

**THE UNIFIED GOVERNMENT OF ATHENS-CLARKE COUNTY
COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM**

SUBJECT: Clerk of Superior Court FY26 Supplement Adjustment and Addition of Tax Appeal Administrator Supplement

DATE: December 23, 2025

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

The Clerk of Superior/State Courts respectfully requests amending the FY26 local supplement of the Clerk to re-establish equitable pay in accordance with the State of Georgia statutory salary calculation and the ACCGov FY26 employee market increase granted July 1, 2025, and additionally requests adding the Tax Appeal Administrator Supplement provided for in Step 9 of the statutory formula which determines the salary for a superior court clerk.

BUDGET INFORMATION:

REVENUES: \$0

EXPENSES:

ANNUAL:	\$9,004 (January – July, \$4,502) – FY26 employee market increase
	<u>\$4,630</u> – Tax Appeal Administrator Supplement
	\$13,634

CAPITAL:

OTHER:

FUNDING SOURCE: General Fund Operating Contingency

COMMISSION ACTION REQUESTED ON: February 3, 2026

PURPOSE:

To request that the Mayor and Commission:

- a. Approve an appropriation of \$4,502 to the FY26 Operating Budget for Clerk of Courts Compensation – Supplemental and authorize staff to amend the supplement amount of the Clerk of Superior Court, effective FY26;
- b. Approve an appropriation of \$4,630 to the FY26 Operating Budget for the Tax Appeal Administrator Supplement for the Clerk of Superior Court (Attachment #2, step 9 of the statutory calculation worksheet);

- c. Authorize staff to complete a Comprehensive Position Questionnaire to properly identify the pay grade associated with the required qualifications and skillset of the position; and
- d. Adopt an ordinance amending the FY26 Operating Budget for Clerk of Court expenses (**Attachment #1**).

HISTORY:

1. Since Clarke County was chartered in 1801, the Office of the Clerk of Courts has been served by one full-time Clerk. The salary for the Clerk of Superior Court is determined by a statutory formula, which includes a base salary, longevity increase, state-approved cost of living increases, and a local ACCGov supplement. Initially, the supplement for the Clerk of Courts was set at \$5,000 on July 1, 2018. This has been the only ACCGov supplement approved by the Mayor and Commission for this position.
2. In 2018, ACCGov contracted with Management Advisory Group (MAG) to conduct a comprehensive Classification and Compensation Study. Because the Clerk of Court position is not classified as part of the ACCGov Pay Plan, the position was not included in the 2018 Pay Study.
3. On June 1, 2023, the Court Administrator (an ACCGov employee for 12 years) was appointed by the Probate Judge to serve as the Clerk of Superior Court until a special election could be held in November 2023. The current clerk was elected in a special election to complete the term of the retiring Clerk. The newly elected Clerk of Court, in accordance with state statute, was granted the salary of the previous Clerk of Court for the remainder of the term (CY24 only).
4. On November 6, 2024, the Mayor and Commission approved an appropriation of \$17,857 to the FY25 Operating Budget for Probate Court, Compensation – Supplemental and authorized staff to amend the supplement amount of the Judge, effective January 1, 2025.
5. On November 6, 2024, the Mayor and Commission approved an appropriation of \$34,824 to the FY25 Operating Budget for Magistrate Court, Compensation – Supplemental and authorized staff to amend the supplement amounts of the Chief Magistrate and two (2) Associate Magistrates, effective January 1, 2025.
6. On June 3, 2025, the Mayor and Commission adopted the FY26 Operating and Capital Budget, providing funding for ACCGov, including salaries and operating costs for the Office of the Clerk of Courts and a 4% market increase for all ACCGov employees.
7. On December 2, 2025, the Mayor and Commission approved an appropriation of \$10,608 (January – June \$5,304) to the FY26 Operating Budget for Probate Court,

Compensation – Supplemental and authorized staff to amend the supplement amount of the Probate Judges, effective January 1, 2026.

8. On December 2, 2025, the Mayor and Commission approved an appropriation of \$15,336 (January – June \$7,668) to the FY26 Operating Budget for Magistrate Court, Compensation – Supplemental and authorized staff to amend the supplement amounts of the Chief Magistrate and two (2) Associate Magistrates, effective January 1, 2026.

FACTS & ISSUES:

1. The Clerk of Superior Court position is locally paid. The statutory calculation without a supplement represents the minimum required salary. Based on the current population of Athens-Clarke County, longevity increase, cost of living increases, and any statutory supplements, the minimum salary for Clerk of Superior Court on January 1, 2025 using the statutory formula is \$107,556.41.
2. Because the Clerk of Superior Court is not classified as part of the ACCGov Pay Plan, the position was excluded from the 2018 Pay Study. Furthermore, unlike other unclassified positions, the Clerk of Superior Court did not complete a Comprehensive Position Questionnaire to properly identify the pay grade associated with the position.
3. Other unclassified positions did undergo an evaluation by Human Resources and were assigned a new pay grade. In consultation with the ACCGov Attorney's Office, it was advised that ACCGov continue to use the statutory calculation with an appropriate supplement rather than simply assign unclassified positions to a ACCGov pay grade.
4. ACCGov is currently undergoing another Pay Study. The Clerk of Superior Court has not been included in the current pay study in order to properly identify the pay grade associated with the position.
5. There was no market (cost-of-living) increase given by the State of Georgia for 2026. In accordance with the annual State Salary Review and resulting Salary Guide, the local supplement amount is to be reviewed annually and adjusted consistent with any state legislation, locally adopted classification system, and/or local annual pay adjustments. During the annual review of judicial officeholders, the state of Georgia establishes a minimum salary for implementation in January. Following state action, the Court may request adjustment to the supplement during the autumn for the coming calendar year based upon any local market increases and longevity calculation.
6. ACCGov granted a 4% market increase to employees on the Unified Plan for FY26 beginning July 1, 2025. The ACCGov classification system is a legally defensible and sound structure to observe and maintain relative internal and external equity amidst the 400+ positions across the government. ACCGov thereby receives regular,

coordinated management of pay plans and ensures a balance of sustainable pay, as well as sustainable service level commitments. FY26 market increases were set at 4% for ACCGov employees to facilitate proper maintenance of compensation.

7. The Clerk of Superior/State Court position is locally paid, and the salary is determined using the statutory calculation. The required salary of the Clerk of Courts (see **Attachment #2**) is based on the current population of Athens-Clarke County, longevity increase, state-granted cost of living increases, statutory supplements, and a local supplement. In accordance with pay increases implemented for ACCGov employees on July 1, 2026, annual maintenance of the Clerk of Courts salary would suggest an increase of the current supplement equivalent to a 4% increase in the total salary, \$4,502.
8. The Clerk of Superior Court serves as the tax appeal administrator, providing the Board of Equalization with oversight, facilities, and administrative assistance. In accordance with O.C.G.A 48-5-311 (d)(4)(C.1), counties are required to include a separate line item in the budget for the compensation of the appeal administrator for the performance of duties required under this code section (see Step 9 of **Attachment #2**).
9. These recommendations support the following Mayor and Commission Strategic Plan Goal and Strategy:
 - **Organizational Improvement** – *Develop strategies to recruit, reward, and retain high performing employees, both internally and externally, including individuals coming out of the justice system*

OPTIONS:

1. Mayor and Commission
 - a. Approve an appropriation of \$4,502 to the FY26 Operating Budget for Clerk of Courts, Compensation – Supplemental and authorize staff to amend the supplement amount of the Clerk of Superior Court, effective January 2026.
 - b. Approve an appropriation of \$4,630 to the FY26 Operating Budget for the Tax Appeal Administrator Supplement for the Clerk of Superior Court (Attachment #2, step 9 of the statutory calculation worksheet);
 - c. Authorize staff to complete a Comprehensive Position Questionnaire to properly identify the pay grade associated with the required qualifications and skillset of the position; and

- d. Adopt an ordinance amending the FY26 Operating Budget for Clerk of Court expenses (**Attachment #1**).
2. Mayor and Commission deny request.
3. Mayor and Commission Defined Option.

DEPARTMENT RECOMMENDED ACTION: Option #1 a, b, c & d

DEPARTMENT:

Prepared by: Elisa Zarate



12/23/2025

Elisa Zarate

Date:

ADMINISTRATIVE COMMENTS: As recommended previously by the Attorney's Office, the Manager's Office would recommend that ACCGov continue to use the statutory calculation with an appropriate supplement for the Clerk of Superior/State Court rather than assigning unclassified positions to a ACCGov pay grade. This is consistent with other elected officials throughout ACCGov.

If the M&C wishes to support the request outlined in the agenda report, the Manager's Office would not recommend approval of item c.

ADMINISTRATIVE RECOMMENDATION: Option #1 a, b, & d



January 14, 2026

Bob Cowell, Manager

Date:

ATTACHMENTS:

Attachment #1: Clerk of Superior/State Courts Budget Amendment
Attachment #2 - Clerk of Court Salary Calculation

Attachment #1

AN ORDINANCE TO AMEND THE FY2026 OPERATING AND CAPITAL BUDGET FOR ATHENS-CLARKE COUNTY, GEORGIA SO AS TO PROVIDE FUNDING FROM OPERATING CONTINGENCY FOR AN EMPLOYEE MARKET INCREASE AND TAX APPEAL ADMINISTRATOR SUPPLEMENT; AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES.

The Commission of Athens-Clarke County, Georgia hereby ordains as follows:

SECTION 1. The Commission of Athens-Clarke County, Georgia desires to amend the General Fund to provide funding from operating contingency for an employee market increase and tax appeal administrator supplement. Said Operating budget is hereby amended as follows:

General Fund:

EXPENDITURES:

Decrease:

Other General Administration	
Contingency	\$13,634

Increase:

Clerk of Courts	
Personal Services	\$13,634

SECTION 2. All ordinances or parts of ordinances in conflict herewith are hereby repealed.

Athens-Clarke County
MEMORANDUM

TO: Elisa Zarate, Clerk of Superior Court

FROM: Vickie Casella, Human Resources Director **VO**

SUBJECT: 2025 Salary

DATE: January 8, 2025

The purpose of this memorandum is to indicate your salary effective January 1, 2025.

Step 1: Base Salary from Schedule of Base Salaries Table

Step 2: Add Any Required Supplements (State Court Supplement)

Jury Management Supplement

Subtotal of base salary and required supplements

Step 3: Longevity ** (applicable to some county officers)

Enter the number of 4-year terms served since 1977

5% increase (Effective start date of term 1/2025. Longevity increase 1/2029).

(60% Maximum) Multiply by base salary and
required supplements from Step 2).

Add longevity increase to subtotal of base salary
and required supplements

Step 4: COLA (The below COLA is required for all county

officers, regardless of whether they were actually in office during the COLA year)

COLA 2020 (2%)
COLA 2021 (0%)
COLA 2022 (0%)
COLA 2023 (\$5000)
COLA 2024 (\$2000)
COLA 2025 (4% up to \$3000)

Step 5: Add any local supplements granted by the county
governing authority. M&C approved supplement effective 7/1/18.

Total Salary

Due to payroll calculations and rounding, the total salary shown above may be different than
the salary. Please contact Teresa Scruggs or Sara Ivy at 613-3090 if you have questions.

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