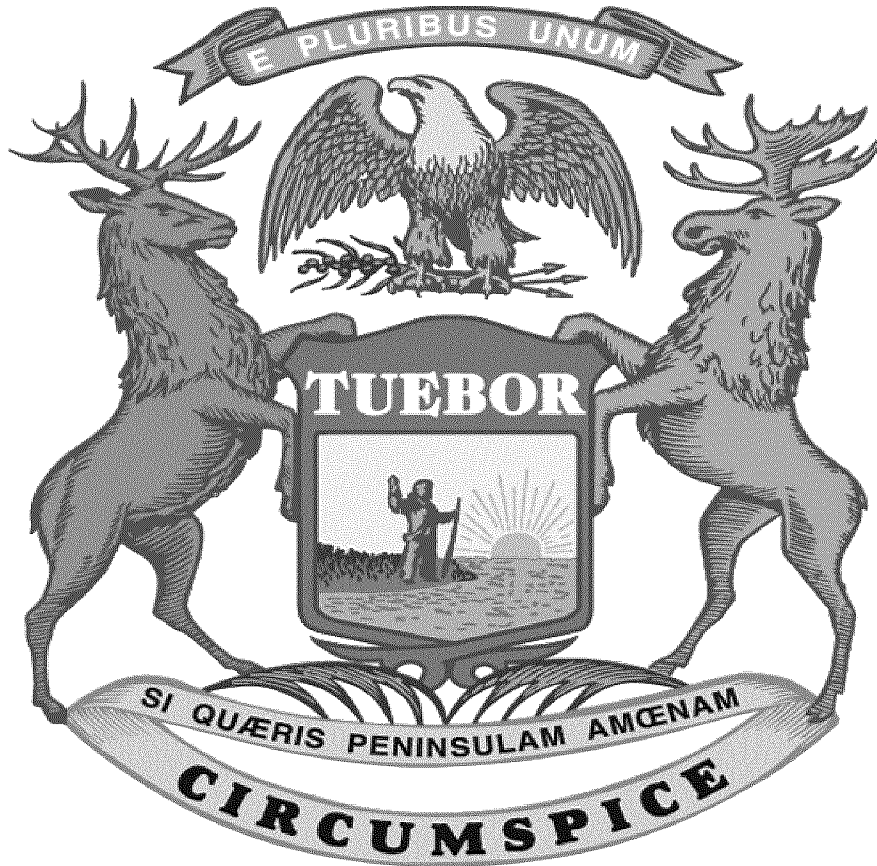


**STATE OF MICHIGAN  
COUNTY OF OTTAWA**

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**20<sup>th</sup> Circuit Court  
Probate Court**



**2011 – 2014  
Strategic Plan**

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**Revised 12/10**

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**20<sup>th</sup> JUDICIAL CIRCUIT &  
OTTAWA COUNTY PROBATE COURTS**

**2011-2014 Strategic Plan**  
(Revised 12/10)

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**Strategic Plan**

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## **Acknowledgements**

Since the 20<sup>th</sup> Judicial Circuit and Ottawa County Probate Courts' first strategic planning efforts in 2004, the Strategic Planning Oversight Team (SPOT) has consistently provided leadership to this ongoing process. The members of the Team are commended for their significant contributions of time, talent and commitment to court-wide strategic planning. Their collective efforts will continue to assist the Courts in the administration of justice and exemplary service to the public. In addition, the Courts' stakeholders have been instrumental in providing critical data to guide them in this endeavor.

Brenda Wagenknecht-Ivey, Ph.D., President – PRAXIS Consulting, Inc. is acknowledged for her continued support and masterful facilitation of the strategic planning process. Her ability to blend her planning expertise with an intuitive sense of balancing a variety of roles has been reflected in the consistent extraction of the best from the SPOT members and the Courts.

This document represents the efforts of many, the constant support of the judges and the wisdom of past and present “lessons learned” combined with the deliberate, eager anticipation of the future. It is with confidence and excitement, the Courts bring this document to life through the next phase of strategic planning implementation.

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## Strategic Planning Oversight Team Members

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Honorable Edward Post  
Chief Judge, Circuit Court

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Honorable Mark Feyen  
Chief Judge, Probate Court

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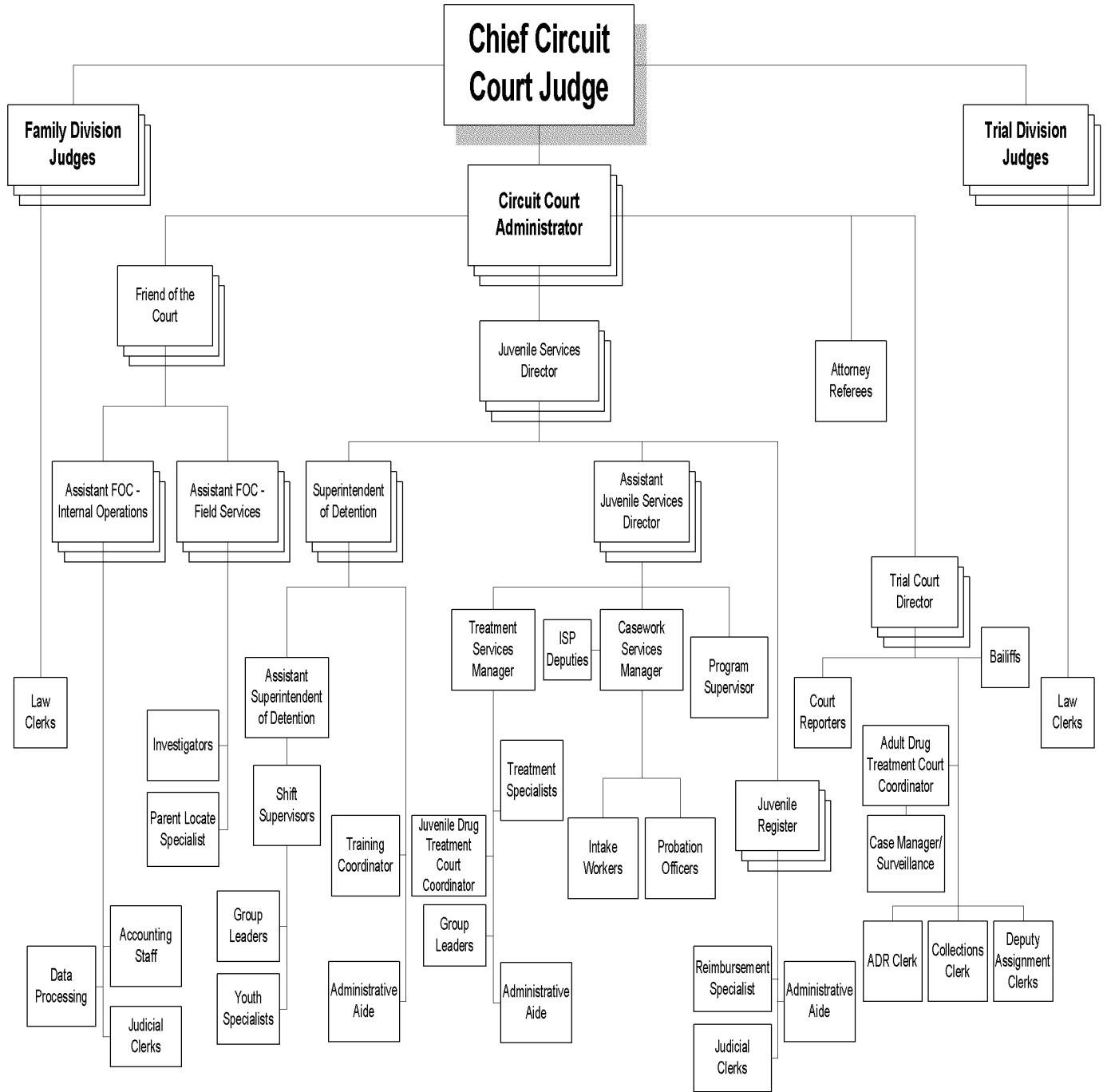
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Amanda Sheffield  
Deputy Probate Register

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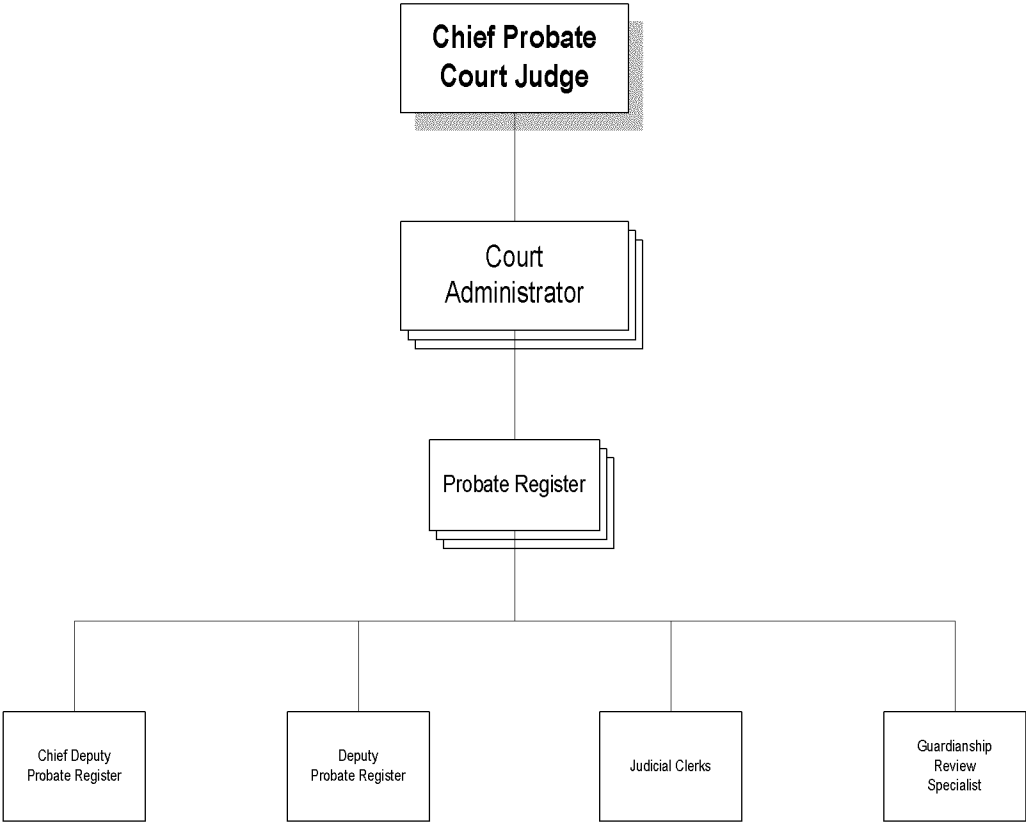
Brenda J. Wagenknecht-Ivey, Ph.D.  
Consultant, PRAXIS Consulting, Inc.

# 20th Judicial Circuit Court Ottawa County



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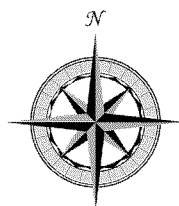
# Ottawa County Probate Court



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# 20<sup>th</sup> JUDICIAL CIRCUIT & OTTAWA COUNTY PROBATE COURTS

## 2011-2014 Strategic Plan (Revised 12/10)



### **Section I: Introduction and Overview**

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American society is built on three, separate and independent branches of government: executive, legislative, and judicial. Each fulfills a unique function in our democracy. The purpose of the judicial branch is to maintain the rule of law and a civil society. Individual courts fulfill this purpose by being independent and impartial, and by resolving society's conflicts peacefully and fairly, one case at a time. Courts across the nation provide justice for all people and in doing so, build the public's trust and confidence in the judicial branch of government.

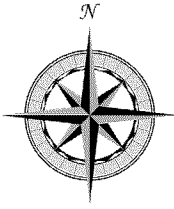
Article VI of Michigan's Constitution vests judicial power of the state exclusively in "one court of justice. The 20<sup>th</sup> Judicial Circuit and Ottawa Probate Courts (Courts) are part of the "one court of justice" in Michigan. While the Michigan Supreme Court is responsible for overseeing the trial courts across the state, the Chief Judges are responsible for administering the trial courts locally.

In 2004, the 20<sup>th</sup> Judicial Circuit and Ottawa County Probate Courts developed their first court-wide Strategic Plan. Developed by an internal Task Force appointed by the Chief Judges, the 2004-2007 Strategic Plan set forth a defined, future direction and priorities for improving services to the public. It also was instrumental in communicating the Courts' priorities to staff, external partners and stakeholders.

Since 2004, the Courts have completed many strategic projects resulting in significant benefits to the people of Ottawa County. They have been focused and consistent with the Strategic Plan which has resulted in successful improvements despite the downturn in the economy, budget challenges, and trends affecting the Courts. Additionally, the Strategic Plan is updated regularly, reflecting newly established strategic priorities. The Plan is monitored for progress and accomplishments.

This *revised* 2011-2014 Strategic Plan re-affirms the Courts' future direction and priorities for the next four years. The Courts will continue to diligently work to fulfill the mission, achieve the vision of the future, live the identified core values, and implement the Courts' long-range goals.

For a list of the Courts' annual strategic projects, refer to the *Strategic Plan – Priority Projects* of the 20<sup>th</sup> Judicial and Ottawa County Probate Courts (a companion document to this Strategic Plan that will be updated annually).



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## **Section II: Mission, Vision, and Core Values**

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The mission, vision, and core values of the 20<sup>th</sup> Judicial Circuit and Ottawa County Probate Courts are presented below.

The **mission statement** expresses the purpose of the Courts; why they exist.

The **vision statement** conveys a preferred future of the Courts. It expresses what the Courts are striving to become or do in the future: what they should be at their best.

The **core values** are carefully composed declarations of the Courts' code of desirable behaviors that are to guide decision-making and day-to-day activities. They describe what the Courts stand for, believe in, and consider acceptable in their quest to achieve their mission and vision. The core values are the behaviors, attitudes, and thoughts the Courts strive to reinforce and reward.

### **Mission of the 20<sup>th</sup> Judicial Circuit & Ottawa County Probate Courts**

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

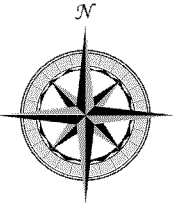
### **Vision of the 20<sup>th</sup> Judicial Circuit & Ottawa County Probate Courts**

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

### **Core Values of the 20<sup>th</sup> Judicial Circuit & Ottawa County Probate Courts**

As we serve the public, we embrace the following values:

**C**ollaboration  
**O**perational Excellence  
**U**nderstanding  
**R**estoration  
**T**ransparency  
**S**ervice



## **Section III: Trends Analysis**

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There are many social, economic, political, technological, and justice system trends affecting the Courts in Ottawa County. The implications of these trends on the Courts in the future will likely be great. Below is a brief summary of the most significant trends likely to affect the Courts in the next three to five years.

### **Social and Demographic Trends**

1. Growing population.
  - The population of Ottawa County increased nearly 10 percent between 2000 and 2009. The population grew from 238,314 in 2000 to an estimated 261,957 in 2009. Ottawa County has been one of the fastest growing counties in Michigan. Currently, however, the County's population growth has slowed considerably. It is estimated to be growing at less than 1% a year.
2. Increasingly racially/ethnically diverse.
  - Ottawa County's population is becoming increasingly racially and ethnically diverse, although it remains predominantly white (nearly 87 percent in 2009 down from 92 percent in 2000). Hispanics/Latinos make up approximately 8 percent of the population in 2009, up from 7 percent in 2000. Asians and Black/African Americans make up approximately 3 and 1 percent of the population respectively in 2009.
3. Aging population.
  - The population generally is aging due to the large number of people in the Baby Boomer generation and the fact that the life expectancy for men and women continues to increase. However, Ottawa County's population is younger on average than the State of Michigan as a whole.
4. Continued polarization of people by class, race, ethnicity, and lifestyles.
5. Continued break-up of traditional families.
6. Greater expectations placed on organizations and service providers (e.g., customers demanding better service; more informed consumers).
7. Increasing demand for institutional and organizational accountability.

### **Economic Trends**

8. Rising Unemployment Rate
  - In 2008, the unemployment rate in Ottawa County was 5.8 percent. It increased to 9.5 percent in 2010.

- 
- While the unemployment rate in Ottawa County has increased 3.7 percent over the past couple of years, it remains below the unemployment rate for the State of Michigan as a whole, which was 10.6 percent in 2008 and 14 percent in 2010.
9. More People Living Below the Poverty Level
    - In 2000, nearly 5.5 percent of people living in Ottawa County were living below the poverty level. That number increased to slightly more than 8 percent in 2009, an increase of 2.6 percent.
    - In 2009, nearly 14.5 percent of Michigan's population was living below the poverty level.
    - There has been a significant increase in health care costs and citizens are challenged to access dental care without insurance. In addition, food banks are reporting a significant increase in those needing food; many people whom have typically not accessed a food bank in the past are now in need.
    - Individual debt is increasing which may effect the Courts' ability to collect fees, child support, fines & costs, etc.
    - Reduced state and local revenue have impacted the Courts' budgets.
  10. Increasing Median Household Income
    - The median household income of people in Ottawa County increased approximately 7 percent between 2000 and 2008. In 2000, the median household income was \$52,347 and in 2008, it was estimated to be \$56,208.
    - The median household income in Ottawa County remains above the median household income for the State of Michigan as a whole and the City of Detroit, which was \$48,606 and \$28,730 respectively in 2008.
      - Note: median household income represents the center or mid-point value of household income where one-half of households are above and one-half are below the median amount.
  11. Increasing stratification between higher and lower incomes.
  12. Increasing use of part-time, temporary and contractual employees.
  13. Increase in e-commerce/e-business.

## Technological Trends

14. Continued developments/rapidly developing telecommunications and information technology.
15. Increase in the use of the Internet.
16. Greater demands and expectations for access to information and ability to do business with the Courts from remote locations (e.g., e-filing; pay fines, fees, restitution online; video conferencing)

- 
17. Greater demands for service and access to information 24 hours a day, 7 days a week (24/7).
  18. Continued need for and progress in networking and sharing of information (data/information exchange standards).
  19. The wireless revolution.
  20. Decreased privacy (on-line court records); increased proliferation of data reporting without accountability; centralization of services; decreased professional relationships; increased on-line training prevents the growth of professional relationships and challenges staff for time; decreased writing ability of staff.

### Policy and Political Trends

21. Increased expectations for government solutions (e.g., public expectation that courts will solve all problems).
22. Increased disorganization, competition, and polarization among the major political parties.
23. Increased scrutiny over how public tax dollars are spent.
24. Increased debate about helping organizations suffering from economic downturn- (e.g., airlines, banks/financial institutions, automobile companies).
25. Continued debate about and implementation of health care reform.
26. Increased legislation for specific crimes.
27. Increased unfunded mandates.
28. Increased demand/need to address illegal immigration issues.
29. Continued emphasis on homeland security and fighting terrorism at home and abroad.

### Court System Trends

31. Increased numbers and changing composition of court users (e.g., more non-English speaking and self-represented court users/litigants).
32. Increased and changed caseloads/workloads (e.g., increase in certain types of cases, increased demand for greater customer service and assistance, more complex cases, more fee waiver requests, more inability to pay/defaults).

- 
33. Reduced budgets/funding at the state and local levels.
  34. Increased number of litigants with mental health and/or addiction problems.
  35. Increased use of alternative dispute resolution (e.g. mediation, arbitration).
  36. Increased need/demand for the use of technology to enhance access and allow for doing business remotely/electronically (e.g., e-filing, online payments, video arraignments/hearings, access to case information via the Internet/website).
  37. Declined court infrastructure (e.g., facilities, technology, equipment, security).
  38. Increased public scrutiny and criticism of the judicial branch generally.

#### Caseload Trends.

39. During the 2009 calendar year, the Circuit Court managed 6131 new and reopened cases; the Probate Court received 906 new filings.
40. Through the end of 2009, filing trends for criminal and civil case types were static or slightly declining. Filings for personal protection orders, however, increased more than 20% and several domestic relations case types increased more than 6%. Juvenile delinquency filings increased more than 11%. Overall, from 2008 to 2009, the Circuit court caseload increased 2.7% and the Probate caseload decreased 2%.

#### Staffing Trends.

41. The Circuit Court is comprised of 4 elected Judges and 118 current full time equivalent (FTE) staff members. There are also part-time and temporary staff, as well as 4 Sheriff Deputies and 10 Intermediate School District staff assigned to work with the Court. Throughout the past few years, the Court has been working with reduced staffing, i.e., maintaining several vacant positions, for the purpose of budget savings. The Probate Court has 1 elected judge and 5 FTE's. An additional part-time, temporary position has assisted the Court during recent years, however, the funding for this position was eliminated in the FY 2011 budget.
42. The Courts will need to focus on employee training and preparation for advancement opportunities during the next five years because 25% of current staff will be eligible to retire within this period. A new strategic priority will be to implement an effective succession plan to ensure the right people, with the right skills, are in the right place, at the right time.
43. During 2010 a succession planning component of the Strategic Plan has been developed, including the identification of "key positions" within the Circuit and

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Probate Courts. The term “key position” identifies the position as critical to the Courts’ functions on a day-to-day basis and/or a position that is statute-driven. The term does not suggest that other positions within the Courts are not “key” to the Courts, but rather, in the absence of the position, the Courts’ efficiency/effectiveness may be critically impaired. Of the 30 employees in key positions, 26% are eligible to retire within five years. Of those employees currently in administrative key positions, 58% are eligible to retire within five years.

44. During the past five years, attrition or turnover rates (including voluntary and involuntary separation of service) have remained stable at approximately 6% overall for the Courts. Within the Juvenile Detention Center, however, the rate is significantly higher at 16%. The primary reasons for this higher rate include relief workers seeking full time employment, returning to school, relocating, and experiencing health issues.

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## Implications of Trends on the Courts

The trends noted above will interact in a myriad of ways, significantly affecting the Courts in the years ahead. Below are a few of the most significant implications of the trends on the Courts in the future.

1. Changing composition of court users. The demographics of the Courts' users will likely change in the future. For example, a greater proportion will be self-represented, non-English speaking, elderly, and more racially and ethnically diverse. Additional innovations, services, and assistance will be necessary to eliminate barriers and to make the Courts more accessible, user-friendly, and understood by all court users.
2. Increasing demand to improve and expand services and programs. Court users and the community will increasingly expect more and better services from the Courts. For example, consumers will likely expect better and more timely service as well as access to expanded Court and community-based programs. These services may include improved collection of fines, fees, and restitution; alternative dispute resolution; alcohol and drug treatment; mental health services; rehabilitation services; etc.

The needs and expectations of Court users and the community may be greater in the future at a time when the Courts may have to reduce or eliminate programs and services due to fiscal constraints.

3. Ongoing funding challenges and the need to be more transparent and accountable. The Courts may continue to experience budget shortfalls and funding challenges in the near term, as there are no imminent solutions to the expansive financial problems. Growing deficits and shrinking revenues at all levels of government will continue to impact the level of service the Courts can provide. In addition to the impact on staffing levels, a likely adverse effect will be on the Courts' technological innovations and improvements, updating technology and equipment, Court services and treatment programs. Finally, the Courts will continue to experience pressure to be more efficient and effective with existing or declining resources, creative in finding revenue streams, and transparent, responsible, and accountable in the future.
4. Need to more effectively manage cases and workload, and increase overall efficiency. Although the overall caseload trends show only slight increases, it is clear the complexity of many cases is on the rise. Also, the significant increase in certain domestic relations and domestic violence cases may have dire consequences for the community and the Courts. The public seems to expect courts to find innovative ways to expeditiously resolve legal matters and more efficient and effective methods of completing work (e.g., uniform and streamlined procedures, efficient scheduling and case management practices, better use of technology, less labor intensive paperwork, digitizing records and files, increased system integration and sharing of information with partners, etc.).
5. Need to maintain and improve the Courts' infrastructure (e.g., facilities, space, technology, financial, human resources). The new Ottawa County Courthouse in Grand

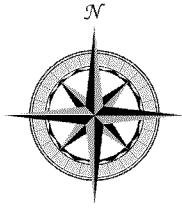
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Haven is a good example of how infrastructure investment can significantly improve efficiency and service. Recent employee and consumer surveys have verified improved satisfaction resulting from facility changes. Simultaneously, the improvements in Grand Haven shed new light on the inadequacies of the current Fillmore Complex Court facilities. As employees and Court users are exposed to a range of possible environmental options, expectations for improvement are raised.

6. Need for competent, dedicated, and engaged staff. A large proportion (25%) of the Courts' workforce is eligible to retire within the next 5 years, which will result in a significant loss of institutional knowledge and experience in the future. Although older workers may delay retirement due to uncertain economic times, the retirements which do occur will provide advancement opportunities for other high performing and high potential staff. Thus, the Courts must develop the next generation of Court managers and leaders now to handle the anticipated attrition and loss of expertise.

In addition, the Courts must continue to train and educate its workforce as well as involve staff in making service and operational improvements. The Courts must continue to invest in and value staff so they are able to attract and retain competent, dedicated, and engaged staff in the years ahead.

7. Need for positive and collaborative relations with national, state, and local leaders and partners. Continued collaboration with national organizations, state leaders, legislators, city and county officials, local justice system partners, and the community will be even more important in the future. Positive relations and ongoing collaboration are needed to ensure adequate resources, make technology and other infrastructure improvements, improve case management practices, better serve and provide programs to Court users and the community and to remain connected and responsive to the local bar, partners, and the community. Such relationships are essential and are challenged by the retirements of those in the Courts' stakeholder agencies who have represented stable, knowledgeable, long-standing relationships.



## **Section IV: Organizational Assessment**

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A “SWOT” analysis is a process of identifying an organization’s strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (i.e., SWOT). This analysis is completed in the context of the Courts’ mission, vision, values and the effects of a variety of trends. Below is a brief summary of the organizational assessment conducted in 2010.

### **Strengths**

1. Access to the Courts has been improved (e.g., Legal Self-Help Center and Learning Center).
2. Case management practices are effective and efficient. The majority of cases are handled and resolved expeditiously (i.e., within time guidelines and related performance measures).
3. The Courts’ facilities and security have improved (e.g., the new Ottawa County Courthouse in Grand Haven).
4. Judicial officers and staff are committed to helping and serving the public.
5. There is a strong culture to “do the right thing” and of mutual respect.
6. The Courts’ leadership, managers, and staff continue to explore new opportunities to improve, expand, and add services and programs as needed.
7. Staff is well-educated, experienced, and compassionate.
8. The bench provides good leadership; judicial officers are unified.
9. The Courts’ administrative leadership is strong and they have a strategic perspective. They also keep staff informed about important and relevant matters.
10. There is good intra and inter-divisional communication and teamwork due to strategic planning.
11. Community partnerships and external relations are strong.
12. The Courts’ are fiscally responsible; budgets are well managed and new revenue streams are actively cultivated.

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## Areas for Improvement

1. The Juvenile Services building needs significant improvements.
2. Select policies and procedures need revision to better serve the public.
3. The Courts are lagging behind in the use of available technology.
4. Some employees are overqualified for current positions and some appear discontent, dissatisfied, or disengaged. Some employees are not adapting well to change.
5. It is increasingly difficult to keep younger employees engaged. Resources to tangibly recognize or reward employee performance are lacking and a constant challenge.
6. Court staff is not very diverse; most employees are not bilingual or bicultural.
7. Several Court programs are increasingly dependent on grant funding. This type of funding makes certain programs vulnerable to reductions and/or closure.
8. The Courts do not have dedicated fiscal or IT staff.
9. Lack of centralized Court facilities makes communication more difficult.

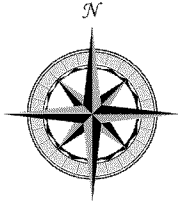
## Opportunities

1. The Courts need to use more technology to increase access and services.
2. Smaller caseloads provide more time to conduct staff training and address necessary changes/updates within the Courts, e.g., policies, practices, etc.
3. The Courts need to leverage the self-help and learning centers.
4. The Courts need to continue to explore creative programming to meet evolving needs.
5. Developing the Building Bench Strength Program will provide new opportunities for high performing and high potential staff.

## Threats

1. The Courts' budget may decline in the future thereby limiting resources necessary to meet service demands.
2. A large number of experienced staff is eligible to retire within the next few years

- 
3. More Court users (e.g., juveniles) are experiencing mental health issues. Mental health resources and services are lacking.
  4. The political landscape is very volatile.
  5. Technology developments are happening very rapidly and the Courts have limited time and resources to stay abreast of relevant changes. Also, Court users have higher expectations due to technological advances.



## **Section IV: Strategic Issues, Goals, and Objectives**

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The Courts have identified five strategic areas that need attention in the years ahead. They are as follows:

**Strategic Issues of the 20<sup>th</sup> Judicial Circuit &  
Ottawa County Probate Courts**

1. Resources
2. Access to Courts
3. Efficient/Effective Services and Operations
4. Positive External Relations
5. Employee Opportunities and Satisfaction

A brief description of each of the strategic areas as well as goals and objectives are presented below.

See the Courts' *Strategic Plan – Priority Projects* for a list of the strategic projects the Courts are working on each year.

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## **Strategic Issue #1: Resources**

The Courts must have sufficient resources to provide justice to all court customers and provide exemplary service to the Ottawa County community. This includes having adequate staff, training, technology/information systems, equipment, facilities, and programming to meet the current and future needs of judicial officers, staff, court customers, and justice system partners. However, budget and resource constraints are expected to persist in the future. Thus, the Courts must continue to seek and implement innovative and effective ways to provide justice and serve the people while saving money, cutting costs, being more efficient, and increasing the collection of fines, fees, restitution, and court costs.

### ***Goals and Objectives:***

#### Goal 1: Ensure sufficient resources to provide exemplary services.

- Objective 1.1: Use alternative work arrangements (e.g., volunteers, interns, part-time, job sharing, tele-commuting; etc.) to provide assistance and services, where appropriate
- Objective 1.2: Pursue additional forms of funding to supplement the budget and address organizational needs
- Objective 1.3: Form creative partnerships to share resources and provide needed Court and community services (e.g., shared employee training to lower costs; collaboration with bar associations to provide low cost or free legal services; form partnerships with local educational and community institutions to provide support for select programs (drug treatment court, Lighthouse, staff training opportunities, etc.).
- Objective 1.4: Communicate and advocate for the resource needs of the Courts

#### Goal 2: Implement cost saving/reduction measures without adversely affecting services or Court operations.

- Objective 2.1: Implement green initiatives which save money and reduce costs (e.g., recycling programs, energy reduction initiatives, alternative transportation, etc.)
- Objective 2.2: Implement other innovative and effective practices to save money and reduce costs (e.g., reduce unnecessary printing/copying, expand use of electronic content management system, increase use of video and telephonic technology for appropriate court hearings, etc.).

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Goal 3: Collect reimbursement, revenues, fines, fees, restitution and Court costs.

Objective 2.1: Use innovative and effective practices to increase collection rates for court ordered reimbursement, fines, fees, restitution, court costs, etc.

Objective 2.2: Continually track, report and evaluate collection efforts

**Note:** See the Courts' *Strategic Plan - Priority Projects* for a list of strategic projects related to this key area.

---

## **Strategic Issue #2: Access to Courts**

The Courts remain committed to providing all parties with equal access to justice and services. This means continual efforts to reduce or minimize procedural, physical, language, cost, and other barriers to accessing the Courts. New and effective methods of making the Courts more convenient, understandable, and user-friendly will be implemented.

### ***Goals and Objectives:***

Goal 1: Ensure Court services and information are readily available, easily understood, and user-friendly for all.

- Objective 1.1: Provide easy access to Court and case information; online and at Court locations
- Objective 2.2: Make the Courts easily understood for all court users
- Objective 2.3: Provide Court users with information and assistance so they can efficiently complete their court business

Goal 2: Eliminate barriers to court access.

- Objective 2.1: Simplify the Courts' procedures
- Objective 2.2: Improve physical access to Court facilities
- Objective 2.3: Implement innovative methods for providing services to court users in remote areas of Ottawa County

**Note:** See the Courts' *Strategic Plan - Priority Projects* for a list of strategic projects related to this key area.

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### **Strategic Issue #3: Efficient and Effective Services and Operations**

The Courts must continue to improve services and operations in the years ahead. This includes providing timely and high quality services to all court users and making court operations more efficient and effective. In particular, court users will be served in a timely manner and will be treated respectfully and courteously. Finally, case management practices and internal work processes will be timely, streamlined, consistent, and effective.

#### ***Goals and Objectives:***

##### Goal 1: Complete work in a timely and effective manner.

- Objective 1.1: Resolve all cases/legal matters in accordance with *Michigan Trial Court Case File Management Standards*
- Objective 1.2: Implement innovative and effective case processing policies and practices
- Objective 1.3: Improve, streamline, and standardize internal work processes and operations
- Objective 1.4: Simplify and increase uniformity in written policies and procedures
- Objective 1.5: Use technology to improve efficiency and effectiveness of case management and internal operations

##### Goal 2: Provide exemplary service to court users.

- Objective 2.1: Treat all Court users respectfully and courteously
- Objective 2.2: Serve all Court users in a timely manner – reduce wait times
- Objective 2.3: Improve services to all Court users including clients, jurors, victims, witnesses, and litigants

**Note:** See the Courts' *Strategic Plan - Priority Projects* for a list of strategic projects related to this key area.

---

## Strategic Issue #4: Positive External Relations

The Courts value strong and collaborative relations with justice system partners and community members such as prosecutors, attorneys, not-for-profit agencies, schools, clergy, law enforcement, treatment providers, governmental agencies, and the general public. The Courts continually seek to improve and expand these working relationships as they are integral to the Courts' short and long-term success. Improving communication, joint problem solving, collaboration on treatment alternatives, fiscal collaboration, planning, etc. are among the areas for continued improvement.

### *Goals and Objectives:*

#### Goal 1: Improve communication and collaboration with justice system and community partners.

- Objective 1.1: Frequently and consistently share relevant information with existing and new partners
- Objective 1.2: Engage current and new partners to better serve the Ottawa County community
- Objective 1.3: Collaborate with partners to solve mutual justice system problems
- Objective 1.4: Continually solicit suggestions from partners to improve services and court operations

#### Goal 2: Increase public understanding of the Courts.

- Objective 2.1: Inform the public of the Courts' services and how to access services
- Objective 2.2: Sponsor training and educational opportunities, as appropriate
- Objective 2.3: Educate students and community groups about the purpose of courts and the judicial branch of government
- Objective 2.4: Use multiple media to educate others about the Courts

**Note:** See the Courts' *Strategic Plan - Priority Projects* for a list of strategic projects related to this key area.

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## **Strategic Issue #5: Employee Opportunities and Satisfaction**

The Courts are committed to improving the work environment, employee engagement, and employee satisfaction. These areas include improving court-wide communication, providing staff with training and development opportunities, involving staff in making organizational improvements, recognizing staff and providing incentives for exceptional performance, demonstrating that staff are valued and appreciated, and fostering teamwork and trust within and across the Courts. A positive and motivating work environment as well as engaged and satisfied employees is essential to providing the highest standards of justice and exemplary service to the Ottawa County community.

### ***Goals and Objectives:***

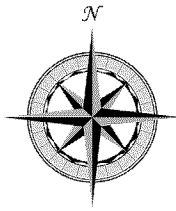
#### Goal 1: Continually improve the work environment.

- Objective 1.1: Encourage open communication and information sharing among Court divisions
- Objective 1.2: Promote respect and teamwork among employees
- Objective 1.3: Continually enhance the leadership and management skills of supervisors and managers
- Objective 1.4: Value and recognize staff for their good work and service to the Courts and community
- Objective 1.5: Improve the work space and equipment of judges and staff

#### Goal 2: Maintain a highly skilled and engaged workforce.

- Objective 2.1: Educate and train judges and Court employees on all aspects of their jobs
- Objective 2.2: Provide interested, high performing and high potential staff with additional training, development, and advancement opportunities
- Objective 2.3: Ensure required employee certifications are complete and in compliance with their respective positions
- Objective 2.4: Cross-train staff within and across Divisions.
- Objective 2.5: Involve staff in making service and operational improvements

**Note:** See the Courts' *Strategic Plan - Priority Projects* for a list of strategic projects related to this key area.



## **Section V: Conclusion**

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### **Institutionalizing Strategic Thinking & Strategic Leadership**

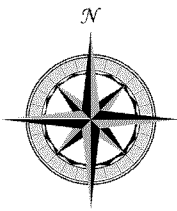
The National Association for Court Management (NACM) core competency on visioning and strategic planning emphasizes the importance of institutionalizing strategic thinking and strategic leadership, moving beyond the mere development of a strategic plan. Additionally, it stresses the need to differentiate among operational thinking, strategic planning, strategic thinking, and strategic leadership. Specifically, many court leaders are focused on the operational requirements of daily managing courts daily, leaving little time for reflection or time to anticipate problems and issues that affect the courts capacity to deliver services over the long-term. According to the NACM core competency materials, strategic thinking enables leaders to anticipate, promote, and sustain change.

In Ottawa County, the shift to strategic thinking and strategic leadership has been a challenging yet vital process. Although it has not yet been fully achieved, significant progress is being made. Some of the steps taken include: (1) periodic judicial briefings, so the judges are aware of and can provide support for strategic activities and projects; (2) a permanent change in the Leadership Team bi-weekly agenda, which now includes a regular update on strategic planning initiatives; and (3) development of a communication plan to ensure regular updates about project status to all staff, and improved efforts to communicate among implementation teams to avoid duplicating efforts or working at cross-purposes on similar strategic projects. In sum, the Courts' Leadership Team continues to strive for balance between tending to operational matters while remaining focused on the Courts' long-term, strategic direction and priorities.

### **Succession Planning: A Natural Extension of Strategic Leadership**

Following a multi-year period of successfully creating, implementing and stabilizing a strategic plan for the Courts, a new focal point has emerged. Ongoing goals, highlighted by the five strategic issues noted above, must now be augmented with an emphasis on succession planning and talent development ("Building Bench Strength"). To ensure the time and effort spent on developing court resources, improving public access to courts, increasing efficiency and effectiveness, building positive external relations and providing professional development opportunities for staff results in a high performance court, it is time to envision a future court where all of these strategic issues will continue and the Courts will have the right people with the right qualifications in the right place at the right time.

As a result of the Leadership Team's research and development of the BBS program, the Circuit and Probate Courts in Ottawa County have a clearer understanding of the workforce and future personnel needs, as well as professional development plans required for employees aspiring to move into key positions. This succession/talent development plan will ensure the Courts have a steady, reliable pipeline of people ready to meet the organization's future needs in leadership and other key roles. It is a natural outgrowth and an important "next step" in the Courts' carefully executed, long-range strategic plan.



## Section VI: Glossary

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Mission Statement: Expresses the fundamental purpose of an organization.

Vision Statement: Defines a preferred future of an organization. It describes what the organization desires to become or do in the future: what it should be at its best.

Core Values: carefully composed declarations of the Courts' code of desirable behaviors that are to guide decision-making and day-to-day activities. They describe what the Courts stand for, believe in, and consider acceptable in their quest to achieve their mission and vision.

Strategic Issues: Internal or external, underlying issues that are fundamentally important to the organization over the long-term.

Goal: A statement that reflects an anticipated outcome or result.

Objective: General statements that describe the manner in which the end result – or goal – will be achieved.

Priority Projects: These are the shorter-term (1-2 years) strategic and operational priorities of the organization.

SPOT Team: The Strategic Planning Oversight Team consists of members who want to be actively involved in the implementation process and oversee the Courts' Strategic Plan. They are charged with regular reviews of implementation, problem-solving challenges, maintaining focus, supporting the Implementation Teams, building support, sharing information and celebrating/acknowledging goal completion or success.

Strategic Planning Coordinator. The appointed Strategic Planning Coordinator is the Circuit Court Administrator or his/her designee. This person is responsible for helping to implement and monitor progress of the Strategic Plan; functions as primary liaison between Strategic Issue Implementation Teams and working members of those teams, the Circuit/Probate Leadership Team and individuals working on other projects; and is the primary contact for judges and staff.

Strategic Issue Implementation Teams. Each Implementation Team represents one of the five Strategic Issue areas. Implementation Teams lead the facilitation of change and improvement efforts identified in their respective strategic issue areas. The Teams are comprised of managers and staff from the Courts and are responsible for completing priority projects, communicating progress and encouraging others to get involved.

Leadership Team: The Circuit and Probate Courts' Leadership Team is comprised of Directors representing each division of the Courts.