Ms. Sahs will be meeting with program directors in March to introduce the idea and gather input and existing forms, with an update to follow at the next GCDR meeting.

Additionally, the Committee reviewed several outreach efforts currently underway. Ms. Johnson has a meeting scheduled with court leadership in Rockdale County – a county among the most populated in Georgia without a formal court ADR program – and has begun follow-up conversations with the Oconee Judicial Circuit regarding interest in establishing a new ADR program. There has been initial interest from that circuit, and additional information will be provided to its chief judge, as requested.

Finally, the Committee received an update on the Waycross Judicial Circuit ADR Program, which remains in the implementation phase. A planned orientation was postponed due to a change in judicial leadership. Mr. Gray commended Mr. Randall Weiland for his outstanding support to the circuit in this effort.

Mr. Gray asked committee members to continue thinking about additional ways the Outreach Committee might be helpful moving forward.

The Committee will meet next on May 21, 2026.

e. Domestic Violence Rules Committee: Ms. Tracy Johnson

Ms. Johnson noted that the Committee does not have anything new to report.

The Committee's next meeting is TBD.

VII. Special Committee Report

a. Judicially Hosted Settlement Conference Working Group: Judge Pandora Palmer

Judge Palmer shared that, since the December GCDR meeting, the JHSC Working Group has continued its work, with particular attention to the ethical concerns raised at the working group's October meeting.

Judge Palmer, Judge Markham, Chief Judge Morris, Judge Rieder, Ms. Johnson, and Ms. Sahs met with Courtney Veal, Director of the Judicial Qualifications Commission, to discuss how the proposed role of a senior judge conducting settlement conferences fits within a judge's existing ethical obligations. The discussion focused specifically on issues identified by the working group, including judicial disqualification and recusal, confidentiality and ex parte communication, the appropriate limits of evaluative input, judicial referrals to specific neutrals, and how all these considerations intersect with current judicial conduct rules. That meeting was productive and helped clarify several areas where additional guidance will be needed as the framework is refined. It also reinforced the importance of close coordination with the JQC as this work moves forward. Judge Palmer anticipates continued dialogue on these issues, particularly after the working group has an opportunity to meet with Justice Ellington for further guidance.

The working group will next meet on March 20, 2026.

VIII. 2023 & 2024 Data Presentation: Mr. Andres Bosque

A copy of 2023 and 2024 data reports were provided in the meeting materials. Mr. Andres Bosque gave a presentation which covered certain trends derived from the data, notably including a 20% increase in cases referred to mediation (statewide) from calendar years 2023 to 2024. Mr. Pat O'Connor asked questions regarding representation of parties in mediation as compared to cases which only participated in traditional litigation processes. Staff noted that data is increasingly better, though still flawed, but there is an interest in developing data collection/analyzation which may showcase the benefits of mediation to courts and parties.

Commission members were asked to review the data reports and provide any feedback prior to publishing for public dissemination.

IX. GODR Report: Ms. Tracy Johnson & Ms. Karlie Sahs

a. Strategic Projects Update

Updates to the strategic projects are as follows:

1. **Data Collection:** Earlier in the meeting, Mr. Andres Bosque, Lead Data Analyst for the JC/AOC Office of Research & Data Analysis, presented a brief analysis of 2023 & 2024

data. Data collection for calendar year 2025 is currently underway and is set to closed on March 16. Staff will be sending out frequent reminders to those who have not yet submitted their data.

GODR and JC/AOC Research and IT divisions continue their work to determine the best methods for collecting data from court ADR programs which are not using ScheduleADR as well as methods of enhancing data analysis/reporting.

2. **Neutral Registration System:** Staff met with the Georgia Courts Registrar (GCR) team on 1/27 and with AOC IT leadership on 1/28. Ms. Amber Range, who manages the GCR team, advised that GCR is fully staffed with 4 full time support staff, and AOC is actively advancing system enhancements, thus: improving usability, security, and data integrity; strengthening role-based dashboards, implementing communication safeguards, modernizing workflows, and refining continuing education tracking logic to ensure greater accuracy and compliance; and enhancing account auditing, introducing multi-factor authentication, and addressing duplicate account consolidation. These updates are designed to improve efficiency, reduce risk, and better align system functionality with operational needs.

Late registration renewal ends February 28, and reports were sent to court ADR programs so they may ensure their rosters reflect neutrals in good standing.

3. **Court Program Support:** The Outreach Committee is beginning the process for exploring the creation of standardized forms. More information will be provided at the next GCDR Meeting.
4. **ADR Institute:** The 2026 ADR Institute will be held on November 19 at the State Bar of Georgia. Staff are working with a few identified plenary speakers and will be sending out both a Save the Date and a request for proposals (RFP) very soon.
5. **Court Program Evaluations, Expansion of Neutral Services, Juvenile Court ADR Programs, and Program Director Conference:** no updates to report.
6. **GODR 2.0 & Judicially Hosted Settlement Conference (JHSC)/Evaluative Processes:** updates were provided elsewhere in the meeting.

b. Upcoming Conferences:

1. **Georgia Council of Court Administrators**

March 9-11, Chateau Elan. Ms. Johnson and Ms. Sahs will attend.

X. Chairman's Report: Judge Markham

Judge Markham provided a 2026 legislative update. GODR's budgetary requests were presented to the House Legislative Budget Committee on Thursday, February 12, where Judge Markham and Ms. Johnson (along with Justice Bethel, who presents the entire Judicial Council budget package) were present to answer any questions. Following the House approval of the FY27 budget (still pending a vote), the bill will cross over to the Senate. The final day of the legislative session is April 2 (Sine Die). Judge Markham acknowledged the assistance and insight of Mr. Andrew Zoll, Chief Budget Officer at JC/AOC, who has been invaluable to this process along the way.

XI. New/Old Business

There was no new or old business to report.

XII. 2026 Commission Dates: May 13 (virtual); August 19 (virtual); and December 9 (in-person)

The Commission’s next two meetings will be held virtually. The December 9 meeting will be held in person at the State Bar of Georgia Conference Center.

XIII. Adjournment

The meeting concluded at approximately 12:20 p.m.

[Minutes prepared by Karlie A. Sahs and Tracy B. Johnson]

[Minutes approved via email March 13, 2026]



Justice John J. Ellington swears in new Chair Judge Carrie B. Markham



(L-R) Karlie Sahs, GODR Deputy Director; Chief Judge Cindy Morris Immediate Past Chair; Tracy Johnson, GODR Executive Director; Judge Carrie Markham, Chair; Justice John J. Ellington; and new members Crystal Cooper, Donald Horace and Judge Jason Thompson