

FAMILY DIVISION STATEMENT

We, as lawyers, ministers, elected officials, and voters who utilize and support the Fulton County Family Division, voice our strenuous opposition to the clandestine attempt by some lawyers and some judges of the Fulton County Superior Court to dismantle the Fulton Family Division and to revert to the practice of handling Family Law Cases utilized years ago. That failed prior procedure convinced all those who supported the Family Division when it was created in 1996-1998 that there was a far better way to insure that families and children receive the time, attention, knowledge and expertise required to handle their cases.

Prior to the creation of the Family Division, family law cases were assigned to all of the judges on the court. Because of the overwhelming number of criminal cases and civil matters, family law cases took bottom rung priority in granting hearings on child support, child custody, pressing immediate matters of protective hearings, and the like. Many of the judges were ill-equipped to handle family matters and had an obvious distaste for handling family law cases. Fast forward to today, the motivation of some lawyers and some ill-informed judges who may lack the historical perspective, is to seek to dismantle the Family Division and to reverse the clock.

Who is affected by the lower priority given to family cases? Self-represented people, the poor, and people in need of critical immediate attention to their family issues are the ones who will suffer. Not only has this ill-informed effort gained traction among some lawyers and some of the Fulton Superior Court Judges, but there has been a hidden agenda in doing so. Their activities have just come to light. A survey was supposedly conducted and sent to various lawyers.

However, if such a survey existed, it was a scattershot approach since not all who practice in the Fulton Family Division received the survey, while others throughout the State who have no experience in Fulton did receive the survey. Inputs were presumably sought at a roundtable from "prominent family law practitioners". Our courts fundamentally and constitutionally serve ALL THE PEOPLE, not just "prominent family law practitioners."

We do hereby DEMAND that this effort to dismantle the Fulton Family Division cease immediately and that the judges who are supposed to serve ALL THE PEOPLE promptly give voice to the people, citizens, and voters whom they are appointed or elected to serve. Our citizens must mobilize to prevent the families of our communities from being pushed to the bottom of the caseload pile by the destruction of this Family Division community treasure as a result of the desire of some lawyers and some judges representing "prominent family law practitioners" at the expense of our families and children.

The Honorable Thelma Wyatt Cummings Moore Retired Superior Court Chief Judge and Leader on Creation of Family Division George O. Lawson, Jr., Esquire The Honorable Marvin Arrington, Jr., Fulton County Commissioner, District 5 The Reverend Doctor Gerald A. Durley, Pastor Emeritus, Providence Missionary Baptist Church The Reverend Timothy McDonald, Senior Pastor, First Iconium Baptist Church Janise Miller, Esquire, Past President of the Gate City Bar Association Suzy Ockleberry, Esquire Antavius Weems, Esquire, Immediate Past President of the Georgia Alliance of African-American Attorneys