

Senate Bill 229

By: Senator Robertson of the 29th

A BILL TO BE ENTITLED
AN ACT

1 To amend Chapter 1 of Title 15 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated, relating to
2 general provisions regarding courts, so as to create parental accountability court divisions to
3 provide alternative adjudication to the traditional judicial system; to provide definitions; to
4 provide for assignment of cases; to provide for planning groups and work plans; to provide
5 for standards; to provide for staffing and expenses; to provide for completion of parental
6 accountability court division programs; to provide for records, fees, grants, and donations;
7 to provide for related matters; to repeal conflicting laws; and for other purposes.

8 BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF GEORGIA:

9 **SECTION 1.**

10 Chapter 1 of Title 15 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated, relating to general
11 provisions regarding courts, is amended by adding a new Code section to read as follows:

12 "15-1-17.1.

13 (a) As used in this Code section, the term:

14 (1) 'Department' means the Department of Human Services.

15 (2) 'Obligor' shall have the same meaning as set forth in Code Section 19-11-3.

16 (3) 'PAC' means parental accountability court division.

17 (b)(1) Any court that has jurisdiction over civil actions involving the department
18 pursuant to Chapter 11 of Title 19 may establish a PAC to provide an alternative to the
19 traditional judicial system for the disposition of cases.

20 (2) In any case involving the department pursuant to Chapter 11 of Title 19 in which a
21 defendant is an obligor and the defendant meets the eligibility criteria for PAC, the court
22 may assign the case to the PAC:

23 (A) Prior to the entry of the contempt, if the department consents;

24 (B) As part of a finding of contempt; or

25 (C) Upon consideration of a petition or motion by the department to assign the case to
26 PAC.

27 (3)(A) Each PAC shall establish a planning group to develop a work plan. The
28 planning group shall include the judges, department, and persons having expertise in
29 services available to obligors. The work plan shall address the operational,
30 coordination, resource, information management, and evaluation needs of the PAC.
31 The work plan shall include PAC policies and practices related to implementing the
32 standards and practices developed pursuant to paragraph (4) of this subsection. The
33 PAC shall combine judicial supervision, employment assistance, treatment of PAC
34 participants, and risk of drug use and mental health assessments.

35 (B) As determined by the PAC planning group, a PAC may enlist the services provided
36 by agencies, and organizations in the judicial circuit, including, but not limited to:

37 (i) Community service boards;

38 (ii) County departments;

39 (iii) State agencies, including, but not limited to, the Department of Labor, the
40 Department of Community Health, and the Department of Behavioral Health and
41 Developmental Disabilities;

42 (iv) Other judicial circuit accountability courts;

43 (v) The Board of Regents of the University System of Georgia;

44 (vi) The Technical College System of Georgia;

45 (vii) Substance abuse treatment organizations;

46 (viii) Mental health service providers;

47 (ix) Nonprofit organizations that provide family counseling;

48 (x) Organizations that provide legal representation to indigent litigants;

49 (xi) Local, regional, and state task forces or coordinating entities regarding at-risk
50 adults;

51 (xii) Providers of medical, legal, housing services or housing facilities; and

52 (xiii) Any other entity which a PAC determines is necessary.

53 (4)(A) The Council of Accountability Court Judges of Georgia shall adopt standards
54 and practices for PAC, taking into consideration guidelines and principles based on
55 available current research and findings published by experts on obligors' needs. The
56 Council of Accountability Court Judges of Georgia shall update its standards and
57 practices to incorporate research, findings, and developments in the PAC field if any
58 such research, findings, or developments are created. Each court shall adopt policies
59 and practices that will be consistent with any standards and practices published by the
60 Council of Accountability Court Judges of Georgia.

61 (B) The department shall provide consultation to the Council of Accountability Court
62 Judges of Georgia and to each court to assist in the development and implementation
63 of standards, policies, and practices.

64 (C) The Council of Accountability Court Judges of Georgia shall create and manage
65 a certification and peer review process to ensure each court is adhering to the Council
66 of Accountability Court Judges of Georgia's standards and practices and shall create a
67 waiver process for courts to seek an exception to the Council of Accountability Court
68 Judges of Georgia's standards and practices. In order to receive state appropriated
69 funds, any court established on and after July 1, 2019, shall be certified pursuant to this
70 subparagraph or, for good cause shown to the Council of Accountability Court Judges
71 of Georgia, shall receive a waiver from the Council of Accountability Court Judges of
72 Georgia.

73 (D) On and after July 1, 2019, the award of any state funds for a PAC shall be
74 conditioned upon a PAC attaining certification or a waiver by the Council of
75 Accountability Court Judges of Georgia. On or before September 1 of each year, the
76 Council of Accountability Court Judges of Georgia shall publish an annual report
77 listing certified PACs.

78 (E) The Council of Accountability Court Judges of Georgia and the department shall
79 develop and manage an electronic information system for performance measurement
80 and accept submission of performance data in a consistent format from all PACs. The
81 Council of Accountability Court Judges of Georgia shall identify elements necessary
82 for performance measurement, including, but not limited to, participant employment,
83 the number of participants who successfully complete the program, and the number of
84 participants who fail to complete the program.

85 (F) On or before July 1, 2022, and every three years thereafter, the Council of
86 Accountability Court Judges of Georgia shall conduct a performance peer review of
87 each PAC for the purpose of improving PAC policies and practices and the certification
88 and recertification process.

89 (5) The clerk of the court instituting the PAC or such clerk's designee shall serve as the
90 clerk of the PAC.

91 (6) The court instituting the PAC may request other employees of the court to perform
92 duties for the PAC. Such employees shall perform duties as directed by the judges of the
93 PAC.

94 (7) The court instituting the PAC may enter into agreements with other courts and
95 agencies for the assignment of personnel from other courts and agencies to the PAC.

96 (8) Expenses for salaries, equipment, services, and supplies incurred in implementing
97 this Code section may be paid from state funds, funds of the county or political
98 subdivision implementing such PAC, federal grant funds, funds approved by the federal
99 Office of Child Support Enforcement to be used for such purposes and allocated to the

100 department pursuant to Title IV-D of the federal Social Security Act, and funds from
101 private donations.

102 (c) Each PAC shall establish written criteria that define the successful completion of the
103 PAC program.

104 (d) Any statement made by a PAC participant as part of participation in such court, or any
105 report made by the staff of the court or program connected to the court, regarding a
106 participant's mental health shall not be admissible as evidence against the participant in any
107 legal proceeding or prosecution; provided, however, that if the participant violates the
108 conditions of his or her participation in PAC or is terminated from PAC, the reasons for the
109 violation or termination may be considered in sanctioning or otherwise disposing of the
110 participant's case.

111 (e) Nothing contained in this Code section shall be construed to permit a judge to increase,
112 modify, or reduce an obligor's child support obligation.

113 (f) Notwithstanding any provision of law to the contrary, PAC staff shall be provided,
114 upon request, with access to all records relevant to the treatment of the obligor from any
115 state or local government agency, except records declared confidential by Code Section
116 49-5-40 to which access may be obtained pursuant to Code Section 49-5-41. All records
117 and the contents thereof shall be treated as confidential, shall not be disclosed to any person
118 outside of the PAC, and shall not be subject to Article 4 of Chapter 18 of Title 50 or subject
119 to subpoena, discovery, or introduction into evidence in any civil or criminal proceeding.
120 Such records and the contents thereof shall be maintained by the PAC and originating court
121 in a confidential file not available to the public.

122 (g) The PAC shall be provided a copy of an obligor's Georgia Crime Information Center
123 report by the sheriff, or the sheriff's designee, of the county in which the PAC is
124 established, without charge or fee to the PAC or department.

125 (h) The court shall have the authority to accept grants, donations, and other proceeds from
126 outside sources for the purpose of supporting the PAC. Any such grants, donations, or
127 proceeds shall be retained by the PAC for expenses."

128 **SECTION 2.**

129 All laws and parts of laws in conflict with this Act are repealed.