For more information on organizing and managing your office's files or the State Bar of Georgia's Law Practice Management program, please contact:

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File Opening and Closing Checklists

When a new file is opened, the following should always be done:

- Create a new matter information sheet (filled out by the attorney or legal assistant) to place within the file.
- Enter all new client and matter information into your firm’s billing and/or case management systems.
- If you do not have an automated system, set up important client information on a card, cross-reference it, and place in an “open file” box.
- NEVER open a file without associating it with some sort of calendar (tickler/deadline) entry on the firm’s calendar.

For your own protection as well as the good organization of your office, adopt the following procedures for closing files:

- Clearly indicate that you want a file to be closed (use a form if necessary).
- Have the bookkeeper determine whether the client has paid in full; if the client hasn’t paid, the file should be left open until payment is made. The trust balance should be zero.
- Archive case in billing and/or case management systems; remove from active file list and “open file” box.
- Have a checklist “travel” with the file so that each person involved can initial her step of the process.
- Store the closed files separately from the open files.
- Renumber closed files to indicate the date the file was closed.

File Organization and Maintenance

Several key components to a good filing system include:

- A master index or log of all files in the office maintained through your billing or case management software or manually if you do not have these processes automated.
- A log of all documents within each file.
- As far as organizing the material within the file goes, there are several adequate alternate methods, which include:
  * using the time-honored method of attaching a two-hole punch clip to either side of the file folder, and placing all correspondence in chronological order on one side, and all court documents in chronological order on the other.
  * using a more sophisticated (and more expensive) variation of the above, where each file has a divider or two in the middle, each of which has a two-hole clip in it.
  * using an accordion folder or some other “master file folder” and within it placing multiple small manila files labeled as to contents.
  * three-hole punching all material and keeping a case “notebook,” with materials organized chronologically behind tabs separating different topic areas.

File Location

Keep up with the files in your office by adhering to the following:

- All active files for a particular workgroup should be stored in a central location, regardless of which attorney is primarily responsible for them.
- Files should remain in the file storage area unless they are currently being worked on.
- Files that are currently being worked on should be on the desk of the attorney, legal assistant or secretary doing the work until, and only until, that work is completed. Files should be checked out to a particular person using a check-out log, card, or user-defined entry in a case management program.
- When work is completed on a file, it should be returned to the central storage area with a tickler date put into the case management system that shows when the file should be pulled next.
- Strongly discourage staff from taking files home with them.
- File clerks should not move whole files around; if a piece of information within the file needs to be copied, note the removal of the document in the file’s internal log.
- As soon as a file is closed, it should be renumbered and transferred to a closed file storage location on-site.
- After a specific period of time, the file should be destroyed in accordance with your office’s file retention and destruction policy.