

House Bill 873

By: Representatives Gunter of the 8<sup>th</sup>, Smith of the 18<sup>th</sup>, Burchett of the 176<sup>th</sup>, Reeves of the 99<sup>th</sup>, Leverett of the 123<sup>rd</sup>, and others

A BILL TO BE ENTITLED  
AN ACT

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

8 BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF GEORGIA:

9 **SECTION 1.**

10 Title 15 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated, relating to courts, is amended by revising  
11 subsection (a) of Code Section 15-1-18, relating to Council of Accountability Court Judges  
12 of Georgia, as follows:

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

14 (1) 'Accountability court' means a superior, state, or juvenile court that has a drug court  
15 division, mental health court division, veterans court division, juvenile treatment court

16 division, or operating under the influence court division, or a juvenile court that has a  
17 family treatment court division.

18 (2) 'Council' means the Council of Accountability Court Judges of Georgia."

19 **SECTION 2.**

20 Said title is further amended in Chapter 11, relating to the juvenile code, by adding a new  
21 Code section to read as follows:

22 "15-11-71.

23 (a)(1) As used in this subsection, the term 'risk and needs assessment' means an actuarial  
24 tool approved by the Council of Accountability Court Judges of Georgia and validated  
25 on a target population that is scientifically proven to determine an individual's risk to  
26 recidivate and to identify criminogenic risk factors that, when properly addressed, can  
27 reduce such individual's likelihood of committing future delinquent or criminal behavior.

28 (2) As used in this subsection, the term 'child' has the same meaning as defined in Code  
29 Section 15-11-2.

30 (3) Any juvenile court may establish a juvenile treatment court division to provide an  
31 alternative to the traditional judicial system for the disposition of juvenile delinquency  
32 and child in need of services cases. The goal of a juvenile treatment court division is to  
33 reduce the likelihood of family disruption or removal to an alternative placement, reduce  
34 the use of detention and commitments to the state, reduce recidivism, and increase  
35 likelihood of successful rehabilitation through early, continuous, and intense judicially  
36 supervised treatment by:

37 (A) Reducing alcohol or drug abuse and addiction in the child;

38 (B) Treating the mental and behavioral health and related needs of the child;

39 (C) Increasing the educational, personal, familial, and societal accountability of the  
40 child;

41 (D) Preventing and reducing gang involvement and affiliation; and

42 (E) Promoting effective intervention and use of resources among child welfare  
43 personnel, law enforcement agencies, treatment providers, community agencies, the  
44 department of juvenile justice, independent probation officers, and the courts.

45 (4) In any delinquency or child in need of services proceeding, when the child meets the  
46 eligibility criteria for the juvenile treatment court division, such case may be assigned to  
47 the juvenile treatment court:

48 (A) Prior to the entry of adjudication or disposition if the prosecuting attorney or other  
49 petitioner consents;

50 (B) As part of a disposition in a case; or

51 (C) Upon modification or revocation of probation or a new petition for a violation of  
52 probation.

53 (5) Each juvenile treatment court division shall establish a planning group to develop a  
54 work plan. The planning group shall include the judges, prosecuting attorneys, sheriffs  
55 or their designees, public defenders, community supervision officers, and probation  
56 officers and may include other individuals and agencies that the court finds have  
57 expertise in services available to children. The work plan shall address the operations,  
58 coordination, resource management, information management, and evaluation needs of  
59 the juvenile treatment court division. The work plan shall include juvenile treatment  
60 court division policies and practices related to the implementation of the standards and  
61 practices developed pursuant to this paragraph. The work plan shall ensure a risk and  
62 needs assessment is used to identify the likelihood of recidivating and identify the needs  
63 that, when met, reduce recidivism. The work plan shall include eligibility criteria for the  
64 juvenile treatment court division. The juvenile treatment court division shall combine  
65 judicial supervision, treatment of juvenile treatment court division participants, drug  
66 testing, and mental health treatment.

67 (6)(A) The Council of Accountability Court Judges of Georgia shall establish standards  
68 and practices for juvenile treatment court divisions, taking into consideration guidelines

69 and principles based on current research and findings that are published by experts on  
70 the health needs and treatment options for children. Standards and practices shall  
71 include, but shall not be limited to, the use of a risk and needs assessment to identify  
72 the likelihood of recidivating and identify the needs that, when met, reduce recidivism.  
73 The Council of Accountability Court Judges of Georgia shall update its standards and  
74 practices to incorporate research, findings, and developments in the juvenile treatment  
75 court field. The Council of Accountability Court Judges of Georgia may further adopt  
76 standards and practices for separate tracks of juvenile treatment courts such as, but not  
77 limited to, a juvenile drug court track or a juvenile mental health court track. Each  
78 juvenile treatment court division shall adopt policies and practices that are consistent  
79 with the standards and practices published by the Council of Accountability Court  
80 Judges of Georgia.

81 (B) The Council of Accountability Court Judges of Georgia shall provide technical  
82 assistance to the juvenile treatment court division to assist them with the  
83 implementation of policies and practices, including, but not limited to, guidance on the  
84 implementation of risk and needs assessments in the juvenile treatment court division.

85 (C) The Council of Accountability Court Judges of Georgia shall create and manage  
86 a certification and peer review process to ensure juvenile treatment court divisions are  
87 adhering to the Council of Accountability Court Judges of Georgia's standards and  
88 practices and shall create a waiver process for juvenile treatment court divisions to seek  
89 an exception to the Council of Accountability Court Judges of Georgia's standards and  
90 practices. The Council of Accountability Court Judges of Georgia shall create a  
91 certification process to allow a court to demonstrate its need for additional state grant  
92 funds, as authorized by Code Section 15-11-52, for one or more part-time judges to  
93 operate a juvenile treatment court division. In order to receive state appropriated funds,  
94 any juvenile treatment court division established on and after July 1, 2026, shall be  
95 certified pursuant to this subparagraph or, for good cause shown to the Council of

96 Accountability Court Judges of Georgia, shall receive a waiver from the Council of  
97 Accountability Court Judges of Georgia.

98 (D) On and after July 1, 2026, the award of any state funds for a juvenile treatment  
99 court division shall be conditioned upon a juvenile treatment court division attaining  
100 certification or a waiver by the Council of Accountability Court Judges of Georgia. On  
101 or before December 1, 2026, the Council of Accountability Court Judges of Georgia  
102 shall publish an annual report listing certified juvenile treatment court divisions.

103 (E) The Council of Accountability Court Judges of Georgia shall develop and manage  
104 an electronic information system for performance measurement and accept submission  
105 of performance data in a consistent format from all juvenile treatment court divisions.  
106 The Council of Accountability Court Judges of Georgia shall identify elements  
107 necessary for performance measurement, including, but not limited to, recidivism of  
108 participants in juvenile treatment court division, drug testing results, number of  
109 moderate-risk and high-risk participants in a juvenile treatment court division,  
110 participant educational improvement, the number of participants who successfully  
111 complete the program, and the number of participants who did not complete the  
112 program.

113 (F) On or before July 1, 2026, and every three years thereafter, the Council of  
114 Accountability Court Judges of Georgia shall conduct a performance peer review of the  
115 juvenile treatment court divisions for the purpose of improving juvenile treatment court  
116 division policies and practices and the certification and recertification process.

117 (7) The court instituting the juvenile treatment court division may request any of the  
118 following individuals to serve in the juvenile treatment court division:

119 (A) One or more prosecuting attorneys designated by the prosecuting attorney for the  
120 jurisdiction; and

121 (B) One or more defense attorneys designated by the public defender, comparable  
122 agency, or other means.

123 (8) The clerk of the juvenile court that is instituting the juvenile treatment court division  
124 or such clerk's designee shall serve as the clerk of the juvenile treatment court division.

125 (9) The court instituting the juvenile treatment court division may request other  
126 employees of the court, including, but not limited to, community supervision officers,  
127 probation officers, Department of Juvenile Justice probation officers, other employees of  
128 the court, and other interested agencies to perform duties for the juvenile treatment court  
129 division. Such individuals shall perform duties as directed by the judges of the juvenile  
130 treatment court division.

131 (10) The court instituting the juvenile treatment court division may enter into agreements  
132 with other courts and agencies for the assignment of personnel and probation supervision  
133 from other courts and agencies to the juvenile treatment court division.

134 (11) Expenses for salaries, equipment, services, and supplies incurred in implementing  
135 this Code section may be paid from state funds, funds of the county or political  
136 subdivision implementing such juvenile treatment court division, federal grant funds, and  
137 funds from private donations.

138 (b) Each juvenile treatment court division shall establish written criteria which define the  
139 successful completion of the juvenile treatment court division program and which may  
140 provide for dismissal of charges upon successful completion. Programs may be  
141 pre-adjudication or post-adjudication. Any admission or plea of nolo contendere entered  
142 pursuant to this Code section shall not be withdrawn without the consent of the court.

143 (c) Any statement made by a juvenile treatment court division participant as part of  
144 participation in such court division, or any report made by the staff of such court division  
145 or program connected to such court division, regarding a participant's substance usage shall  
146 not be admissible as evidence against the participant in any legal proceeding or  
147 prosecution; provided, however, that, if the participant violates the conditions of his or her  
148 participation in the program or is terminated from the juvenile treatment court division, the

149 reasons for the violation or termination may be considered in sanctioning, sentencing, or  
150 otherwise disposing of the participant's case.

151 (d) Notwithstanding any provision of law to the contrary, the juvenile treatment court  
152 division shall be provided, upon request, with access to all records relevant to the treatment  
153 of the juvenile treatment court division participant from any state or local government  
154 agency. All records and proceedings of the juvenile treatment court, including, but not  
155 limited to, the contents of any case management system, shall be treated as confidential,  
156 shall not be disclosed to any person outside of the juvenile treatment court division, and  
157 shall not be subject to Article 4 of Chapter 18 of Title 50, relating to open records, or  
158 subject to subpoena, discovery, or introduction into evidence in any civil or criminal  
159 proceeding. Such records and the contents thereof shall be maintained by the juvenile  
160 treatment court division in a confidential file not available to the public.

161 (e) Any fees received by a juvenile treatment court division from a juvenile treatment court  
162 division participant as payment for treatment and services shall not be considered as court  
163 costs or a fine.

164 (f) The court may have the authority to accept grants, donations, and other proceeds from  
165 outside sources for the purpose of supporting the juvenile treatment court division. Any  
166 such grants, donations, or proceeds shall be retained by the juvenile treatment court  
167 division for expenses."

168 **SECTION 3.**

169 This Act shall become effective on July 1, 2024.

170 **SECTION 4.**

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