



From THE DESK of

NORMAN H. CUADRA

CHIEF JUDGE,
CITY OF SUWANEЕ MUNICIPAL COURT

“I got a ticket.”

You look at your teenager in disbelief as they utter these words. Your mind starts to count the zeros added to your monthly insurance premium. Maybe you can bake a cake with a file in it for when they go to jail?

“When is your court date?”

“Uh, tomorrow?”

Do you panic now, or later? Is there any “HOPE?”



The Suwanee HOPE Program was developed to educate first-time offenders under the age of 21 about the dangers of alcohol, drugs, texting, and speeding. By requiring conditions such as community service, educational videos, and in-person programming, HOPE allows these drivers the opportunity to reduce their charge. In the last eight years, approximately 4,000 young drivers have participated.

The first phase of the program consists of an initial court appearance: drivers watch a video produced by City of Suwanee court personnel on the dangers of texting, speeding, and drug use. The young drivers then meet with a prosecutor who makes a recommendation on sentencing, gives a reasonable period of time to complete the conditions of the program, and sets a return date for court review.

The next phase requires the driver to return to court for

disposition with a Suwanee Municipal Court judge. The judge will review the driver’s rights, acceptance and completion of requirements, and finally, approve the reduction in the charge. By completing the conditions of the program, most drivers avoid license suspensions and exorbitant insurance premiums.

HOPE provides an opportunity to educate young drivers, and hopefully eliminate repeat driving offenses. Rather than suspending driver licenses and increasing family insurance premiums, the HOPE program instead makes use of the opportunity to highlight the consequences of impaired and dangerous driving.

Judge Norman Cuadra has been a municipal court judge for the last 17 years. He has also been a practicing attorney for 27 years working on criminal, family, and personal injury law cases. He and his family live in the Suwanee area and are active in the community.

THE HISTORY OF HOPE

In 2015, a Georgia law was changed to allow offenders under the age of 17 to potentially appear in front of a jury, rather than a judge in a municipal court, as the law stated prior. Suwanee Chief Judge Norman Cuadra thought that this type of trial would be detrimental to a youth with a minor violation, and began creating a way to retain jurisdiction over these cases – and the City of Suwanee’s HOPE program was born. The Georgia Municipal Court Clerks’ Council recognized Suwanee Municipal Court with the distinguished Program of the Year award in 2017 for the HOPE program.