

House Bill 77 (AS PASSED HOUSE AND SENATE)

By: Representatives Greene of the 154<sup>th</sup>, Cheokas of the 151<sup>st</sup>, Sampson of the 153<sup>rd</sup>, and Yearata of the 152<sup>nd</sup>

A BILL TO BE ENTITLED  
AN ACT

1 To amend Code Section 15-6-2 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated, relating to the  
2 number of judges of superior courts, so as to provide for a fourth judge of the superior courts  
3 of the Dougherty Judicial Circuit; to provide for the appointment of such additional judge by  
4 the Governor; to provide for the election of successors to the judge initially appointed; to  
5 prescribe the powers of such judge; to prescribe the compensation, salary, and expense  
6 allowance of such judge to be paid by the State of Georgia and the counties comprising said  
7 circuit; to authorize the judges of such circuit to divide and allocate the work and duties  
8 thereof; to provide for the manner of impaneling jurors; to provide for an additional court  
9 reporter for such circuit; to authorize the governing authorities of the counties comprising  
10 the Dougherty Judicial Circuit to provide facilities, office space, supplies, equipment, and  
11 personnel for such judges; to declare inherent authority; to provide for related matters; to  
12 repeal conflicting laws; and for other purposes.

13 BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF GEORGIA:

14

**SECTION 1.**

15 Code Section 15-6-2 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated, relating to the number of  
16 judges of superior courts, is amended by revising paragraph (5) as follows:

17 "(15) Dougherty Circuit ..... 3 4"

18

**SECTION 2.**

19 One additional judge of the superior courts is added to the Dougherty Judicial Circuit,  
20 thereby increasing to four the number of judges of said circuit.

21

**SECTION 3.**

22 Said additional judge shall be appointed by the Governor for a term beginning  
23 January 1, 2024, and continuing through December 31, 2026, and until his or her successor  
24 is elected and qualified. His or her successor shall be elected in the manner provided by law  
25 for the election of judges of the superior courts of this state at the nonpartisan judicial  
26 election in 2026, for a term of four years beginning on January 1, 2027, and until his or her  
27 successor is elected and qualified. Future successors shall be elected at the nonpartisan  
28 judicial election every four years thereafter for terms of four years and until their successors  
29 are elected and qualified. They shall take office on the first day of January following the date  
30 of the election.

31

**SECTION 4.**

32 The additional judge of the superior courts of the Dougherty Judicial Circuit shall have and  
33 may exercise all powers, duties, dignities, jurisdiction, privileges, and immunities of the  
34 present judges of the superior courts of this state. Any of the judges of the Dougherty  
35 Judicial Circuit may preside over any cause, whether in their own or in other circuits, and  
36 perform any official act as judge thereof, including sitting on appellate courts as provided by  
37 law.

38 **SECTION 5.**

39 The qualifications of such additional judge and his or her successors shall be the same as are  
40 now provided by law for all other superior court judges, and his or her compensation, salary,  
41 and expense allowance from the State of Georgia and from the counties comprising the  
42 Dougherty Judicial Circuit shall be the same as are now provided by law for the other  
43 superior court judges of such circuit. The provisions, if any, enacted for the supplementation  
44 by the counties of such circuit of the salary of the judges of the superior courts of the  
45 Dougherty Judicial Circuit shall also be applicable to the additional judge provided for by  
46 this Act.

47 **SECTION 6.**

48 All writs and processes in the superior courts of the Dougherty Judicial Circuit shall be  
49 returnable to the terms of such superior courts as they are now fixed and provided by law,  
50 or as they may hereafter be fixed or determined by law, and all terms of such courts shall be  
51 held in the same manner as though there were but one judge, it being the intent and purpose  
52 of this Act to provide four judges equal in jurisdiction and authority to attend and perform  
53 the functions, powers, and duties of the judges of such superior courts and to direct and  
54 conduct all hearings and trials in such courts.

55 **SECTION 7.**

56 Upon and after qualification of the additional judge of the superior courts of the Dougherty  
57 Judicial Circuit, the four judges of such circuit may adopt, promulgate, amend, and enforce  
58 such rules of practice and procedure in consonance with the Constitution and laws of the  
59 State of Georgia as they deem suitable and proper for the effective transaction of the business  
60 of the court; and, in transacting the business of the court and in performing their duties and  
61 responsibilities, they shall share, divide, and allocate the work and duties to be performed by  
62 each. In the event of a disagreement among the judges in respect hereof, the decision of the

63 chief judge shall be controlling. The four judges of the superior courts of the Dougherty  
64 Judicial Circuit shall have and are clothed with full power, authority, and discretion to  
65 determine from time to time and term to term the manner of calling the dockets, fixing the  
66 calendars, and order of business in such courts. They may assign to one of such judges the  
67 hearing of trials by jury for a term and the hearing of all other matters not requiring a trial  
68 by jury to the other judges, and they may rotate such order of business at the next term. They  
69 may conduct trials by jury at the same time in the same county or otherwise within such  
70 circuit, or they may hear chambers business and motion business at the same time at any  
71 place within such circuit. They may provide in all respects for holding the superior courts  
72 of such circuit so as to facilitate the hearing and determination of all the business of such  
73 courts at any time pending and ready for trial or hearing. In all such matters relating to the  
74 fixing, arranging for, and disposing of the business of such courts and making appointments  
75 as authorized by law where the judges thereof cannot agree or shall differ, the opinion or  
76 order of the chief judge as provided for in this Act shall control.

77 **SECTION 8.**

78 The drawing and impaneling of all jurors, whether grand, petit, or special, may be conducted  
79 by any of the judges of the superior courts of such circuit; and they, or any one of them, shall  
80 have full power and authority to draw and impanel jurors for service in such courts so as to  
81 have jurors for the trial of cases before any of such judges separately or before each of them  
82 at the same time.

83 **SECTION 9.**

84 The four judges of the superior courts of the Dougherty Judicial Circuit shall be authorized  
85 and empowered to appoint an additional court reporter for such circuit, whose compensation  
86 shall be as now or hereafter provided by law.

87 **SECTION 10.**

88 All writs, processes, orders, subpoenas, and any other official paper issuing out of the  
89 superior courts of the Dougherty Judicial Circuit may bear teste in the name of any judge of  
90 the Dougherty Judicial Circuit and, when issued by and in the name of any judge of such  
91 circuit, shall be fully valid and may be heard and determined before the same or any other  
92 judge of such circuit. Any judge of such circuit may preside over any case therein and  
93 perform any official act as judge thereof.

94 **SECTION 11.**

95 Upon request of any judge of the circuit, the governing authorities of the counties comprising  
96 the Dougherty Judicial Circuit shall be authorized to furnish the judges of such circuit with  
97 suitable courtrooms and facilities, office space, telephones, furniture, office equipment,  
98 supplies, and such personnel as may be considered necessary by the court to the proper  
99 functioning of the court. All of the expenditures authorized in this Act are declared to be an  
100 expense of the court and payable out of the county treasury as such.

101 **SECTION 12.**

102 Nothing in this Act shall be deemed to limit or restrict the inherent powers, duties, and  
103 responsibilities of superior court judges provided by the Constitution and statutes of the State  
104 of Georgia.

105 **SECTION 13.**

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