



WHAT DO YOU KNOW ABOUT THE GWINNETT COUNTY LAW DEPARTMENT?

By: Tuwanda Rush Williams, Senior Assistant County Attorney and GCBA Treasurer
Tuwanda.Williams@gwinnettcountry.com

I find delight in meeting people, both lawyers and non-lawyers, who are puzzled by my position as a Gwinnett County Staff Attorney. The common responses to my announcement that I am a County Staff Attorney are "Oh, okay" or "That's interesting," accompanied by a confused facial expression. Occasionally, however, someone will ask in response "What kinds of criminal cases do you handle?" or "Can you help me file for divorce?" It becomes immediately apparent that the individual, like most folks, have absolutely no idea what county government attorneys do on a day-to-day basis. Although a couple of us have handled criminal or domestic relations matters at some point in our legal careers, I can assure you that we don't do any of that kind of work in the Law Department.



So here's a quick overview on the Gwinnett County Law Department for anyone who cares to know:

The Gwinnett County Law Department was established in the mid-1980's, and Dick Carothers was appointed as the first "in-house" County Attorney. Prior to that time, the legal needs of Gwinnett County were served by private practitioners. The mission of the Law Department is to deliver top quality legal services to Gwinnett County and its Board of Commissioners, citizens, elected officials, department directors and staff, authorities, and related organizations.

What Gwinnett County Staff Attorneys Do: Our duties are broad and diverse! We provide daily advice and counsel on a variety of legal matters to County elected officials, departmental staff, and boards and authorities; initiate and defend lawsuits on behalf of the County; prepare ordinances and resolutions; draft, review, and approve contracts; prepare formal legal opinions; conduct extensive legal research; review and comment upon state legislative bills; review and approve Board of Commissioners agenda items; review, investigate, and respond to claims/threatened litigation; oversee departmental responses to open records requests; conduct real estate closings; and fulfill other duties as necessary.

Types of Litigation Matters County Attorneys Handle:

The Law Department is divided into two divisions. The Property Division handles Condemnations, Inverse Condemnations, Zoning, and Tax Appeal lawsuits. The Risk Division handles Personal Injury, Property Damage, Section 1983 Civil Rights, Constitutional Violations, Employment, and Breach of Contract lawsuits.

Law Department Staff: The department is currently staffed with eight (8) attorneys who possess a wealth of transactional and litigation skills and experience. Karen Gilpin Thomas is the County Attorney and Director of the Law Department, and she has been employed by the

County for over 20 years. In addition to Mrs. Thomas, Chief Assistant County Attorney M. Van Stephens and Senior Assistant County Attorneys Theresa Cox, Forrest Fields, Scott Fuller, Michael Ludwiczak, Brooke Savage, and myself are each assigned County departments. There are also six (6) support staff members, inclusive of a paralegal.

And that's the 411 on the Gwinnett County Law Department!