



**GEORGIA HEIRS PROPERTY  
LAW CENTER**

**Quarterly Update, November 11, 2019**

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Heirs property is the hidden story behind blight and generational poverty throughout Georgia. In 2017, USDA Forest Service and UGA Carl Vinson researchers identified probable heirs property in 10 non-metro Georgia counties with a total tax appraised value of over two billion dollars (\$2,148,951,361), equity that can't be used. If heirs property in 10 counties represents over \$2 billion in locked equity, the total tax appraised value of probable heirs property undermining Georgia's economy is over **\$34 billion**.

The Georgia Heirs Property Law Center, Inc. ("the Center") increases generational wealth, social justice, and community stability by securing and preserving property rights. Since 2015, the Center has provided legal representation and closed **369** matters. The Center has conducted **8** wills clinics and completed **159** estate plans for clients. The Center has completed **323** community outreach programs, trainings and stakeholder meetings in **47** counties and provided information and educational materials to over **10,500** individuals. Today, the Center has **141 open** title clearing and estate planning matters involving properties in **46** counties with a total tax assessed value of **\$12.44 million**.

The Center's average client is **64.8 years old**, has an annual household income of **\$28,972**, and has property with a tax assessed value of **\$88,698.73**.

**Client Stories:**

**Martha Sawyer\*** was raised by her aunt and uncle, Mr. and Mrs. Martin\*. Ms. Sawyer discovered that the Martins were not her biological parents when she went to get her driver's license and needed her birth certificate. She lived in the Martin's home all of her life, and took care of them until they both passed away. The Martins had no biological children or wills. After their deaths, Ms. Sawyer continued living in the home and paying the property taxes. When the home fell into disrepair, Ms. Sawyer found a CDBG grant program that would help with repairs; however, the lack of clear title to the property was a barrier to her participating. Since Ms. Sawyer was raised as the Martin's daughter, the Center had to open estates for both her aunt and uncle and prove "virtual adoption" by them and therefore the only heir to the estates.

After **Mrs. Timmons\*** passed away intestate in 1997, her daughter Ms. Apple\* was appointed administrator and executed an administrator's deed of assent "as Mrs. Timmons" wanted. The administrator's deed improperly placed title in the name of only one of Mrs. Timmons's daughters and five great-grandchildren. The property should have been deeded to Mrs. Timmons's four daughters and three of her granddaughters. In 2018, Ms. Apple\* came to us as a defendant on a quiet title action brought by two of Mrs. Timmons's daughters who were left off of the deed.

The Center filed an answer and appeared with Ms. Apple before a special master. The special master submitted a report and recommendation to the judge that reformed the deed to include our client and the other proper grantees. A realtor has been hired and the property listed for \$217,000, of which our client expects to receive 8%, less her share of the special master's fees. Center staff is also working with Ms. Apple on her estate plan.

\*Name has been changed to protect client confidentiality.