

Georgian attorneys visit Atlanta to train in jury trials

Contributed article

Friday, June 13



Five Georgian attorneys recently returned home after a week of legal education in the United States, part of an ongoing effort to introduce jury trials to Georgia.

The attorneys were hosted by the Atlanta law firm Hall, Booth, Smith & Slover, P.C., in conjunction with the United States Congress' Open World Program. The attorney delegation engaged in an intensive week of training in jury trials at Emory University. As the delegation returns home, each attorney will help implement jury trials here next year.

Georgian judges currently preside over both criminal and civil cases. They determine the facts and the law. Soon, juries will determine the facts.

The jury trial system, the bedrock of the English common law system, aims to increase fairness and foster public participation and confidence in the government. The lawyers that visited Atlanta believe this confidence is needed in Georgia.

As Irakli Kotetishvili, head of the central administration for the Georgian prosecutors service, said: "We need to raise public confidence in the judiciary, and it is important for the public to participate in the execution of justice."

They also recognize that implementing a trial by jury system will be challenging. Nino Janisashvili, assistant director of the Georgian Young Lawyers Association, highlighted one of those challenges in the context of the jury selection process, known as voir dire:

"People in Georgia are not used to talking about these issues in front of others," she said.

"It is one of many obstacles, both practical and social, to the successful transformation of Georgia's legal system."

Koba Bochorishvili, the executive director for the Center for Protection of Constitutional Rights, likewise acknowledges that the public must participate in this process.

"In order to effect reform, we must familiarize society with the system and change public perception of the judiciary," he said.

Efforts to inform Georgian citizens are already underway, and will include public demonstrations of jury trials on the television and internet.

Two other recognized attorneys also participated in the program, Meliton Benidze and Tamar Chubinidze.

Meliton Benidze heads Tbilisi Legal Aid, an office of 26 employees that represents poor defendants.

Tamar Chubinidze is the deputy head of the central administration of the prosecution service.

Beyond gaining academic education, the attorney delegates built upon the strong relationships that exist between Atlanta, Georgia and Tbilisi, Georgia. In particular, the Atlanta-Tbilisi Sister City Committee, in conjunction with Hall, Booth, Smith & Slover, P.C., hosted multiple events for the delegates. The committee put the visiting lawyers in touch with Georgians who live in Atlanta and encouraged future cooperation between the two cities. The committee is actively implementing a plan to foster economic, governmental, humanitarian, and educational progress for Georgians.

The recognized law firm of Hall, Booth, Smith and Slover, P.C. expressed great confidence in the attorneys.

"They are all bright and dedicated to taking to their country the rule of law and the systems we take for granted," said partner Alex Booth.

The law firm and the committee have expressed a continued desire to see the Republic of Georgia prosper and are developing plans to bring legal training to Georgia in the fall.