

**AN OVERVIEW OF VENUES IN GEORGIA
(THE GOOD, THE BAD AND THE UGLY)**

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In Georgia and with some exceptions, lawsuits are generally filed in the county where the Defendants reside. In the case of corporate defendants, lawsuits are filed in the county where the registered agent of the corporation is located or the county where the corporation maintains an office and does business. In cases involving multiple, in-state defendants, the Plaintiff is entitled to select in which county to file his/her lawsuit. However, should the defendant upon which venue is based be dismissed, venue must be transferred to a county where one of the remaining defendants reside.

Although most rural counties in Georgia tend to be fairly conservative in their verdicts, several counties are known to be more Plaintiff oriented than others. For example, several urban counties such as Muscogee (Columbus), Dougherty (Albany), Richmond (Augusta) and Chatham (Savannah) counties are known to be particularly Plaintiff friendly. Although Fulton county (Atlanta) was generally accepted by the bar as being more liberal in its verdicts, that has changed in the last few years. This is because of the revitalization of the downtown area and the fact that affluent Alpharetta and Johns Creek communities are also located in Fulton county. However, great care should be taken in deciding whether to proceed with trial in Fulton county. Jury pools vary widely in Fulton county. As a result, it is difficult to determine what kind of jury will be selected prior to trial.

The Atlanta suburban counties of Dekalb and Clayton are known to be unpredictable. The demographics in Clayton county, in particular, have changed drastically in the last few years. Higher income households are now moving out of Clayton county since the county school district recently lost its accreditation. As a result, the verdicts in Clayton county have steadily increased over the last year or so. Based on the verdict reporters I have reviewed, it appears that Clayton county juries are more willing to award higher pain and suffering awards. Dekalb county does tend to be more conservative in verdicts where the special damages are generally low; however, it has been a county that has returned some of the highest verdicts in the state. Recently, Douglas county (slightly west of Atlanta) has returned some large verdicts as well.

Interestingly enough, two metro Atlanta counties, Gwinnett and Cobb, are known to be the most conservative in the state. Juries in these counties will often only award special damages without any award for pain and suffering. These counties also have a higher percentage of defense verdicts. That being said, these counties are also known to return large verdicts in instances where Defendants have engaged in egregious conduct or where punitive damages are warranted. If you are defending a lawsuit in Georgia, you want your venue to be in either Cobb or Gwinnett counties.

Some counties defy the accepted conventional wisdom of attorneys in this state concerning whether they generally return higher or lower verdicts. Some rural counties such as Echols, Quitman, Atkinson, Cherokee and Brantley counties are known to return higher than average verdicts. Other counties such as Floyd County (Rome), Bibb (Macon) and Clarke (Athens), Hall (Gainesville), Fayette (Fayetteville) and Lowndes (Valdosta) counties tend to be more conservative in their verdicts..

Because of the great amount of variation in jury pools in Georgia (depending on the county) great care should be taken in deciding whether to proceed with trial, to consider mediation as an alternative method of dispute resolution or settlement.

For a map of Georgia Counties, please refer to the following website: www.georgiacountymap.com