

## **Appalachian Pretrial and Probation Program**

The Appalachian Pretrial and Probation Program is a county probation program operating in Pickens, Fannin, and Gilmer Counties. O.C.G.A. 42-8-100-108. This program is a certified law enforcement program and has been so certified since June, 2002. The program is monitored by the Georgia Department of Community Supervision. The Chief Probation Officer for the program is April Van Alstine, a certified law enforcement officer for approximately 6 years. The program currently employs a Chief Probation Officer plus 2 probation officers, who are certified law enforcement officers and three office staff. Offices are located in each of the three counties. In addition, Larry Clemmons and Julie Panter provide assistance and supervision as needed to staff. Mr. Clemmons and Ms. Panter have assisted in the operation of this program for over 15 years.

The first county probation officer was hired in 1998 to assist the state probation department in supervising misdemeanor probationers. The number of people on misdemeanor probation was increasing and the state was not hiring any additional probation officers. In addition, the circuit was interested in establishing a pre-trial diversion program with an emphasis on drug and alcohol treatment education. Prior to this time, the circuit had contracted with a private probation

company, from 1996 until June 1, 1998 for assistance in the supervision of misdemeanor probationers.

Under the leadership of Susan Stringer, Chief Probation Officer for the state probation department, at that time, District Attorney Roger Queen, Chief Judge Bobby Milam, and Judge Brenda S. Weaver and with the approval of the county commissioners in the office at that time, the planning for the establishment of a county misdemeanor probation and pretrial program began in 1998. Lori Clayton was hired as the first county probation officer in July, 1998.

The planning team believed that many misdemeanor probationers were involved in the use of illegal drugs and/or alcohol and it was important that they attend drug and alcohol treatment and education classes and to be drug screened on a random and regular basis. Probationers needed to be returned to court promptly if violations of their probation occurred, particularly new criminal violations. The planning team believed that it was critical that all defendants who were on probation for driving under the influence be closely monitored and screened on a random and regular basis for the use of alcohol and illegal drugs. Also, all defendants charged with family violence crimes needed to be closely supervised and monitored. Reports showed that many of these defendants were

also addicted to the use of illegal drugs and alcohol. In addition, each probationer charged with family violence offenses should be closely monitored to ensure their attendance at "Men Stopping Violence" classes as well as other drug and alcohol treatment and education classes which were ordered by the court. The planning team did not feel that our requirements and needs would be met by private probation companies.

The planning team also wanted to establish a pretrial diversion program for defendants who did not need to go through the regular trial track in court. The pretrial diversion program was the beginning of the formation of the Appalachian Judicial Circuit Adult Drug Court in our circuit which was established in February, 2002.

Effective January 1, 2001 the state probation department was no longer allowed by statute to supervise misdemeanor cases. At this time the APPP began supervising all misdemeanor probation cases in the Superior Courts which did not include a felony charge. The program expanded to include the supervision of misdemeanor cases in the Probate and Magistrate Courts as well as some city courts located in our circuit.

Frank Martin, Sole Commissioner of Pickens County in 1998, agreed that Pickens County would assume the fiscal responsibility for the program. Due to the intent that the program would focus on drug and alcohol treatment and education, it was determined by the planning team that the initial seed money to begin this county program would be provided by the County Drug Abuse and Treatment Fund in the amount of \$10,000.00 from each county. The ongoing funding for this program would be obtained from the monthly probation fees paid by the probationer as a condition of his/her probation and by general county funds.

Ms. Stringer set up the initial probation office and its bookkeeping functions using the state probation model. She interviewed and selected staff. Gradually as the program expanded and more funds were available through the collection of probation fees, additional staff were hired in order to adequately and properly supervise the probationers and to operate the pretrial diversion unit of the program.

Julie Lasley, was initially hired as a probation officer in November, 2000 and was later selected to serve as the first Chief Probation Officer in February, 2001. In September 2001, Larry Clemmons was hired to serve as the Chief Probation Officer and Ms. Lasley agreed to serve as the Deputy Chief Probation Officer.

Later, Mr. Clemmons and Ms. Lasley agreed to also work in the Appalachian Judicial Circuit Drug Court Program at the request of Judge Weaver due to no available state funding at that time to hire full time employees for the Drug Court.

In December, 2006, Lori Clayton was designated the Chief Probation Officer and served in that position until August, 2015, when she was hired as the Investigator for the Pickens County Public Defender's office. Until a new full time Chief Probation Officer could be hired and trained, Julie Panter and Larry Clemmons assumed supervisory roles again until the new Chief Probation Officer was hired.

Financially, the program operates as follows:

1. The probationer is assessed fines, state fees and surcharges, attorney fees, restitution and probation fees by the sentencing judge.
2. The probationer meets with the probation officer to set up a monthly payment plan.
3. The probationer pays his/her fees as per monthly payment plan.
4. The monies are deposited into the APPP bank account and are disbursed as per the program guidelines which follow state law and the state probation guidelines. Fines and surcharges are disbursed monthly. Probation fees and victim restitution funds are disbursed each month. Court ordered attorney fees

are disbursed as restitution. Monthly reports are sent to each County Commissioner's office and to state agencies.

5. Elizabeth Edwards is currently employed as the program's financial officer. She is supervised by Stacy McClure. Ms. McClure is employed by all three counties and is also responsible for managing the finances of all accountability courts and other special programs operating in our circuit. All financial records concerning the payment and collection of fines, surcharges, etc. and their distribution are available in her office in the Pickens County Courthouse in Jasper, Georgia and in the administrative offices of Pickens County.
6. Pickens County serves as the payroll agent for the program. All staff of APPP are county employees who are paid by Pickens County. Pickens County is reimbursed for all payroll associated costs from the probation fees paid by the probationers and general funds from each county as shown on Judge Weaver's annual budget request for each county. The program is part of Pickens County's annual audit.

Prior to January 2002, Pickens County's financial officer was also responsible for payment of travel and other program expenses. Due to her county work responsibilities and duties, Commissioner Billy Newton notified Judge Weaver in 2001 that an additional person was needed to assist in the financial administration

of APPP as well as other grants and court related programs that Pickens County was administering for the circuit. As a result of this request from Commissioner Newton, the three counties approved in 2001 to hire an employee whose job title would be "Grants Administrator" and who would ultimately be responsible for assisting Pickens County in administering all court related programs and grants for all three counties. The funding for this position was included in the 2002 budget submitted by Judge Weaver's office to each county and has continued to be approved by each county every year thereafter. Pickens County agreed to be the fiscal agent for this position and would then request reimbursement from the other two counties for their share of payroll and office expenses. Pickens County provides office space for this position at no cost to the other two counties. The office is located in the Pickens County Courthouse. The job title was changed to "Judicial Program Coordinator" as a result of new duties she assumed in reference to grant reporting for the accountability courts.

The Payroll agent for Pickens County prepares a monthly invoice for all payroll related expenses and submits the invoice to the Ms. McClure. Ms. McClure prepares a letter showing the breakdown of expenses for each county for Judge Weaver's signature which is then emailed or mailed to each county requesting reimbursement for Pickens County.