



FULTON COUNTY, GEORGIA
OFFICE OF THE COUNTY AUDITOR
Passport Audit
October 20, 2025

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INTRODUCTION

The Office of the County Auditor performed an audit of the passport process administered by the Clerk of Superior and Magistrate Courts as a special request from Commissioner Bob Ellis, District 2.

BACKGROUND

The Fulton County Clerk of Superior and Magistrate Courts, “the Clerk’s Office”, plays a vital role in the judicial process as Clerk for both the Superior and Magistrate Courts in Georgia’s largest and most populous county. This office is responsible for maintaining all official court records, including civil, criminal, and real estate filings. It processes legal documents, manages and safeguards court records, issues court-related documents, and supports the day-to-day operations of the courts. In addition, the Clerk’s Office provides other public services, such as passport processing and notary services.

The Office of the County Auditor was tasked with conducting an audit of the passport process. The Clerk’s Office offers the following passport services at the Fulton County Justice Tower and the North and South Service Centers.

- **Passport services:** Accept and process passport applications in partnership with the U.S Department of State (DOS) as official passport agents.

The Clerk’s Office is responsible for application intake, document verification, security, storage, and transmittal of applications and documentation. Since 2021, the Clerk’s Office has processed over 11,000 passports annually in partnership with the DOS.

OBJECTIVE

The objectives of the audit were to evaluate the passport processing function administered by the Clerk’s Office and to determine whether financial and operational controls are operating efficiently and effectively.

SCOPE

The scope of this audit was from January 1, 2020, through December 31, 2024. Additional information was obtained from January 1, 2025, through June 30, 2025.

METHODOLOGY

We conducted this audit in accordance with *Generally Accepted Government Auditing Standards* (GAGAS). Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

To achieve our audit objectives, we performed the following audit procedures:

- Conducted interviews with key staff to determine the established processes and procedures related to the passport process;
- Performed walkthroughs to observe key processes and procedures related to daily passport operations;
- Reviewed departmental organizational chart;
- Reviewed Standard Operating Procedures for Passport Services;
- Reviewed the U.S. Department of State Passport Agent’s Reference Guide;
- Identified internal controls and reviewed for operational efficiency;
- Reviewed passport transmittals of processed applications and reconciliation reports;
- Observed the financial reporting process for reporting distributions made by the Clerk of Superior and Magistrate Courts, including passport fees;
- Reviewed Treasurer’s Distribution Reports;
- Reviewed Senate Bill (SB 19) along with other applicable laws; and
- Reviewed U.S. Department of State compliance audit of the passport process

We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and recommendations based on our audit objectives.

PASSPORT PROCESS

Applicants may submit passport applications by scheduling an appointment at one of the three processing locations via [Fultonclerk.org](https://fultonclerk.org) or as a walk-in.

Upon arrival, applicants begin the process at a check-in kiosk, where a ticket is created and tracked through the Q-Flow ticketing system. This system monitors processing flow and notifies applicants of their place in line via a “Now Serving” display and an audible notification. Deputy Clerks who process passport applications are certified as Passport Acceptance Agents; every agent must meet specific qualifications and undergo mandatory annual training.

The processes discussed below were reviewed and found to be operating effectively:

The agent interviews the applicant, collects the required documentation, verifies the validity of the documents, and confirms the applicant's identity in accordance with DOS guidelines. Applicant information is entered into the Odyssey Court System and recorded on an electronic passport transmittal sheet containing information such as the passport type and applicable fees.

Application fees, including any fees for expedited processing, can be paid by personal check, money order, or cashier's check made payable to the DOS. Payments are sent to the DOS, together with the application. Additionally, a separate passport execution fee or processing fee payable to the Clerk's Office is collected for each application. The following outlines the next steps in the passport process:

- The applicant signs and attests to the accuracy of the information provided on the application.
- The acceptance agent certifies the application with an official stamped seal.
- Completed applications are:
 - Securely stored until the end of each business day
 - Sent to the DOS via a trackable delivery method
- All completed applications, supporting documents, and passport payments (excluding the \$35 processing fee) are sent directly to the DOS. The Clerk's Office does not retain any of these items.
- Transmittal sheets are copied and stored by the Clerk's Office and retained for a maximum of two years, as required by the DOS.
- A reconciliation of the passport fees collected is performed daily by the Superior Court Treasurer.

Passport application information is protected under the Privacy Act of 1974, which prohibits the unauthorized disclosure of personal information contained in federal records. Additionally, compliance audits are conducted every two years by the DOS, with the most recent audit conducted on January 29, 2025.

PASSPORT FEES

Passport processing fees are set by the U.S. Department of State, under authority granted by Congress, as noted in 22 U.S.C. § 214(a)(1). The schedule of these fees is published in 22 C.F.R. 22.1. Additionally, Georgia Code § 15-6-77 grants clerks of superior courts the authority to charge and collect passport fees as personal compensation. In accordance with this statute, a processing fee of \$35 is collected for each passport application processed by the Clerk's Office. This fee is separate from any passport application fees collected on behalf of the DOS.

Effective January 1, 2025, Georgia Senate Bill 19 (SB 19) amended O.C.G.A § 15-6-77 to clarify that Clerks of Superior Court are authorized to collect passport processing fees as personal compensation for the performance of such duties. The legislation also mandates that clerks report these fees quarterly to their county governing authority. We note that as of the time of this audit, the Clerk has complied with SB 19 by submitting reports for the first and second quarters of 2025 to the Fulton County Governing Authority. Total fees reported for the first and second quarters of 2025 were \$150,010 and \$114,100, respectively.

Prior to being elected in 2024 for a full term of four years, the current Clerk was appointed as the interim Clerk when the former Clerk resigned, effective June 30, 2023. This appointment was for the remaining term from June 30, 2023, through December 31, 2024.

Below are the number of passports processed and the respective fees collected by the Fulton County Clerk's Office for each year within the scope of our audit.

	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Number of Passports Processed	2,796	11,197	18,032	15,143	11,868
Passport Processing Fees Collected	\$ 97,860	\$ 391,895	\$ 631,120	*\$ 530,005	\$ 415,380

Source: Fulton County Clerk's Office

*In 2023, the current Clerk collected fees from July through December only, corresponding to the time she held office that year. The total fees collected during that time were approximately \$211,000.

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The audit did not reveal any reportable findings. The processes reviewed were found to be adequate and functioning properly.

CONCLUSION

Based on the audit procedures performed, operations appear to be operating efficiently. No significant issues or control weaknesses were identified.

Please provide a written response to this audit within ten (10) business days. The response should be addressed to Anthony Nicks, County Auditor, and prepared in memorandum format. Submit the completed response to Shauna Herbert, Audit Manager, in the Office of the County Auditor at shauna.herbert@fultoncountyga.gov. We would like to thank management and staff for their timely cooperation and assistance during this audit. The distribution of this report is reserved for the executive management of Fulton County and the Board of Commissioners.