



# Annual Report 2017

20th Judicial Circuit and  
Ottawa County Probate Courts  
Ottawa County, Michigan

[www.miottawa.org/Courts](http://www.miottawa.org/Courts)





April 10, 2018  
Ottawa County Board of Commissioners  
12220 Fillmore Street  
West Olive, Michigan 49460

Dear Chairperson DeJong and Commissioners:

As Chief Judges for the 20<sup>th</sup> Circuit Court and the Ottawa County Probate Court, it is our pleasure to present the 2017 Annual Report. This document will provide insight regarding the important work of the judicial branch of government in our democratic republic. The judges of the Circuit and Probate courts strive to be faithful stewards of public resources, while fulfilling our constitutional duty to do justice in every case presented to the courts. We are also mindful of the generous support provided by the Board of Commissioners and the collaborative relationships we enjoy with elected officials, county administration, and the many county employees with whom the courts interact on a regular basis, without which the courts would be unable to provide excellent service to the citizens of Ottawa County.

Beginning with the investiture of the Hon. Karen J. Miedema, our newest Circuit Court Judge, 2017 was a year of change and exploration. Caseloads remained steady, yet the complexity of legal issues presented to our courts increased, along with heightened concerns regarding the safety and security of citizens and court staff required to use public facilities. In addition, significant statewide changes required the attention of judges and court administration. For example, the expansion of electronic filing of court cases by the Michigan Supreme Court, the development of new standards for court appointed counsel required by the Michigan Legislature through the Indigent Defense Commission, significant and costly changes to administrative rules governing the Child Care Fund by the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services, and the imposition of new court performance measures by the State Court Administrative Office, to name just a few.

Fortunately, the Circuit and Probate courts of Ottawa County have an outstanding judiciary, competent court administration, and dedicated employees who are focused on providing the best public service possible. As an organization, the courts are resourceful and nimble enough to successfully navigate change. This is due in large part to the strategic planning process the courts have used for fifteen years to clearly identify our mission and to collectively update goals, ensuring high performance in all aspects of court operations. As Chief Judges, we are proud of the exemplary work completed by judges and court staff in 2017. We are equally aware of the continual need to learn and improve. We pledge to be good stewards of the resources provided by the citizens of Ottawa County and to daily fulfill our mission “*to administer justice and restore wholeness in a manner that inspires public trust.*”

Very truly yours,

*Jon A. Van Allsburg*

Hon. Jon A. Van Allsburg  
Chief Judge, 20<sup>th</sup> Circuit Court

*Mark A. Feyen*

Hon. Mark A. Feyen  
Chief Judge, Ottawa County Probate Court

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# The 20th Judicial Circuit and Ottawa County Probate Courts 2017 Annual Report

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## *To Administer Justice...*

Each year the Annual Report for the Circuit and Probate Courts focuses on a theme selected by the Courts' Strategic Planning Oversight Team. Last year it was determined the 2017-2019 Annual Reports would use the three components of the Courts' Mission Statement as a focal point to share important information about court performance, court culture, and court values. The mission simply states the purpose of the courts is "to administer justice and restore wholeness in a manner that inspires public trust". This year, the 2017 Annual Report includes significant information about court process and caseload statistics to paint a clear picture of how the rule of law is administered in Ottawa County. The 2018 Annual Report will provide a greater focus on the many court programs available to local citizens, which benefit court users as well as their families and helps ensure Ottawa County maintains a strong and vibrant community. The 2019 Annual Report will discuss public trust and confidence in the courts, which is critical to the success of democratic institutions in today's society.

The administration of justice is a not a frequent topic of conversation for most people and yet it can significantly impact communities, families and individuals in many ways. Media pundits may focus attention on the appointment process for federal judges as a newsworthy story, yet more that 90% of all court cases handled in the United States are conducted in state trial courts like our local circuit and probate courts. This is where the clear majority of citizens seek justice in individual cases. To effectively administer justice, courts must protect constitutional rights by providing court appointed counsel, ensuring we have jurors available to hear evidence and decide cases, providing clear notices so litigants know when to be in court and clear judicial opinions and orders, so they fully understand what happened in court and what is expected of them. In addition, courts provide interpreters, legal self-help services, disability accommodations, educational resources, specialized counseling services for juveniles and families, collection assistance for child support and restitution, and much more to be sure justice is properly served.

Although this Annual Report contains many caseload statistics, financial information and program details to ensure transparency, it is important to remember the administration of justice is a very personal event for all citizens seeking resolution of their legal problems. For this reason, judges and court employees strive to provide excellent customer service, ensure public safety by holding offenders accountable, provide evidence-based programs to serve youth and their families, assist with recovery, and much more.





# The 20th Judicial Circuit and Ottawa County Probate Courts Judges

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*“Four things belong to a judge: to hear courteously, to answer wisely, to consider soberly, and to decide impartially.” – Socrates*

The Circuit and Probate courts in Ottawa County are fortunate to have a learned and collegial group of elected judges. The 20th Circuit Court has four judges presiding over the courtrooms, handling a variety of criminal, civil, family, juvenile and appellate cases. The Probate Court has one judge who handles all probate cases and assists the Circuit Court with Family Division cases, as well as the Ottawa County Recovery Court. The Hon. Jon A. Van Allsburg and the Hon. Mark A. Feyen have been appointed by the Michigan Supreme Court to serve as Chief Judge of the Circuit Court and Probate Court, respectively. The Hon. Jon H. Hulsing serves as Chief Judge Pro Tempore of the Circuit Court.



**Jon A. Van Allsburg, Chief Judge, 20th Circuit Court**

Judge Van Allsburg graduated from West Ottawa High School and Central Michigan University. While in college, he took a semester off to backpack through Europe and North Africa. After college, he attended Detroit College of Law (now Michigan State University College of Law) and graduated with honors. He practiced law for two years in Oakland and Wayne counties, then moved back to Holland and joined what became Coupe, Van Allsburg & Pater, P.C. He practiced in the areas of family law, civil and criminal litigation, estate planning, real estate, and business law. In addition to practicing law, he taught business law for several years at both Hope College and Grand Valley State University.

In 2004, Van Allsburg ran for the newly created fourth seat in the 20<sup>th</sup> Circuit Court. He won the election, becoming the first judge in this judicial position. He handles both Family Division cases and civil matters, including business court matters, administrative appeals and appeals from the district court. In November 2016, Van Allsburg was appointed Chief Judge by the Michigan Supreme Court. Van Allsburg also serves as vice president of the Michigan Judges Association and as secretary of the State Bar of Michigan Judicial Council.



**Mark A. Feyen, Chief Judge, Ottawa County Probate Court**

Judge Feyen is the Chief Judge of the Ottawa County Probate Court. In this capacity, he handles cases involving decedent estates, guardianships, conservatorships, and the mentally ill. He hears cases in the Family Division consisting of juvenile delinquency, abuse/neglect, adoptions, and name changes. He also conducts the adult felony recovery court.

Feyen is a lifelong resident of West Michigan. He received his bachelor's degree from Calvin College and graduated from the College of Law at the University of Illinois in 1980. He then practiced law with the Grand Haven firm, Scholten Fant. Following private practice, he joined the Ottawa County Prosecutor's Office and specialized in child welfare cases. He was elected to the Probate bench in November, 1988.



### **Jon H. Hulsing, Chief Judge Pro Tempore, 20th Circuit Court**

A life-long Ottawa County resident, Judge Hulsing grew up in Spring Lake and graduated from Western Michigan Christian High School. He received his undergraduate degree from Grand Valley State University in 1986, *magna cum laud*. While attending GVSU, he was named the Criminal Justice Student of the Year. During his undergraduate years, he joined the Ottawa County Sheriff's Department as a deputy.

Hulsing became a road patrol officer with the City of Wyoming Police Department in 1985. While working full time as a police officer, Hulsing graduated *summa cum laude* from Thomas M. Cooley Law School in 1991. Prior to becoming a judge, Hulsing was an attorney in private practice for six years. He also worked as an assistant prosecutor for Ottawa County. When Judge Wesley Nykamp retired, Hulsing received a gubernatorial appointment to fill the vacancy. He was first elected in 2006 to complete the unexpired portion of Judge Nykamp's term. Hulsing hears felony criminal and general civil cases.



### **Kent D. Engle, Judge, 20th Circuit Court**

Judge Engle graduated from Zeeland High School in 1972. He earned a Bachelor's degree in Political Science from Taylor University, graduating in 1976. In 1979, he received his Juris Doctorate upon graduation from the University of Detroit School of Law.

After graduation from law school, Engle returned to Zeeland and established a solo law practice. Engle served Ottawa County as an assistant prosecuting attorney from 1988 until 2010. He handled cases ranging from traffic citations to homicides. In

November 2010, Engle was elected to the Circuit Court bench. He began serving as judge on January 1, 2011.



### **Karen J. Meidema, Judge, 20th Circuit Court**

Judge Miedema was raised on a farm with her brothers in Borculo, Michigan. Miedema graduated from Holland Christian High School in 1975. She then earned her Bachelor's degree in Criminal Justice from Ferris State University. In 1982, Miedema received her Juris Doctorate from Wayne State University Law School.

After graduating from law school, Miedema began her career as an assistant prosecuting attorney in Oakland County, handling the criminal prosecutions of misdemeanor and felony cases. Then, Miedema moved back to west Michigan and worked as an associate attorney in civil litigation for Smith, Haughey, Rice and Roegge in Grand Rapids. In 1989, Miedema returned to work as an assistant prosecuting attorney, this time in Ottawa County. Miedema was elected to serve as Judge of the Twentieth Judicial Circuit Court by the Ottawa County voters after Judge Edward R. Post's retirement at the end of 2016.

# Court Administration

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In August 1969, soon after he became chief justice of the United States, Warren E. Burger observed, “The courts of this country need management, which busy overworked judges, with drastically increased caseloads, cannot give. We need a corps of trained administrators or managers to manage and direct the machinery so that judges can concentrate on their primary duty of judging. Such managers do not now exist, except for a handful who are almost entirely confined to state court systems. We must literally create a corps of court administrators or managers and do it at once.” As a result of Chief Justice Burger’s efforts and those of other leaders in the field, court administrators have become an important part of the federal, state and local levels. (The Court Administrator: A Guide and Manual, National Association for Court Management, 2011).

It should be emphasized that all judges, particularly the chief judge, are responsible for the administration of the court. In effect, the judges are a board of directors; the chief judge is the chairman of the board and the court administrator is the executive officer responsible for executing policies adopted by the board. Alternately stated, the chief judge (or judges) and the court’s administrator form the court’s leadership team for policy making and implementation.

In the 20<sup>th</sup> Circuit and Ottawa County Probate Courts, the Court Administrator provides a clear vision and leadership for the Courts. He is responsible for all administrative functions including strategic planning initiatives, caseload management, personnel and financial management, succession planning and more. There is direct accountability to the chief judges of the Circuit and Probate courts. Daily operational management and oversight of the courts is conducted by the Courts’ Leadership Team, including the Court Administrator, Juvenile Court Director, Friend of the Court, Trial Division Director and Probate Register. The Courts’ mission, vision and values guide the Team.



**Kevin J. Bowling, JD, MSJA**  
Court Administrator



**Sandra K. Metcalf, MS**  
Juvenile Court Director



**Jennell Challa, JD**  
Friend of the Court



**Susan Franklin, JD, MPA**  
Trial Division Director



**Penni DeWitt, DBA**  
Probate Register



## *Strategic Planning and Strategic Execution*

An important hallmark of high performance courts is a well-articulated strategic plan and the ability to effectively execute the plan using available resources. The plan for the Circuit and Probate courts in Ottawa County has survived several iterations during the past fifteen years, yet the stability of the courts' mission, vision and core values is a testament to the critical and timeless nature of the guidance they provide. These guideposts have been identified by judges and court employees to demonstrate how the courts' high standards for justice and public service may be operationalized daily. As the third branch of government, courts are both independent and inter-dependent. While individual case decisions are made independently by judicial officers, the administrative operations of the courts require extensive collaboration among all three branches of government, as well as attorneys, litigants, treatment services providers, educators, and more.

### Mission of the Courts

To administer justice and restore wholeness in a manner that inspires public trust.

This mission statement intentionally embodies several of the purposes of courts. The competent administration of justice necessarily includes doing individual justice in individual cases, appearing to do justice, and providing a final resolution of legal disputes. In addition, the courts are dedicated to restoring wholeness to litigants through a variety of evidence-based programs including substance abuse treatment, family counseling, mentoring for youthful offenders, residential programming for girls, and much more. The courts also provide some relief to crime victims through the collection of court ordered restitution payments. Efforts to inspire public trust include the provision of high quality customer service, legal self-help options, and the responsible use of public resources to provide judicial services.

### Vision of the Courts

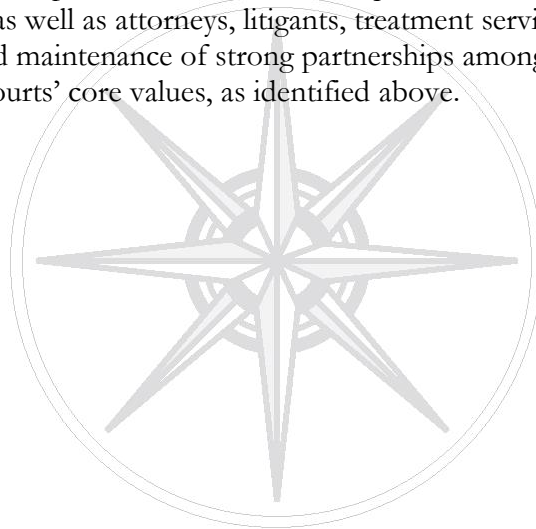
As a leader among Courts, we exemplify high standards for justice and public service.

To obtain the above vision, the courts are committed to:

- Providing justice and equal access to all;
- Processing and resolving legal matters quickly, fairly, and efficiently;
- Being nimble and embracing change; responding quickly and effectively to emerging needs and circumstances;
- Providing easy physical and electronic access to services at all court locations; using proven technologies to enhance access, services, and operational efficiencies;
- Using evidence-based and promising practices to achieve effective case and justice outcomes;
- Seeking sufficient funding and resources to meet the needs of the community and court users;
- Developing positive community relations and collaborating effectively with justice system and community partners; and
- Being an “employer-of-choice” with a stellar reputation, attracting highly skilled applicants, and ensuring judicial officers and employees are well-trained, satisfied, and engaged.



All the efforts discussed above have been identified by judges and court employees to demonstrate how the courts' high standards for justice and public service may be operationalized daily. Clear identification of the courts' mission and vision was a critical first step toward achieving effective strategic execution. It became evident early in the strategic planning process that knowing the goal and what to do to achieve the goal are certainly important, but the goals must be understood and implemented in the relational environment of the courts. As the third branch of government, courts are both independent and inter-dependent. While individual case decisions are made independently by judicial officers, the administrative operations of the courts require extensive collaboration among all three branches of government, as well as attorneys, litigants, treatment services providers, educators, and more. The development and maintenance of strong partnerships among all stakeholders is further served by the adoption of the courts' core values, as identified above.



## Caseload Trends... Circuit Court

TRIAL DIVISION	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	% Change (2016-2017)
Appeals	64	77	60	63	49	-22.2%
Criminal	936	1054	999	908	1115	+22.7%
Civil	386	434	370	364	391	+7.4%
<b>Total Trial Division Filings</b>	<b>1,386</b>	<b>1,565</b>	<b>1,429</b>	<b>1,335</b>	<b>1,555</b>	<b>+16.5%</b>
FAMILY DIVISION (Includes FOC and Juvenile Court)	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	% Change (2016-2017)
Divorce	1096	1077	1037	1031	1029	-0.2%
Other Domestic Relations	534	428	587	740	670	-9.5%
Personal Protection Orders	615	616	578	625	688	+10.0%
Delinquency (does not include Probation Violations)	1127	929	965	864	952	+10.2%
Traffic	14	19	26	23	15	-34.8%
Child Protective	112	110	100	83	74	-10.8%
Adoptions	141	113	119	143	108	-24.5%
Misc. Family	76	71	81	90	88	-2.2%
<b>Total Family Division Filings</b>	<b>3,715</b>	<b>3,363</b>	<b>3,493</b>	<b>3,599</b>	<b>3,624</b>	<b>+0.7%</b>
<b>Grand Total Filings and Reopened Cases</b>	<b>5,101</b>	<b>4,928</b>	<b>4,922</b>	<b>4,934</b>	<b>5,179</b>	<b>+5.0%</b>

## Caseload Trends... Probate Court

OTTAWA COUNTY PROBATE COURT CASELOAD TRENDS	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	% Change (2016-2017)
Estates, Trusts	387	445	434	405	396	-2.2%
Civil, Other	11	24	16	19	11	-42.1%
Guardians	204	243	203	202	214	+5.9%
Conservators	51	55	59	59	55	-6.8%
Admissions/Mental Commitments	304	336	368	354	336	-5.0%
<b>Grand Total Filings and Reopened Cases</b>	<b>957</b>	<b>1,103</b>	<b>1,080</b>	<b>1,039</b>	<b>1,012</b>	<b>-2.6%</b>

For additional caseload information, visit:

<http://courts.mi.gov/education/stats/Caseload/Pages/default.aspx>

## *Attorney Referee Activity*

The Circuit Court Attorney Referees are judicial hearing officers who are cross-trained to conduct hearings in the Family Division, including domestic relations hearings (Grand Haven and the Fillmore Complex) and juvenile delinquency and child protective proceedings (Fillmore Complex). Based on the assigned docket, Referees hear testimony and recommend orders in cases involving juvenile delinquency, abuse/neglect, adoption, child support, parenting time, paternity, uncontested divorce and more.

Overall, from 2016 to 2017 Referee hearings increased 1.6%, with a total of 3,989 hearings conducted. Domestic relations and civil proceedings increased 1.3% (2,307 hearings), including 803 child support, 541 parenting time, 167 uncontested divorce, and 796 paternity hearings conducted at the Ottawa County Courthouse in Grand Haven. At the Fillmore Complex in West Olive, the increase in Juvenile Court Referee activity was 2%, increasing from 1,649 hearings in 2016 to 1,682 hearings in 2017.

Delinquency and child protective petitions are scheduled for preliminary hearings shortly after filing. Domestic relations hearings are typically scheduled within three to five weeks after filing. The Court employs two full-time and one part-time Attorney Referees, in addition to the Friend of the Court who conducts hearings once a week. The Senior Law Clerk and Court Administrator serve as back-up referees to provide docket coverage when needed.

### *Family Division/Juvenile Court (Fillmore Complex)*

<b>DELINQUENCY PROCEEDINGS</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>% Change (2016-2017)</b>
Preliminary Hearings	322	167	167	163	151	-7.4%
Pre-Trial Conferences	480	457	531	573	630	+9.0%
Pleas of Admission/No Contest Hearings	142	140	141	108	109	+0.0%
Original Disposition Hearings	440	369	317	296	320	+7.5%
Dispositional Review Hearings	63	36	55	29	15	-48.3%
Consents/Holds/Other	N/A	N/A	289	264	272	+2.9%
Saturday Preliminary Hearings	48	29	25	21	17	-19.0%

<b>CHILD PROTECTIVE PROCEEDINGS</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>% Change (2016-2017)</b>
Preliminary Hearings	139	155	130	126	99	-21.4%
Adoption Release/Consent/Emancipation/ Emergency Removal/Other	42	35	51	69	69	+0.0%
<b>Total Family Division/Juvenile Court Referee Hearings</b>	<b>1,676</b>	<b>1,388</b>	<b>1,706</b>	<b>1,649</b>	<b>1,682</b>	<b>+2.0%</b>



## Family Division (Grand Haven)

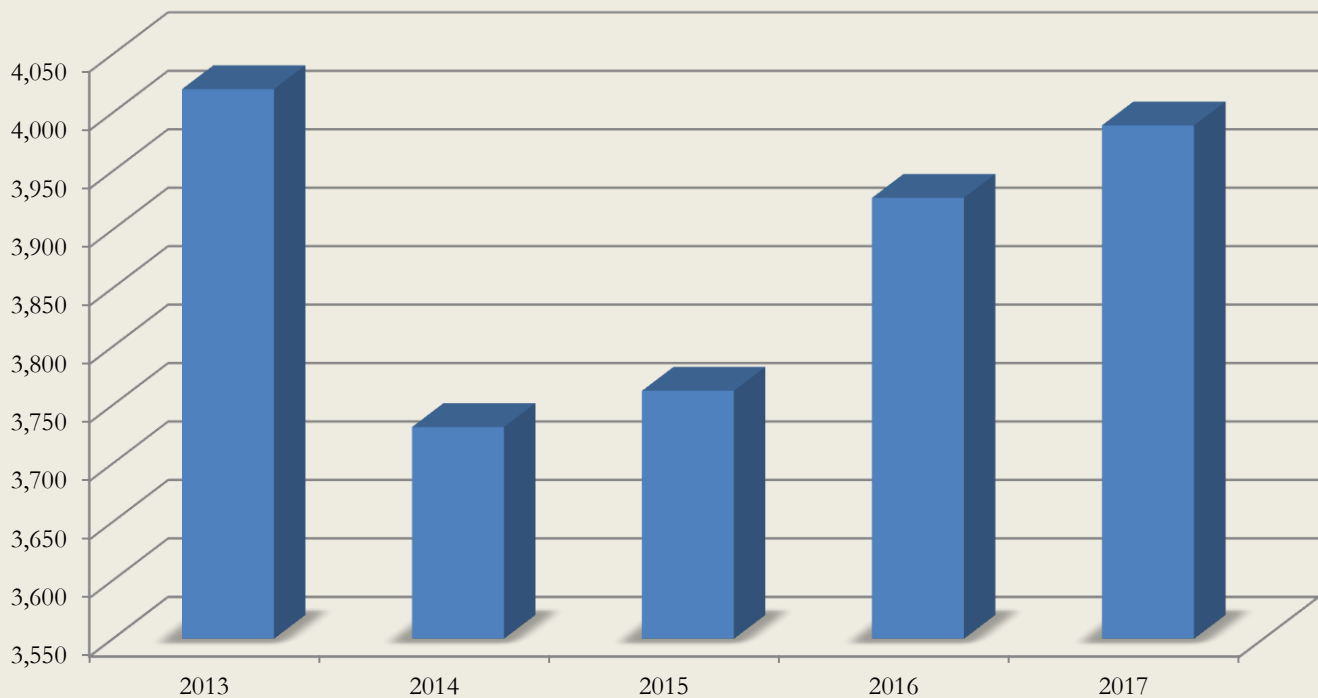
DOMESTIC/CIVIL PROCEEDINGS	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	% Change (2016-2017)
Support Hearings	1,087	1,082	948	979	803	-18.0%
Parenting Time Hearings	420	532	536	504	541	+6.8%
<i>Pro Confesso</i> Divorce Hearings	241	231	235	238	167	-29.8%
Paternity Arraignment/Support Hearings	596	498	337	557*	796	+42.3%
<b>Total Family Division Domestic/Civil Referee Hearings</b>	<b>2,344</b>	<b>2,343</b>	<b>2,056</b>	<b>2,278</b>	<b>2,307</b>	<b>+1.3%</b>

\* Due to missing data, this number represents an average of the other four years shown.

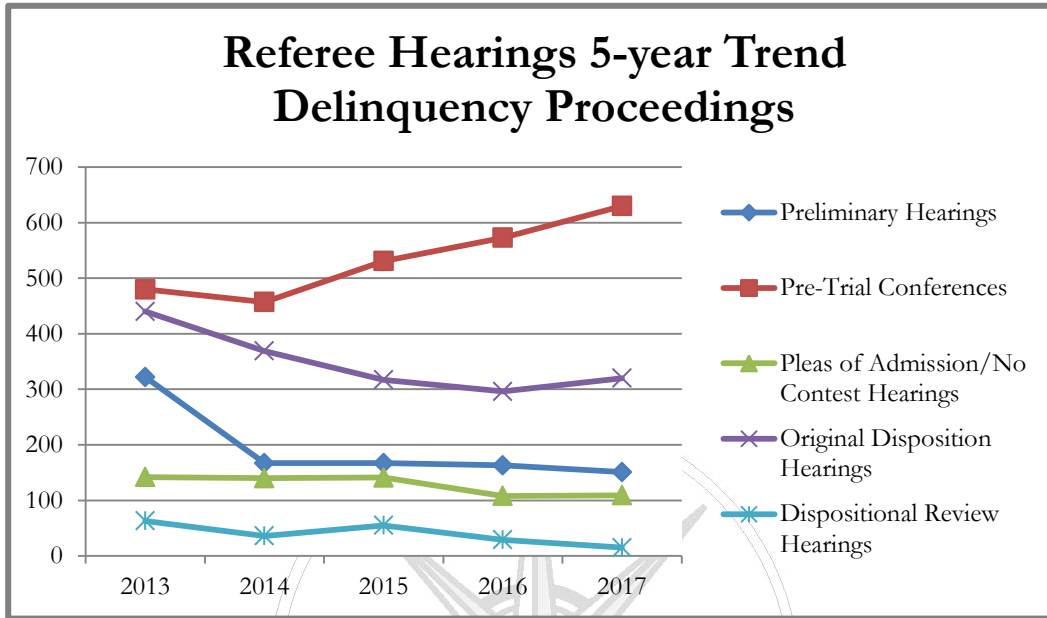
ATTORNEY REFEREE HEARINGS	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	% Change (2016-2017)
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>4,020</b>	<b>3,731</b>	<b>3,762</b>	<b>3,927</b>	<b>3,989</b>	<b>+1.6%</b>

By conducting nearly 4,000 judicial hearings every year, the Attorney Referees play a significant role in the 20<sup>th</sup> Circuit Court's efforts to maintain excellent caseload management. Administering justice by ensuring all parties have their "day in court" and providing timely decisions on matters as important as child support, parenting time, appropriate consequences for delinquent behavior, and more is how the Court's Referees provide direct service to the public and assist the elected judges with their caseloads.

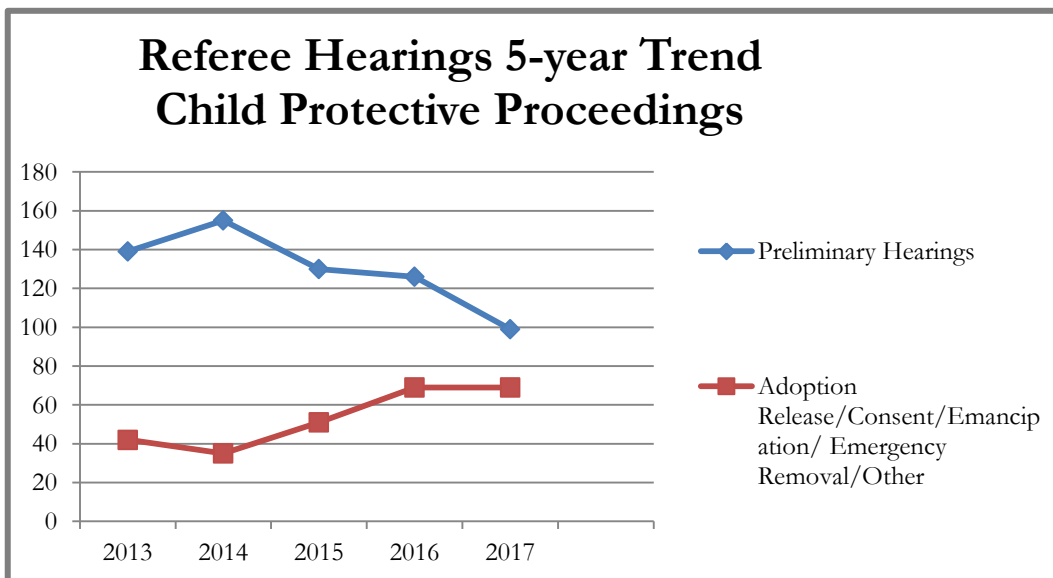
### Total Attorney Referee Hearings - 2017



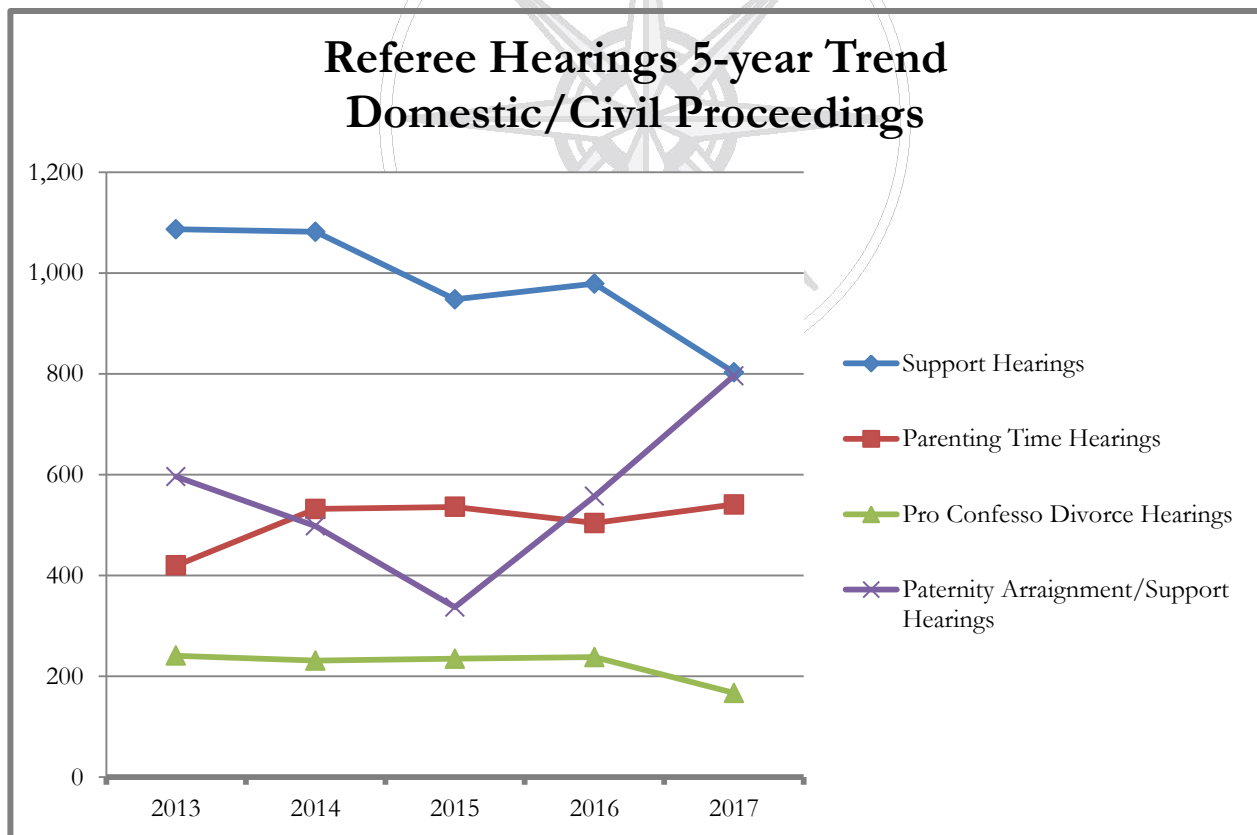
The five-year delinquency proceedings trend line shown below demonstrates the ability of the Court to resolve numerous juvenile cases through the effective use of pre-trial conferences. This requires well prepared prosecutors, defense counsel, juvenile court officers and the availability of evidence-based programs which are part of a substantial continuum of care in Ottawa County.



The following blue trend line demonstrates very positive movement with a reduction in child protective proceedings being filed with the Court and requiring preliminary hearings. These initial hearings, which can result in children being removed from their home based on allegations of abuse or neglect, are conducted by Attorney Referees and their recommendations are moved forward to the judges in subsequent hearings. The red trend line shows, in part, and increase in adoption release hearings where the birth mother formally releases her child to make a legal adoption possible.



The competing trends noted in the chart below, show four major areas of Attorney Referee hearings which are primarily conducted in the Ottawa County Courthouse in Grand Haven. During the past five years there has been a notable decline in repeated child support hearings, which suggests existing court orders are being properly followed and there are fewer significant changes in circumstances requiring modification of existing support orders. There are many possible reasons for this trend, however, improvements in the general economy and the reduction in unemployment rates are likely contributing factors. The trend lines for hearings on parenting time disputes and uncontested divorces have been relatively stable during the past five years, however, the paternity hearings have experienced a sharp increase. This is due in part to more active management of paternity establishment cases by the Friend of the Court staff and their ability to conduct paternity DNA tests at the courthouse.



## *Court Wide Initiatives*

**Strategic Planning** – Maintaining the Strategic Plan, periodically updating and revising goals, objectives, and priority projects, is an important function of court administration. In 2017, the Strategic Planning Oversight Team (SPO'T) reviewed and revised the 20<sup>th</sup> Circuit and Ottawa County Probate Courts' Strategic Plan to ensure court leadership and strategic planning action teams have consistent and reliable direction for court improvements. The most recent review included changing the Strategic Focus Areas to add a team designated to courthouse security and to provide a greater focus on court specific technology. <https://www.miottawa.org/Courts/20thcircuit/pdf/reports/2018-2020-Strategic-Plan.PDF>

**College Internship Program** - This court-wide intern program was revised to better accommodate short-term internships and to maximize the use of volunteer resources and compliment staffing needs. The courts' provide a practical learning experience within the justice system, which benefits the student, the school, and the courts. <https://www.miottawa.org/Courts/20thCircuit/internships.htm>

**Website Updates** - Court information on the County's website is regularly reviewed to update content and to ensure ease of use. Modifications were made to provide new content, increased accessibility and a user-friendly format. <https://www.miottawa.org/Courts/20thcircuit/default.htm>

**Michigan Indigent Defense Commission Compliance Plan Submission** - In 2013 the Michigan Legislature passed Public Act 93, creating the Michigan Indigent Defense Commission (MIDC) and authorizing the Commission to establish standards for public defender systems. Following the approval of the first four standards, all Michigan counties were required to submit compliance plans, with detailed budgets. The Ottawa County Courts and several County partners worked together to create a plan establishing a new executive branch Public Defender Office, with the understanding the Office would only be implemented if the State of Michigan provides adequate funding. Initially the Ottawa County Plan was approved by the MIDC, however the budget was rejected and a revised plan was subsequently submitted. The next review hearing for the revised plan is scheduled on April 17, 2018. <http://michiganidc.gov/>

**Electronic Filing (efiling) of Court Documents** – The Circuit Court and the Ottawa County Clerk/Register's Office were early adopters of efile technology and subsequently were selected as one of five pilot counties for the Michigan Supreme Court efile project. Throughout 2017, court and clerk personnel worked with the State Court Administrative Office and ImageSoft, Inc. to establish a fully functional efile portal, providing attorneys and litigants with the opportunity to remotely file documents in established cases. As the acceptance of efile technology grows, this innovation will provide great access to the courts and increase public trust and confidence in the judicial branch of government. <https://mifile.courts.michigan.gov/>

**JusticeSuite Software Development** – Court staff have been working together with the County Innovation & Technology Department and SolidCircle to redesign a web-based case management system, intended to replace the legacy AS/400 Justice System currently in use. Since this type of process innovation can be slow and tedious, participating courts and county departments have committed significant resources to ensure the ultimate success of the project. It is anticipated the final product will be released in September 2019.

**Courthouse Security** - At the Ottawa County Courthouse in Grand Haven and the Family Division/Probate courthouse in West Olive, two staff teams have been meeting on a regular basis to review and update Site Emergency Plans, discuss relevant courthouse security issues, and collaborate on viable solutions to defined problems. The team consists of representatives from the Courts, the Sheriff's Department, County Clerk/Register's office, and related offices. Since these security teams have been



formed, they have achieved many accomplishments, including:

- Updating Site Emergency Plans and conducting several table-top exercises
- Coordinating Active Shooter drills with the Sheriff's Department
- Reviewing key card access to the building
- Reviewing and revising the West Olive incident report procedures

**Public Education** – Throughout each year the Courts' are actively engaged in a variety of public education efforts. In 2017 for example, several school groups toured the courthouses and the Juvenile Detention Center where they learned about court process, observed judicial hearings, were exposed to a variety of evidence-based programs. In addition, numerous presentations were prepared and delivered on the Juvenile Court, Recovery Court and related substance abuse issues, the role of courts in society, technology applications in the justice system, talent development/talent management, procedural fairness, strategic planning, child support collection strategies, the importance of the US and Michigan constitutions, and much more.

**Family Justice Center** – To provide better coordinated and centralized Family Division services the citizens of Ottawa County, the Courts and County Administration have been discussing plans to build a Family Justice Center on the Fillmore campus. In time, this Center would support the legislatively mandated concept of “one judge – one family” by bringing together the judges, attorney referees and court staff who handle domestic relations cases, juvenile cases, and child welfare cases. Space limitations currently require these services to be divided between courthouses in Grand Haven and West Olive. The Center would also move frequently used court services closer to the population centers within Ottawa County. Phase I of the project will include a “family friendly” courthouse, Phase II will provide for an updated juvenile detention facility, and Phase III envisions educational and treatment space for the Juvenile Justice Institute.



## *Biennial Employee Satisfaction Survey Results* *Show Positive Trend*

Every two years, the 20<sup>th</sup> Circuit and Ottawa County Probate Courts' conduct a Court Employee Satisfaction Survey. Survey logistics are organized and implemented by one of five Strategic Planning Action Teams. In this instance Action Team #5, which focuses on employee development and innovative work culture, executed the survey and prepared the results. Subsequently results were distributed to the Strategic Planning Oversight Team (SPOT) at their quarterly meeting on April 19, 2017. Ninety employees (57%) responded to the survey. Since the last survey in 2015, overall satisfaction increased from 75% to 77%. In 2017, employee satisfaction improved most in response to the following statements:

- In the past 6 months, a supervisor/manager has talked with me about my performance/career development (+8%)
- On my job, I know exactly what is expected of me (+8%)
- I enjoy coming to work (+15%)

The final report was sent to all Circuit and Probate Court staff on April 21, 2017, including recommendations to improve employee satisfaction. Those recommendations were:

- During the design phase of the new courthouse in West Olive, engage employees in providing input about building design and features.
- Continue to seek opportunities to support increased safety measures for court buildings and systems.
- To support field staff in providing efficient and effective case management, continue to explore available technology and provide the necessary training.
- Encourage supervisors and managers to recognize staff for a job well done, as appropriate, or at least equally as often as performance issues.
- Ensure process and procedure changes are clearly articulated to all staff within a department and when possible and appropriate, seek feedback from staff.
- Continue to support staff training opportunities and communicate with staff about the need to budget in advance for opportunities.

To demonstrate how court administration values employee suggestions, the report also included a list of several important changes resulting from 2015 survey recommendations. These include, but are not limited to:

- Requiring all managers/supervisors/administrators to complete the County's GOLD Leader training program.
- Requiring supervisors/managers to send out court-wide communication when new jobs are posted, to ensure all staff are aware and can take advantage of available opportunities.



## *Financial Overview*

As an interdependent branch of government, the Courts generate limited revenue but do not operate like a for-profit business. Other than case filing fees established by the state legislature, the public is not charged for many court services. Instead, the Courts rely on the Michigan Supreme Court to pay for judicial salaries through a legislative appropriation and partially reimburse the County for court-specific operating expenses through the Court Equity Fund.

The Court Equity Fund, (MCL 600.151b), was established in October 1996 to provide limited funding for trial court operations. The fund is disbursed quarterly within the state fiscal year to county governments, based on a statutory formula that establishes each county's share. The formula includes two factors: the caseload activity of the circuit and probate courts and the number of judgeships in each county. The first factor, caseload, takes into account new cases filed for the most recent three years in the circuit and probate courts and compares the county's proportion of these filings for the three years to the total state filings. The second factor compares the number of judgeships within the county to total judgeships for the entire state.

The revenue sources of the Court Equity Fund include state general fund appropriations and multiple sources of restricted revenue that originate from local trial court fees, costs and assessments. Each payment from the fund within the state fiscal year reflects the revenue deposits to the Court Equity Fund for the preceding quarter. Therefore, quarterly payments will vary, reflecting fluctuations in court revenues received.

The Juror Compensation Reimbursement Fund was created as of January 1, 2003 to provide a source of reimbursement funding to trial courts for legislated increases in juror attendance compensation. Beginning October 1, 2003, jurors were compensated at higher rates (see MCL 600.1344) and trial court funding units are allowed to claim reimbursement biannually from the fund for increased expenses.

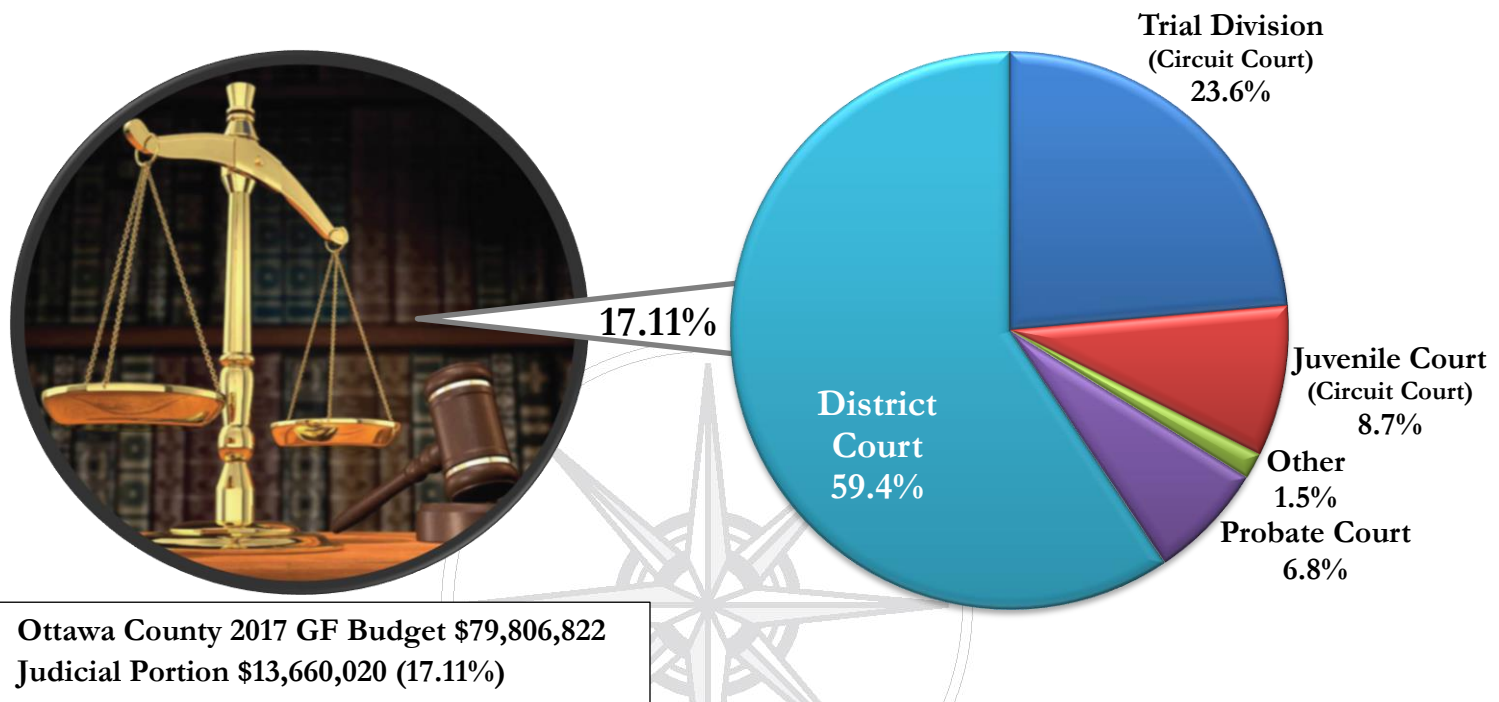
Other Court expenses are paid in part by federal Title IV-D funds (for child support collection); the Michigan Child Care Fund (Family Division – Juvenile Court programming); state reimbursement for the County Juvenile Officers, and various state and federal grants (e.g., partial Recovery Court funding). The substantial balance is paid through an appropriation from the Ottawa County general fund.





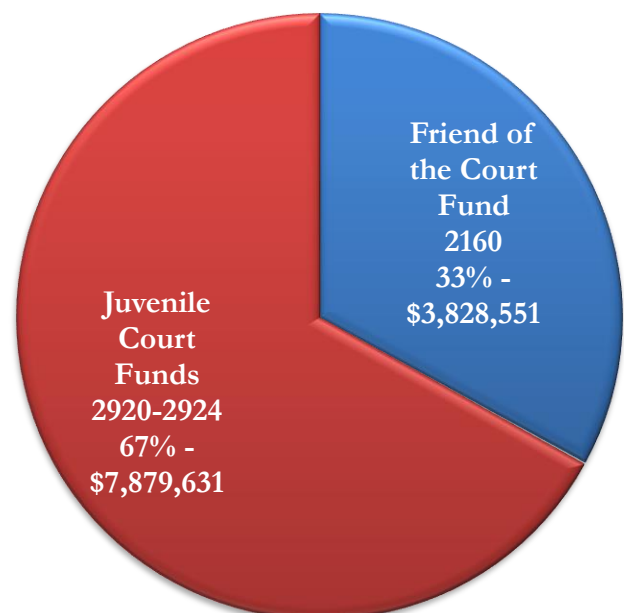
## Ottawa County 2017 General Fund Allocation

In FY 2017, the County general fund appropriation act as adopted was \$79,806,822; the judicial portion was \$13,660,020 or 17.11% of the GF budget. Of the 17.11% expenditure, the Circuit Court Trial Division (Fund 1310) was allocated \$3,228,226 (23.6%); Juvenile Court (Fund 1490) was allotted \$1,185,648 (8.7%); and Probate Court (Fund 1480) received \$934,980 (6.8%). The remaining \$8,115,190 (59.4%) went to District Court (Fund 1360), with a small 1.5% allocation to “adult probation and other”.



## Ottawa County 2017 Special Revenue Funds Transfer

Due to other funding streams, the Friend of the Court (FOC) and Child Care Fund portion of the Juvenile Court budget is not reflected in the general fund budget allocations. For FY 2017, the 20th Circuit received special revenue funds amounting to \$11,808,182. These allocations were divided as follows: FOC received a revenue operating transfer of \$3,828,551; and the Juvenile Court received funding for child care programs of \$7,879,631.





## *Court Administrator Elected Chair of Global Advisory Committee*

In January 2017, 20th Circuit and Ottawa County Probate Court Administrator, Kevin J. Bowling, was elected Chair of the U.S. Department of Justice's Global Advisory Committee (GAC). Kevin has been a member of the GAC since 2011 following his term as President of the National Association for Court Management. Representing the nation's courts on behalf of the National Association for Court Management, he also participated on several GAC technical subcommittees.

Funded by the Department of Justice, this diverse group represents several national organizations which span all three branches of government. Members include representatives from a variety of federal, state, local, and tribal organizations.

The GAC acts as the focal point for justice information sharing activities and works to provide the U.S. Attorney General and the U.S. Department of Justice with appropriate input from local, state, tribal, and federal agencies/associations in the ongoing pursuit of interjurisdictional and multidisciplinary justice information sharing. In accordance with the Federal Advisory Committee Act, membership must be balanced in terms of the point of view represented and functions to be performed. Appointments are for two years and are to be renewed at the discretion of the U.S. Attorney General and/or the Designated Federal Official. The Courts are honored to be represented by Kevin's leadership in this prestigious group!



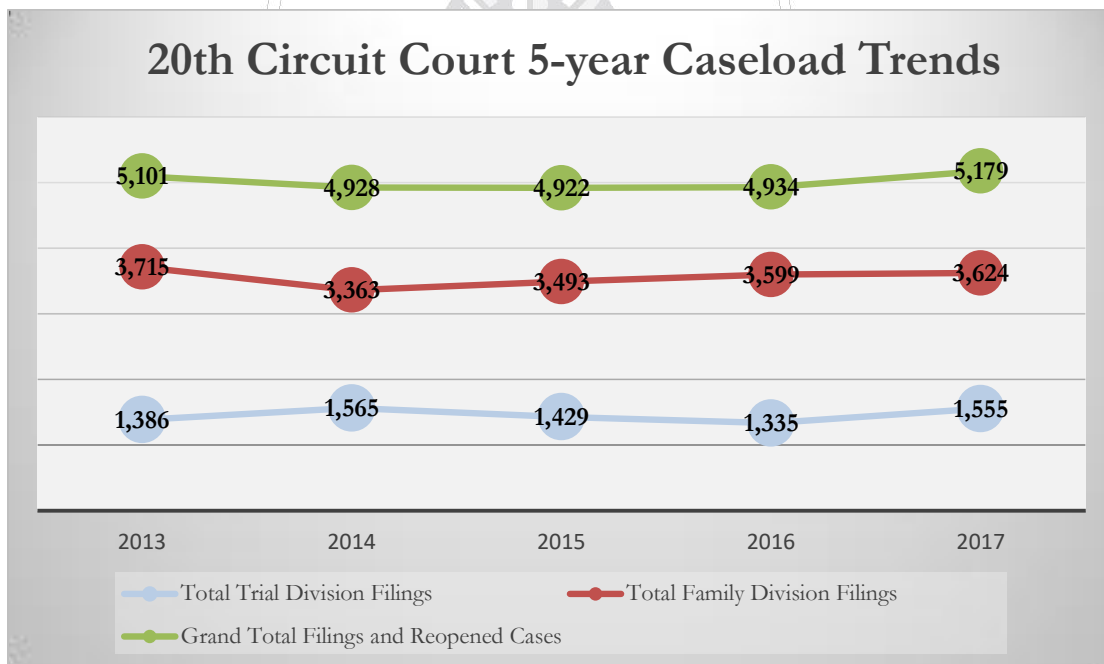
# Trial Division

## Caseload Facts

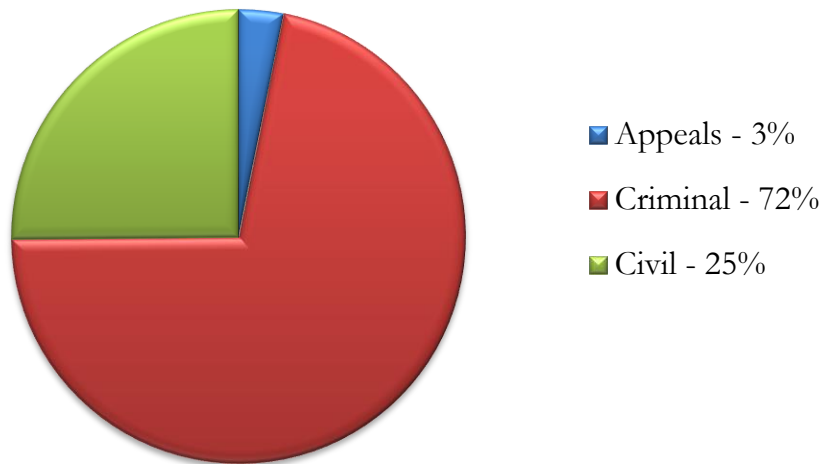
The 20<sup>th</sup> Circuit Court Trial Division (Grand Haven) caseload includes appeals, criminal and civil cases. In addition, the Trial Division handles the domestic relations portion of the Family Division docket.

Throughout 2017 Judge Miedema and Judge Hulsing presided over all criminal, civil and personal protection order cases. Judge Miedema also handled 60% of divorces without children. Judge Van Allsburg heard all appellate and business court cases, 50% of the domestic relations cases, and 20% of divorces without children. Judge Engle was assigned 50% of the domestic relations cases and 20% of divorces without children. In addition, Judge Engle conducts court two days per week at the Fillmore Complex with a mixed docket of juvenile delinquency cases and child protective proceedings.

From 2016 to 2017 the appellate caseload decreased significantly by 22.2%, while the criminal and civil caseload (new filings and reopened cases) increased by 22.7% and 7.4%, respectively. Overall, the Trial Division experienced a 16.5% increase in new filings and reopened cases from 2016 to 2017. This caseload data helps explain the significant workload increase experienced by Trial Division staff and may impact the judicial resource study that is planned by the State Court Administrative Office (SCAO) in 2018.

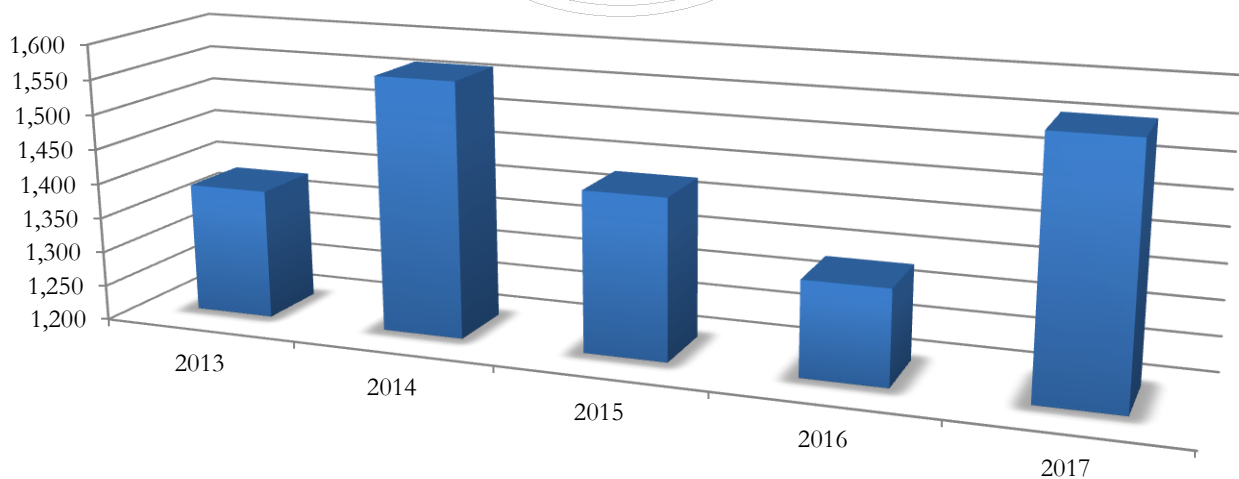


## Trial Division Caseload - 2017



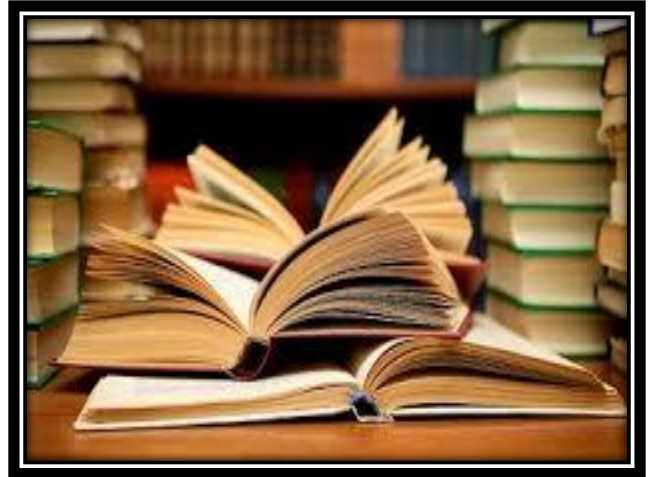
Although the Trial Division caseload is distinct from the Family Division caseload, it is important to note that judges and court employees regularly assist with all aspects of the court's important work, even if assigned to a specific court division. For instance, the primary criminal and civil judges, Judges Hulsing and Miedema, routinely handle most requests for adult or juvenile personal protection. Likewise, due to the current split of the Family Division between the Grand Haven and West Olive courthouses, Trial Division staff assist Family Division staff with the processing and scheduling of disparate cases types. This collaboration and sharing of workloads is a cultural norm in Ottawa County and is reflective of the Courts' core values noted above.

## New and Reopened Case Filings - Trial Division



## *Law Library*

In the age of the Internet, where digital natives tend to seek all answers to their questions on a smart phone, libraries may seem anachronistic to some. Yet law libraries are an integral part of the work of trial courts. Whether law library resources are accessed through commercial services like Westlaw or LexisNexis, or through bound volumes physically located in judicial chambers, courtrooms, or on library shelves, they are regularly used to research legal precedents and to ensure the best decisions are rendered in each case.



To comply with MCL 600.4851 the Trial Division Senior Law Clerk oversees library operations for the Circuit and Probate courts, providing both reference texts and computer aided research options. An annual review is conducted of all library acquisitions as part of the budget process and the county law library fund appropriately supports a portion of the law library costs.

## *Felony Collections*

The Trial Division also manages an active collections program with defendants who are ordered to pay restitution, court costs, fines, fees, etc. The outcome of the collections program in 2017 was payment of \$990,014.63 to the Court, with 51% covering court assessed fines and costs. Another 38% represented collection of restitution to reimburse crime victims for their losses and 9% for the Michigan Victims' Rights Fund. Other payments cover statutorily mandated fees and partially reimburse the County for funds expended in the daily operation of the Court.





## *Ottawa County Recovery Court Recognized as Mentor Court*

The 20th Circuit Court was honored in 2017 when the Recovery Court, a specialty program for non-violent felony offenders with acute substance use disorders, was selected as one of nine “mentor courts” in the United States by the United States Department of Justice and the National Association of Drug Court Professionals. This distinction is awarded to high-performing drug courts that demonstrate exemplary practices and operate with fidelity to the drug court model.

The recovery court accepted its first participant in January 2005 and has since served over 250 people. It has a 67% graduation rate and a 75% retention rate, which is very good for the intensive requirements that participants must complete. Furthermore, a study conducted by Grand Valley State University in 2014 demonstrated the recovery court significantly reduces new crime and repeated drug and alcohol use among high risk and high need offenders. Notably, recovery court participants were 73% less likely to commit a new crime within three years of discharge from the recovery court when compared to a similar group of people who were sentenced to traditional probation.

Judge Mark A. Feyen presides over the drug court. Andy Brown (Coordinator) and Emily Achterhof (Case Manager) are the court staff who make the recovery court work, day-to-day. Their positions are 100% grant funded with state and federal dollars. A large part of Andy’s job is writing grant proposals, administering awarded grants, and managing relations with the drug courts nine partnering agencies. Emily works hands-on with the participants and coordinates services with treatment providers, medical providers, probation officers, and recovery coaches. Both Andy and Emily are very passionate about their jobs and they are committed to helping the participants in the recovery court.

In addition to being selected a national mentor court in 2017, staff were invited to present at three national conferences (American Society for Addiction Medicine, National Association for Drug Court Professionals, and Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration). In addition, the Recovery Court is participating in two studies which are examining recidivism outcomes and cost-effectiveness of the drug court. Both studies are using innovative research methodologies and will be submitted for publication in academic journals.

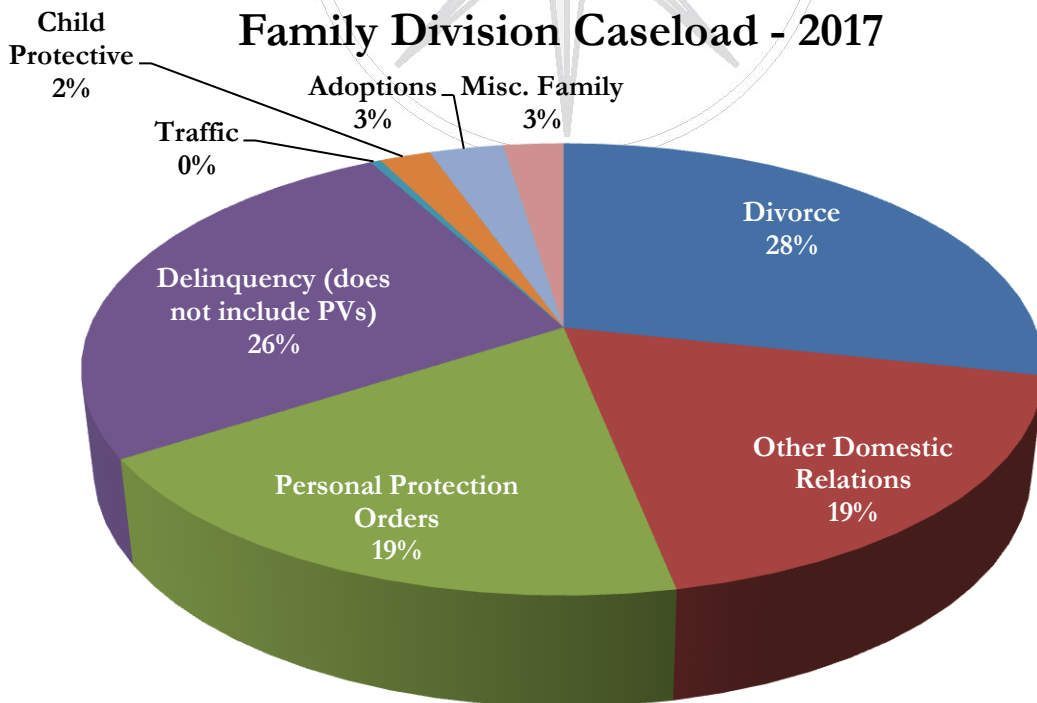


# Friend of the Court (FOC)

## Caseload Facts

Throughout 2017, Friend of the Court staff handled a Title IV-D caseload (child support) of 11,216 cases, representing a 1% decrease from 2016. During the same time period, there was also a 4% overall decrease in new divorce and other domestic relations filings. To enforce court orders on these cases, 3,747 show cause hearings were conducted (where parties are ordered to “show cause” why they should not be held in contempt of court for failing to obey a valid court order), 1,244 bench warrants were issued, and \$39.6 million in child support payments were collected and disbursed to families in need (1.4% increase from 2016). In addition to these enforcement efforts, staff directly assisted clients by scheduling 2,296 appointments and meeting with 888 walk-in clients. To help ensure child support orders are updated to reflect significant changes in circumstances, staff conducted 2,135 case reviews and recommended modification where appropriate. Based on federal child support performance measures, the 20th Circuit FOC is one of the most effective operations in Michigan, ranking at or near the top of the 16 largest counties and collecting \$9.96 for every dollar spent.

Besides the child support enforcement efforts of the Friend of the Court, there were 234 cases in 2017 where the 20th Circuit Court received a petition for a special assessment regarding child custody or parenting time issues. In 64% of these cases, FOC staff conducted an extensive investigation and provided the Court with recommendations. Diversion conferences conducted by FOC staff, resolved 21% of these cases thereby saving significant time and resources for all involved. Often, custody investigators are required to appear in court and testify regarding the investigation/recommendations. In addition to these in-depth child custody assessments, the FOC further supports the Court by providing detailed psychological evaluations in select cases.



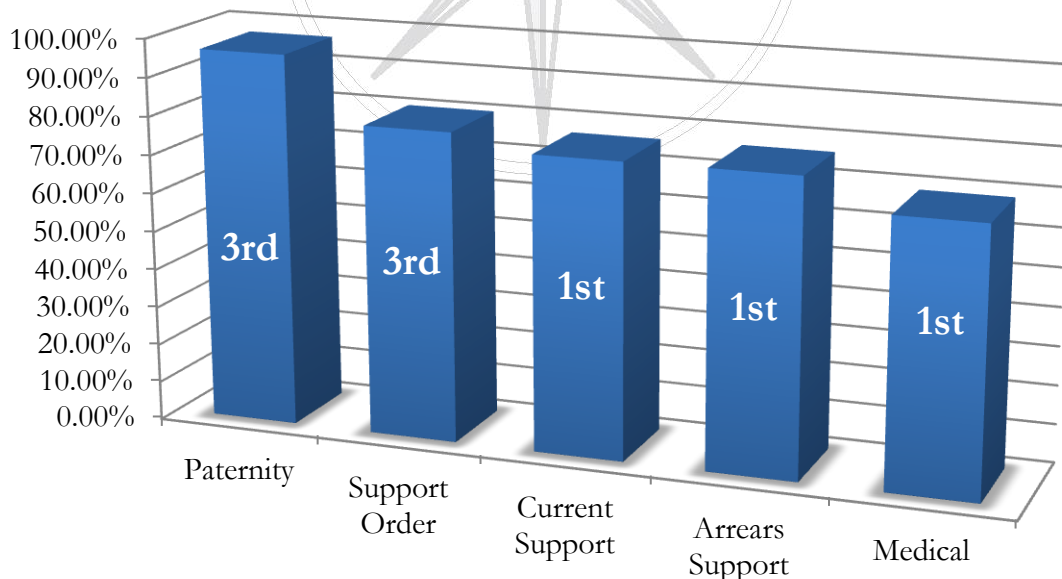
## *FOC Performance Measures*

Child support collection falls under Title IV-D of the Social Security Act. The Friend of the Court office operates as a IV-D agency and a large part of the expense of operating the office (approximately 66%) is reimbursed by Federal funds through a State Cooperative Reimbursement Contract.

The Friend of the Court office also defrays operating costs by earning incentive dollars based on performance. As set forth in the 1998 Child Support Performance and Incentive Act, the performance of each IV-D agency is measured in five key areas. State child support enforcement programs across the country are measured in Paternity Establishment, Support Order Establishment, Collections on Current Support, Collections on Arrears, and Cost Effectiveness. Medical support establishment/enforcement is also measured and incentives are earned on this factor alone at a rate of 15% of medical support collections.

When the Friend of the Court office in Ottawa County measures itself against the sixteen (16) largest counties in Michigan, its performance is notable in all areas. This high performance not only helps secure child support for families and children in Ottawa County, but results in earned incentive dollars that reduce the amount of Ottawa County general fund dollars needed to fund the program. In 2017, the total Federal incentive dollars earned was \$408,530.00 plus an additional medical incentive of \$51,685.00 (**\$460,215 overall**).

### *Ottawa County – 4<sup>th</sup> Quarter Comparison to 16 Largest Counties’ 2017 Performance Levels*



## *FOC Achievements*

**Child Support Collections** - Total FOC collections for 2017 were \$39,617,548 which is the highest amount of child support collected historically by the FOC in Ottawa County.

**Staff Training** - The FOC has maintained high levels of education and training for staff with each FOC employee responsible for participating in 40 hours of training each year. Additionally, 18 out of 20 investigator staff are certified as SCAO trained mediators with an expectation that the two remaining members of the investigator staff will participate in mediator training in June 2018. The FOC in Ottawa County is recognized as a high performing FOC office leading several state-wide training events related to bench warrant enforcement including: the use of assigned deputies from the local sheriff's department to enforce child support, location tools and social media platforms used for enforcement and the use of immobilization devices ("boots") for vehicles of non-payers of support.



**County Innovation Grant** - The FOC applied for and successfully received an Ottawa County Innovation Grant in 2016 which allowed for the creation of a third OCSD deputy position assigned to the FOC, as well as, an additional FOC Account Specialist position. These additional positions have helped to reduce the outstanding civil bench warrant number to an all-time low of 1,261. The third deputy position has also allowed the FOC to focus on meeting the required Federal Expiration Date relating to service of process in paternity and support cases. When the FOC took on the establishment responsibilities from the Prosecuting Attorney's office in October 2015, the service of process percentage was 26% (below the federal requirement of 75%). This percentage has climbed steadily and was at 61% at time of the 2016 audit, with an expectation the federal requirement will be met when the 2017 audit is completed. The third deputy position also contributed to increased revenues in the FOC office related to reimbursed transportation costs for extradition and bench warrant fee collection (budgeted at \$45,000; actual revenue collected totaled \$62,350).

**Online Dispute Resolution** - In 2017, the FOC contracted with Court Innovations, Inc. of Ann Arbor to begin using their online dispute resolution software known as Matterhorn. This software platform assists with reducing the number of cases set for show cause hearing for non-payment of support.

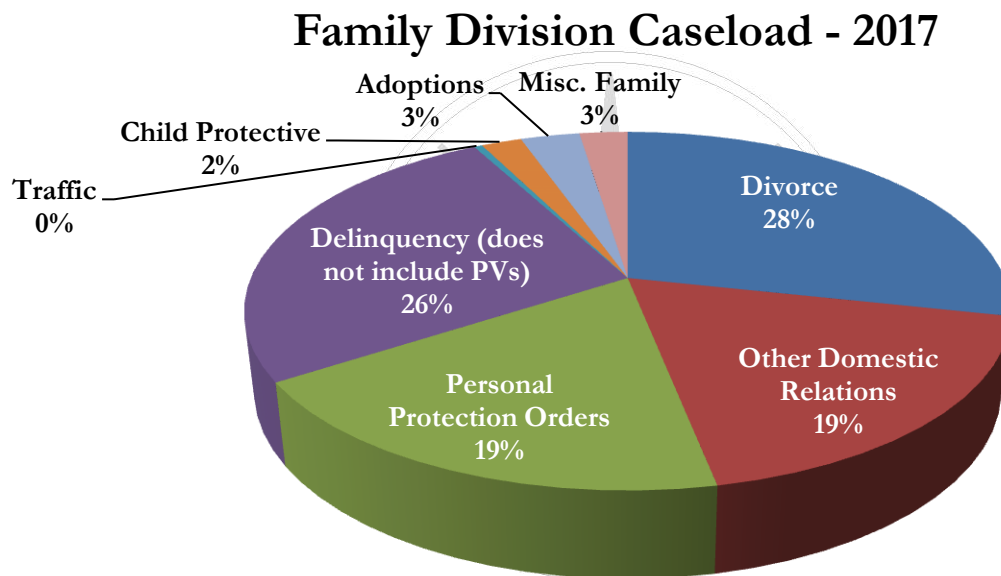


Matterhorn includes a check-in system for use on the day of the court hearing, resulting in efficiencies for staff in conducting pre-hearings with non-paying parties to a child support case. The system also helps create an accurate bench warrant list for use in contempt of court findings. The Matterhorn platform set up a system for texting notification to payers when their case fits the criteria for show cause and allowed FOC staff to negotiate settlement of the outstanding payment amount. This effective method of resolving the non-payment issue resulted in a 27% reduction of show cause hearings scheduled with judges. Show cause hearings are now held two Fridays per month instead of every Friday, providing judges with additional docket time to handle other cases. Use of the Matterhorn platform has also resulted in 36% fewer warrants issued due to payers taking notice of text notifications alerting them to the show cause hearing rather than relying on slower postal notification.

# Juvenile Court and Detention Center

## Caseload Facts

Court personnel, like most community leaders, understand children represent the future. As a result, when 952 new and reopened juvenile petitions and 15 traffic cases arrived at Juvenile Court throughout 2017, a concerted effort was made to ensure appropriate programming was available for delinquent youth, family, caregivers and related agencies. To professionally assess and manage delinquency cases, Juvenile Court staff provided a variety of services within the community. These services included 13,124 contacts with the juveniles and parents, as well as ancillary contacts with schools, counselors, etc. In addition to an increase in the overall number of delinquency cases from 2016 to 2017 (+9%), the complexity of many cases dramatically increased, thus requiring a customized approach to the provision of services and, in some cases, more costly residential treatment. As noted in the chart below, delinquency cases account for 26% of the family division caseload and Juvenile Court staff also assist with child protective proceedings and miscellaneous family cases which are handled at the West Olive Fillmore Complex.



When court-involved youth are on probation or otherwise ordered to receive treatment, there is a continuum of available programs which are designed to assist youth and families in the remediation of offending behaviors. Programs include community-based treatment, supervised community service, anger management, sex offender program, intensive supervision, experiential ropes course, gender-specific groups, individual/group/family counseling and more. In 2017, the Juvenile Court provided educational services through the Juvenile Justice Institute to 42 youth and residential placement alternative community support and supervision through the Juvenile Community Justice to 30 youth.

During 2017, there were 614 admissions to secure detention in the Ottawa County Juvenile Detention Center, representing 11,933 days of service (+25.7%). Many secure detention beds are occupied by Ottawa County youth; however, beds are also rented to other jurisdictions which have no local, secure placement options. Bed rental agreements accounted for \$1,174,016 of new revenue in 2017. In addition, the Court expanded the Lighthouse Program, a female-specific residential program to address the needs of the court-involved, female population. Several beds within the Lighthouse Program are rented to other counties, generating additional revenue. Juvenile Court continues to explore methods of increasing revenue through contract and service arrangements with other counties.



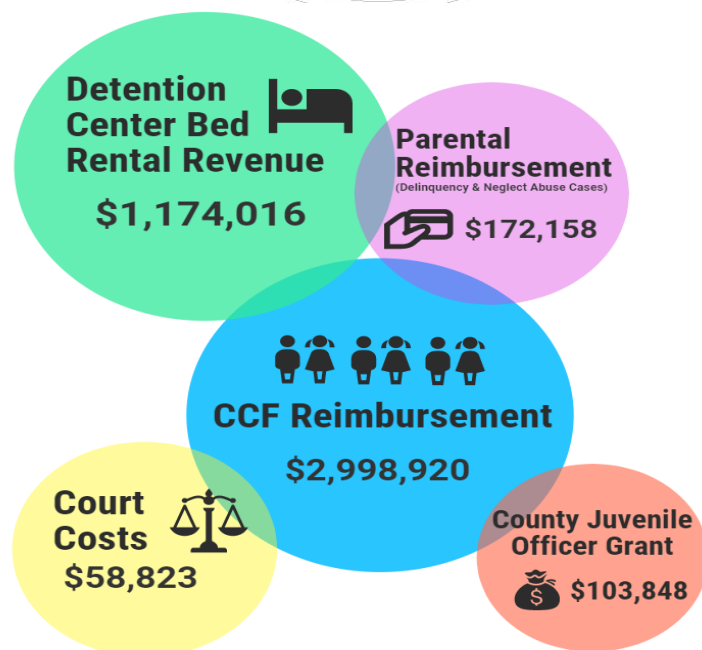
# Juvenile Court Funding

Juvenile Court funding is complex and diverse. Ottawa County is the official funding unit for the 20<sup>th</sup> Circuit Court and a portion of the Juvenile Court budget is appropriated from the County general fund. In addition, in compliance with MCL 400.251 *et seq*, Ottawa County receives a county juvenile officer grant to offset juvenile personnel costs. In 2017, the County received \$103,848 from the state County Juvenile Officer grant which partially funded four positions.

The second and more significant state funding stream is the Child Care Fund (MCL 400.117 *et seq*) which provides for 50% reimbursement for eligible costs related to the direct care of juveniles. Eligible costs are determined by MDHHS, as identified in the 2018 Child Care Fund Handbook. Currently, they include the cost of care for youth placed outside the home and the cost of In-Home Care or community-based programs/services for youth at-risk for out of home placement.

In 2016 and 2017, the Child Care Fund (CCF) underwent a significant revision and many costs became ineligible. In an effort to preserve the integrity of the Fund and the historically-eligible costs, Sandi Metcalf, Juvenile Court Director, and president of the Michigan Association for Family Court Administration, participated in many state-level committees, relentlessly advocating for juvenile courts and counties in the process. Some efforts were favorably rewarded and others were unsuccessful, but through ongoing discussions, certain ineligible costs were reinstated and/or additional fiscal protections of the courts/counties through separate legislation, were successfully realized. Though the CCF now looks different and processes have changed dramatically, this funding stream continues to allow the courts to provide a vast continuum of services to youth and families. In 2017, the Court received \$2,998,920 in reimbursement from the state Child Care Fund.

To further offset the County's costs, the Ottawa County Juvenile Detention Center rented beds to other counties in need of detention or programming for court-involved youth. In 2017, the Juvenile Court contracted with 19 counties for bed rental, resulting in \$1,174,016 in revenue. In addition, the Court's Reimbursement Specialist worked with Juvenile Court Officers to collect court costs (crime victim's rights fees, restitution, state fees, and intake/probation costs), attorney fees, and placement costs from court-involved youth and parents, collecting a total of \$230,981 in 2017.



# *Juvenile Court Community Outreach and Training*

**Juvenile Court Community Training** - The Juvenile Court duties and responsibilities are complex and diverse. Seldom do citizens of Ottawa County and colleagues working within the county governmental system have the opportunity to learn about how the Juvenile Court conducts daily business toward administering justice to juveniles while working with the youth and their families toward rehabilitation, stabilization and a productive lifestyle in the community.

The Juvenile Court offered an open, educational training that provided comprehensive information about court processes, evidence-based strategies, and community-based services within the court's continuum of services that guide the individualization of services and measured dosage of treatment for court-involved youth. The training also offered data outcomes of recently adopted treatment approaches that reflect a more cost-effective approach to juvenile justice. The training was well received, and upon request, two, additional county department staffs were trained following the primary educational event.

The court invites county departments, citizen groups, faith-based organizations, and anyone who is interested in gaining a better understanding of the Juvenile Court in Ottawa County to reach out to the court for this and other trainings. For more information, please contact the Juvenile Court.

**Adoption Worker Appreciation Luncheon** - Each year around Thanksgiving, the Juvenile Court celebrates the many adoptions of children from the foster care system and private adoptions. It is truly an exciting day for children, families and the communities in which they reside. This year's celebration was different because the families who adopted the many children, wanted to finalize their adoptions as quickly as possible and preferred to not wait for the process to occur on Adoption Day. Thus, in an effort to recognize all the work and those who support the families in the process of adoption throughout the year, the court sponsored an Adoption Worker Appreciation luncheon. The result was a wonderful opportunity to learn about the varied experiences from the professionals who have committed their careers to helping children find "forever homes" and often, the completion of families in their endeavor to have the family of their dreams. Overall, Adoption Day was a great celebration!

**Professionals Advocating and Caring for Kids (P.A.C.K) Meeting** - For over three decades, the Juvenile Court, in partnership with other stakeholders, has hosted the annual P.A.C.K. meeting. This meeting provides a great opportunity for professionals from schools, law enforcement, private agency, state agencies, county departments, and community organizations to learn about juvenile justice trends, as well as local and county initiatives. Learning from one another about what works and what doesn't when helping children and families within their respective communities is also a vital part of this meeting.

The P.A.C.K. meeting is a proven method to improve communication across professional disciplines and enhance opportunities for partnership, ultimately improving the fabric of communities within Ottawa County as nearly 150 professionals participated in the meeting in 2017. The meeting has become one of the most valued by professionals as reflected by the continued and consistent attendance each year.



## *Juvenile Court Services and Juvenile Justice Institute Relocation*

On August 7, 2017, the 20th Circuit, Family Division, Juvenile Court relocated the Juvenile Court Services and the Juvenile Justice Institute to 12263 James St., Holland, MI (CMH Building B). The move to a more spacious building allows the Juvenile Court to continue offering a continuum of quality and enhanced treatment services to court-involved youth and their families in a more educationally and therapeutically conducive setting.

The Juvenile Justice Institute (JJI) is the Court's community-based school for adjudicated youth who are long-term suspended, expelled or experiencing chronic behavioral issues in school. The educational program is provided by the Ottawa Area School District through contract and partnership.

The school in the new building offers a gym, music room and outdoor green space for students to enjoy and provides a more diverse educational setting for court-involved youth. A "Teaching Kitchen" is in the planning phase and is being designed to not only teach youth how to prepare food and eat better, but also, to provide a culinary arts program as a vocational opportunity for JJI students.

Also located in the building is the Juvenile Court's Treatment Services Unit. Court treatment specialists (licensed therapists) provide Functional Family Therapy, Choice-individual counseling, and sex-offender specific treatment. The Court also provides a full complement of evidence based and promising practice groups and programs during the afternoon and evening hours including cognitive behavioral groups (Thinking 4 Change and Aggression Replacement Therapy), Restorative Community Service and substance abuse treatment. Substance abuse treatment is offered as part of a collaborative relationship with Wedgwood Christian Services.



## *Juvenile Justice Institute Graduates Four Students*

The Juvenile Court's Juvenile Justice Institute (JJI) and court staff, in partnership with the Ottawa Area Intermediate School District (OAISD) office, serves court-adjudicated youth who are either expelled, long term suspended, or exhibit significant school problems. In June 2017 JJI teachers, staff, judges, juvenile court officers and court administrators, along with many family members and stakeholders, were privileged to honor four JJI students as they graduated with their high school diplomas from their local, home school! The students worked incredibly hard to reach this milestone, which was met with heartfelt emotion and a sense of accomplishment.

At one time, graduating high school seemed impossible for these students, three of whom were the first in their families to receive a high school diploma! Together, the 20<sup>th</sup> Circuit, Juvenile Court and the OAISD made this opportunity possible, and the pride on each graduate's face as they walked across the stage to receive such an incredible honor, was infectious to all who witnessed the event.

Throughout the celebration, it was evident the students credited their success to not only their personal hard work and determination, but also, the deep-rooted relationships formed with teaching and court staff. During the graduation ceremony, each student gave a rose to someone who had impacted their success the most; two of the students gave their rose to staff which affirmed the value of building relationships with these youth.

Congratulations to the graduates! You make us proud of YOU!





## *Music is in the Air*

Working with court-involved youth, Juvenile Court staff understand the importance of young people learning new techniques to grow, both academically and personally. Many of the students have not developed the skills that help them de-escalate and self-regulate their emotions through a positive activity, such as learning how to play a musical instrument.

It has been often said, music is the universal language; everyone can relate to some type of music, and often, it connects us to an emotion. In 2017, the court's community-based school - Juvenile Justice Institute – in conjunction with the Walk the Beat organization that donated the instruments, offered students an opportunity to receive individualized music plans and take part in guitar, piano, and ukulele lessons, and they loved it! As part of their lessons, students learned how to read, write and record music. They also learned about sound engineering from the prestigious, Third Coast Recording Studio in Grand Haven.

Ottawa County Sheriff's Office deputies who are also consummate musicians and are assigned full-time to the Juvenile Court, and musically-talented university interns assigned to the Juvenile Court, provided the lessons. Thanks to the Ottawa Area Intermediate School District office administration, the students were able to receive academic credit for their hard work while discovering new talents and learning ways to use music as a coping mechanism for stressors in their lives.

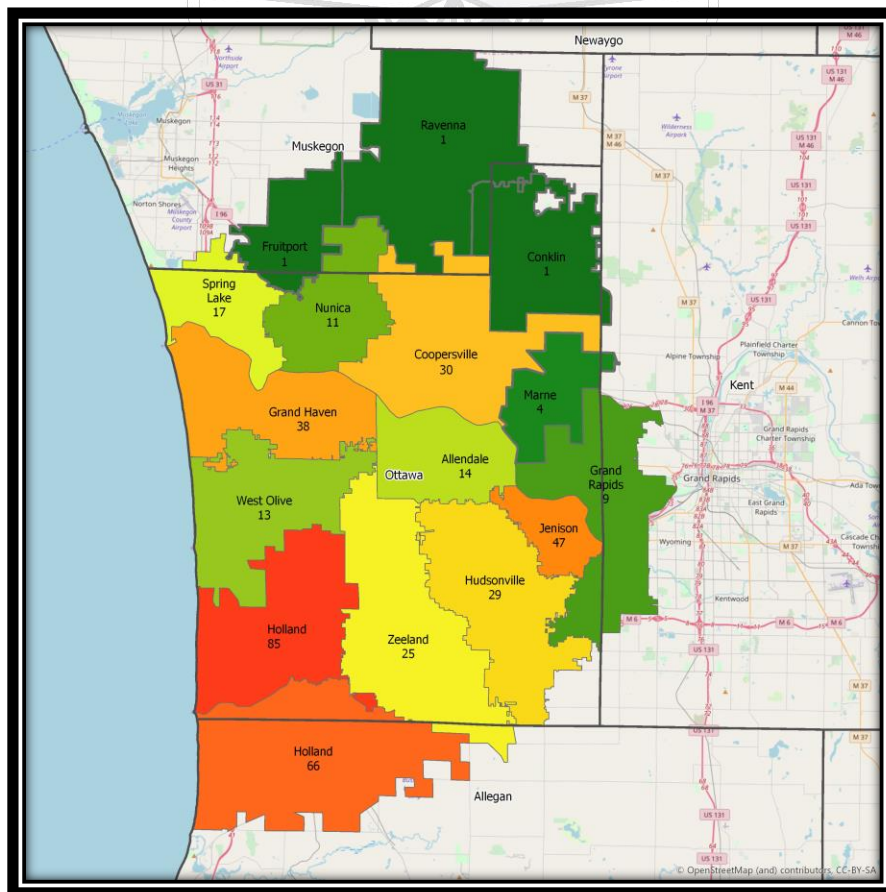




# *Juvenile Court and Ottawa County/GIS Department Partnership to Maximize Use of Court Resources*

Early in 2017, the 20<sup>th</sup> Circuit, Juvenile Court established a relationship with the Ottawa County IT/GIS Department to explore the use of innovative mapping technology to improve court data tracking. Using identified data elements, e.g., youth demographics, risk and need assessment levels, caseworker, and school, the Juvenile Court has improved ability to analyze caseload patterns and maximize the efficiency and effectiveness of court resources. Staff and administration can access the mapping software by using a common link. Thus, GIS technology has enhanced the court's ability to: 1) assign community services based on home addresses of clients; 2) search satellite images of client's homes to better prepare for required visits; and 3) compare risk assessment data with other activity (e.g. crime, public health issues, etc.), by specific geographic regions throughout Ottawa County.

Using data in this innovative way is new to the Juvenile Courts in Michigan. To share the application of the functionality of this data approach, the Juvenile Court and the Ottawa County IT/GIS Department staff co-presented this concept to juvenile court administrators across Michigan, emphasizing both the tremendous value of this partnership and how “mapping” software can significantly improve efficiencies in budget, staff time, and client assignments. Several counties have either reached out to the Court or GIS office in Ottawa County to better understand the program and seek guidance in developing something similar in their local jurisdictions. The Juvenile Court continues to work with the GIS Department to refine this process, adding elements to enhance day-to-day operations, further develop expertise of the software, and monitor trends over time.



## *The Ottawa County Juvenile Detention Center – 2017 in Review*

The American Correctional Association accredited 20<sup>th</sup> Circuit Court Ottawa County Juvenile Detention Center experienced growth within its treatment programs during the year of 2017. Also experienced was an increase in child care days and average daily population, and a decline in significant incidents among residents and staff, and among residents from the year 2016.

The Detention Center realized a 25% increase in Child Care Days from 8,861 in 2016 to 11,933 in 2017. The Average Daily Population also increased from 24.8 in 2016 to 33.7 in 2017. Despite these increases, significant incidents during 2017 decreased by 49% from the previous year, and significant incidents between residents declined by 79%. Some of the decline can be contributed to the residents themselves, but another portion of the decline is contributed to staff for the caring and safe culture they create within the Detention Center.

Also in 2017, the Detention Center completed individual treatment plans with 3 residents which was new this year. These first efforts included working with residents outside a structured, established treatment program. The outcomes were hopeful as two residents successfully returned to their homes after completion of their treatment plans, and one was sent to another placement as originally planned.

Another first for the Detention Center was to have a week dedicated to staff training. The purpose of this week was to focus on staff training in a concentrated manner to make certain staff skills were sufficient to meet the ACA standards. During the training week, Center staff completed approximately 400 hours of training on-line and in-person.

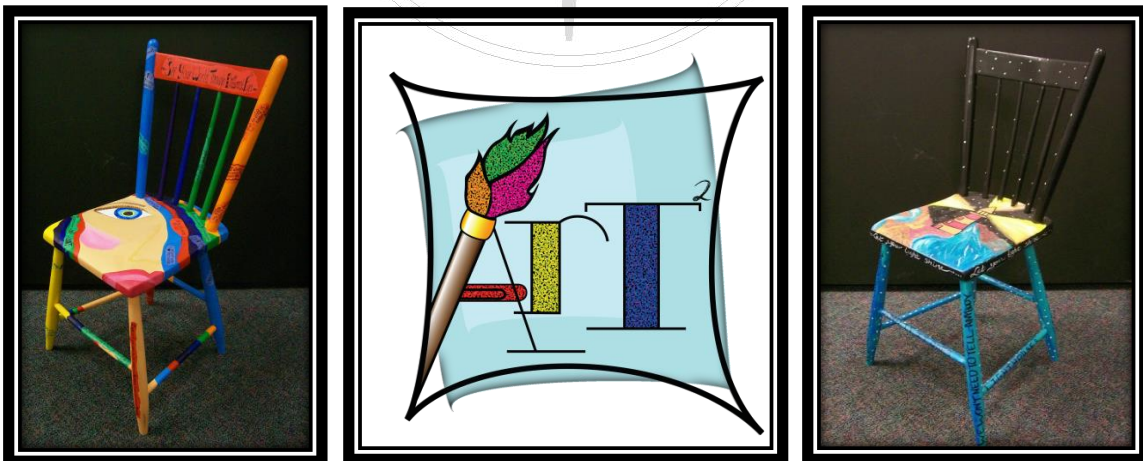


## *Girls Matter! The Trauma-based, Female Specific, Lighthouse Treatment Program*

In March of 2017, the female-specific, Lighthouse Treatment Program located within the Juvenile Detention Center, doubled its capacity without employing additional staff. Since 2010 the Lighthouse Program served up to 8 girls in one pod. An increase in demand and referrals in 2016 prompted the program expansion. Being one of the only secure, truly female-specific, treatment programs for girls in Michigan, the services are popular and necessary, but the commitment and quality, daily work by the therapists and staff ensures the program remains relevant and helpful for the success of the girls. The court is honored by the work done with these girls as they appear to thrive in this program. Feedback from judges and court staff across the state remain extremely positive.

In 2017, twenty-seven girls completed the Lighthouse Program and collectively, they earned 70 school credits, averaging 2.59 credits per individual. Many of these girls would not have earned these credits if they were not in the Lighthouse Program as they were not attending school or regularly attending school before placement in the Lighthouse Program.

These young ladies are very artistic and expressive. To assist them in these areas, they participated in the ART<sup>2</sup> (Art Renewing Teens and Treasures) program. In this program, the Lighthouse girls refurbished donated, wooden furniture by painting them with scenes and inspirational quotes. They also make jewelry and beauty items. The girls sell their items at local craft shows where they learn through experience, how to introduce themselves appropriately; talk with customers; provide customer service; learn how to be a cashier and make change; and effectively market their products. The girls are often pleasantly surprised by the interest in their products expressed by the customers and the interest in the Lighthouse program. In the end, the girls are proud of their accomplishments, obtain a sense of community, and take joy in contributing their proceeds back into the program for future young women who may come through Lighthouse's doors.



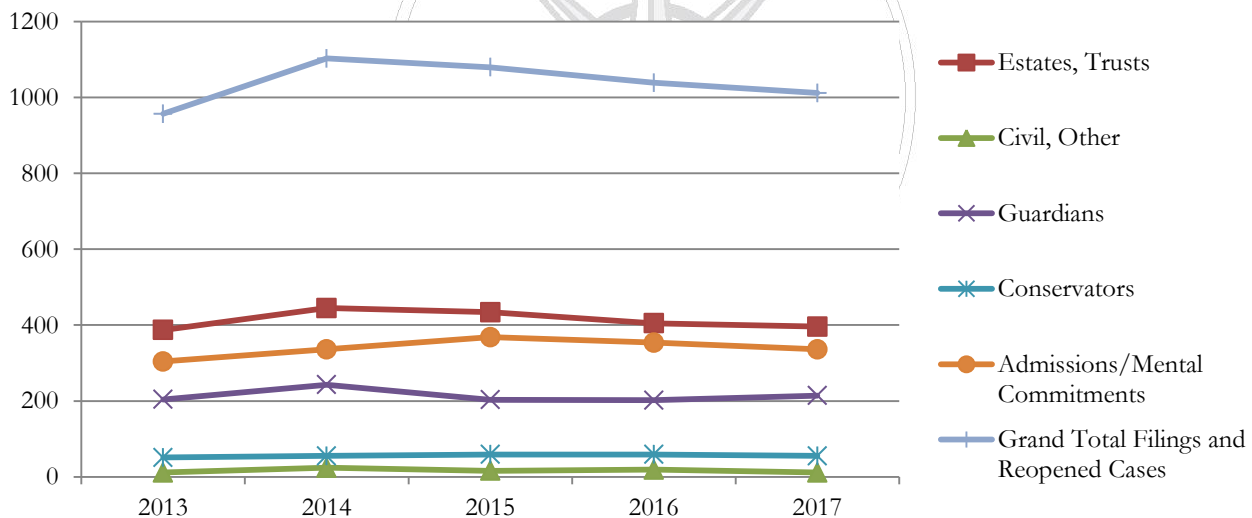
# Probate Court

## Caseload Facts

Ottawa County Probate Court provides services to many who need special consideration including the mentally ill, adults and minors in need of guardians or conservators and families of deceased individuals. The Probate Court has enhanced the Court's effectiveness by the use of mediation, interactive video technology (IVT), document imaging, video court recording, credit card payment capability and on-line case management.

During 2017, the Probate Court experienced a stable five-year trend with more than 1,000 new case filings. Among the new and reopened cases, one category grew in number, guardianship appointments, by 5.9%. Fifty-nine percent of the Probate caseload involves individuals needing the protection of the Court in guardianship, conservatorship and mentally ill cases. At the close of 2017, there were 330 adults and 340 minors with guardians appointed by the Court. In cases where individuals need assistance managing financial assets, there were 137 adults and 118 minors with Court appointed conservators. In addition to the regularly appointed guardians, there were an additional 630 (+5%) developmentally disabled individuals with guardians supervised by the Court.

### Ottawa County Probate Court 5-year Case Trends

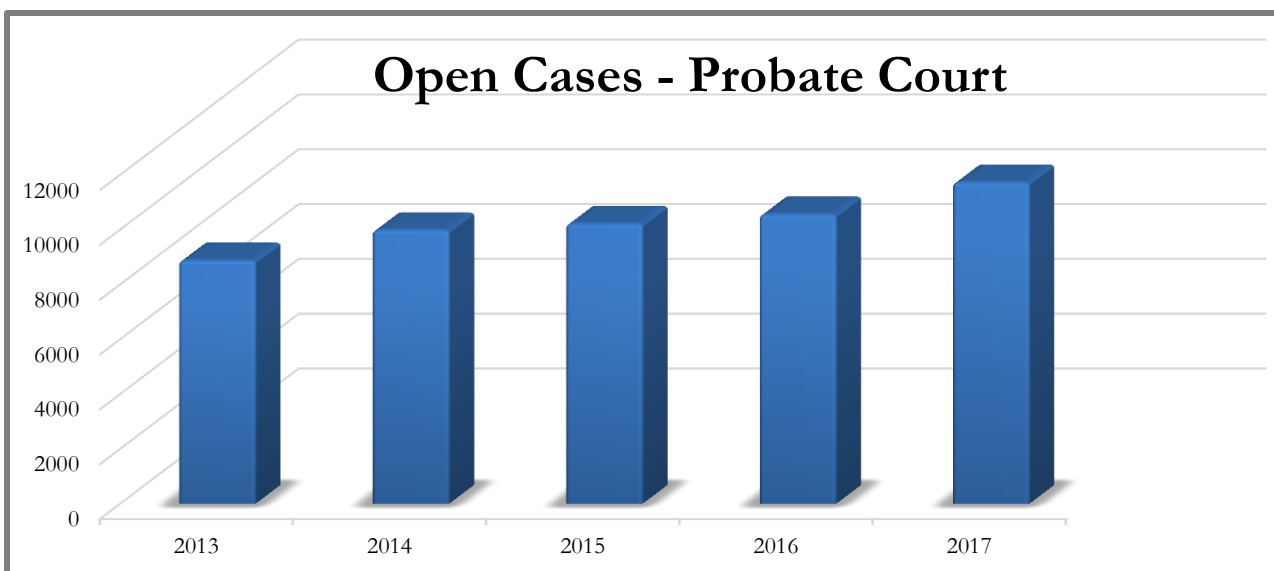
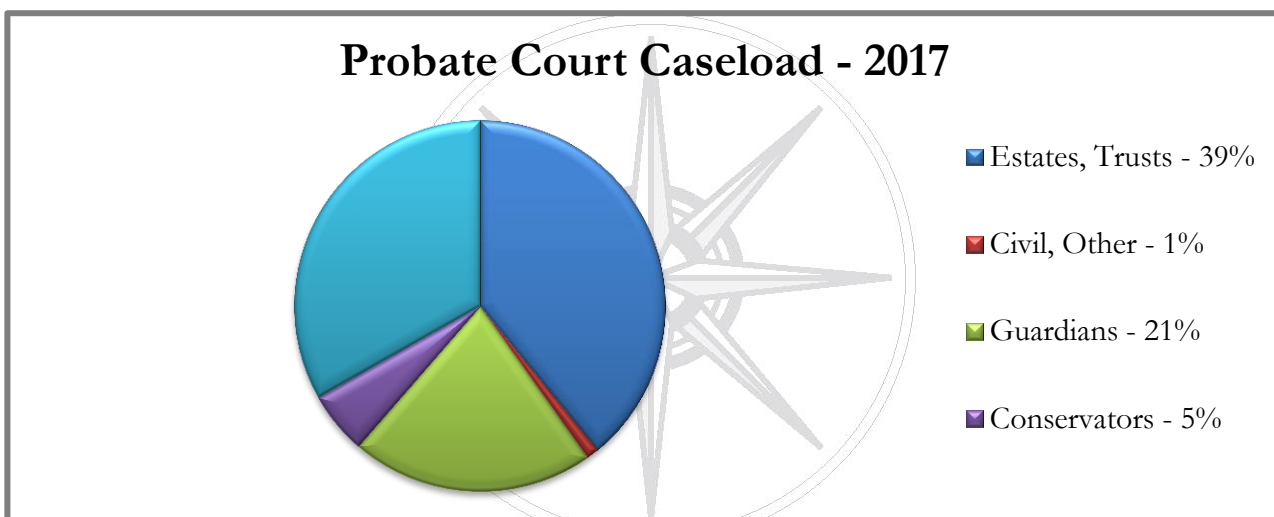


The ability of the Probate staff to cope with the influx of new cases is aided by the County supported OnBase document imaging system. Immediate electronic access to all 11,730 open Probate files has allowed staff to become more efficient in processing cases. The imaging system also allows for more timely and effective public service for interested parties who are seeking case information. In addition to these case processing efficiencies, the Probate Court strives to be more accessible to the public through its website, <http://www.miottawa.org/CourtsLE/Probate/>, where individuals can locate forms and instructions to guide them through a variety of Probate proceedings.

Ottawa County Probate Judge, Hon. Mark A. Feyen, handles all required Probate matters and assists the 20th Circuit Court by serving as Presiding Judge of the Fillmore Complex Family Division. He also is the assigned judge for the Ottawa County Recovery Court.



The pie chart below provides a descriptive view of various types of new cases being filed with the Probate Court. Although the Court has legal jurisdiction to handle twenty distinct types of cases, they are generally grouped in one of five categories: estates and trusts, civil, guardianships, conservatorships, and mental commitments. As demonstrated in this chart, estate work represents nearly 40% of the Court’s overall caseload and emphasizes the important community service role of the Court when assisting spouses and families to resolve sensitive issues related to the recent loss of a family member. Another sensitive issue the Court assists with is the hospitalization (sometime involuntary) of individuals in need of mental health treatment. These cases represent over 30% of the Court’s caseload and require careful coordination with families, attorneys, hospitals, and mental health treatment providers. In situations where an individual is unable to take care of certain daily needs, due to physical or mental limitations, the Court is often asked to appoint a guardian to provide assistance. Likewise, if an individual needs help with managing their finances, a conservator may be appointed. In both instances, the Probate judge carefully reviews the situation and provides legal authorization these “helpers” (guardians and conservators) to assist. Regular reviews are conducted to provide accountability. The second chart simply emphasizes the significant number of cases for which 1 judge and 5 employees are responsible. At the end of 2017 the Probate Court had 11,730 open cases.





## *Conversion of Probate Court Records from Microfilm to Digital*

Ottawa County was founded on March 2, 1831 and subsequently the Michigan Constitution of 1835, Article VI, Section 3, created the Ottawa County Probate Court by stating “A Court of Probate shall be established in each of the organized counties.” Since that time, the Probate Court has been keeping records of every case filed with the Court. For decades paper files were maintained until the adoption of microfilm



technology for long term retention of closed files. Like most Michigan Probate courts, Ottawa County converted closed files to microfilm and maintained them through 2017. As digital technology improved, and as older microfilm records began to deteriorate, it was time to convert the older records to a more current technology platform.

A Request for Proposals was developed and circulated, resulting in the project being awarded to FutureNet Group, Inc. This project included the preparation and scanning of several hundred rolls of microfilm, dating back to the mid-1800's. In addition, the scanned documents were indexed to allow for improved search capability.

In addition to the need of the Court to maintain accurate legal records, the recent explosion of online genealogy companies has increased public interest in historical probate court records. Organizations like “Ancestry.com” and “23andme” aggressively market their services and create public awareness of how to research family histories, including the use of probate court records. The conversion of Ottawa County Probate Court records from microfilm to a digital format will significantly enhance the ability of local residents to conduct such family research.



## About the Cover... The Compass Rose

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The Compass Rose has been guiding sailors for centuries. Regardless of whether we are seafarers, we still ask, “Where are we going?” We need a clear plan to guide us to our destination.

Through strategic planning, the 20th Judicial Circuit and Ottawa County Probate Courts are determining the best path to their destination. The 2017 Annual Report is a reminder of why the plan and destination are important.

The judges and courts’ staff are in the business of administering justice – one case at a time. By doing so, we contribute to a better life within our community, state, nation and world. Perhaps these are lofty goals, but to do less would be a disservice to the rule of law on which our nation was built and to our own potential.



# Quick Guide to the Courts

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For Directions to the Courts:

[www.miottawa.org/Courts](http://www.miottawa.org/Courts)

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For General Information:

Call any office listed on this page

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For Payment Convenience:

- Make payments online at [www.miottawa.org](http://www.miottawa.org)
  - Call any office to pay by credit card
  - Mail payments
  - Pay in person
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## Staff Facts

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### *20th Judicial Circuit Court*

4	Circuit Court Judges
112	Full Time Staff
22	Part Time Staff
1	Temporary Staff
5	Ottawa County Sheriff Deputies
9	Ottawa Area Intermediate School District

**153 Total**

### *Ottawa County Probate Court*

1	Probate Court Judge
5	Full Time Staff

**6 Total**

## CIRCUIT COURT

### Trial Division

414 Washington Ave., Room 300  
Grand Haven, MI 49417  
Phone: 616.846.8320  
Fax: 616.846.8179

### Friend of the Court

414 Washington Ave., Room 225  
Grand Haven, MI 49417  
Phone: 616.846.8210  
Fax: 616.846.8128

### Juvenile Court Division

12120 Fillmore Street  
West Olive, MI 49460  
Phone: 616.786.4100  
Fax: 616.786.4154

### Juvenile Court Services Bldg.

12263 James Street  
Holland, MI 49424  
Phone: 616.393.4450  
Fax: 616.393.4471

## PROBATE COURT

12120 Fillmore Street  
West Olive, MI 49460  
Phone: 616.786.4110  
Fax: 616.738.4624

## LEGAL SELF-HELP CENTER

414 Washington Avenue, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor  
Grand Haven, MI 49417  
Phone: 616.846.8141