



20TH JUDICIAL  
CIRCUIT COURT AND  
OTTAWA COUNTY  
PROBATE COURT



# ANNUAL REPORT

# 2023



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EMBRACING  
CHANGE FOR A  
BETTER  
TOMORROW





TWENTIETH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT COURT  
OTTAWA COUNTY PROBATE COURT

SUSAN M. FRANKLIN, JD  
CIRCUIT COURT ADMINISTRATOR

May 8, 2024

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

Dear Chairperson Moss and Commissioners:

As Chief Judges for the 20th Circuit Court and the Ottawa County Probate Court, it is our pleasure to present the 2023 Annual Report, summarizing the achievements, challenges, and strategic initiatives that have shaped our courts' progress. The past year has been a testament to our collective dedication to justice and an unwavering commitment to uphold the principles that define the foundation of our judicial system. As we reflect on the milestones we've reached, it becomes evident that our journey has not only been about maintaining our standard of excellence but also about embracing change for the betterment of our court and the community we serve.

In the face of evolving societal dynamics, technological advancements, and legal landscapes, it is imperative that we, as custodians of justice, remain proactive in adapting to these changes. The theme of this year's annual report, "Embracing Change for a Better Tomorrow," encapsulates our vision for a resilient and forward-looking judiciary that meets the demands of our county and our citizens. The significant changes and challenges facing the courts this year included:

- Technology Upgrade:** The courts worked to prepare for a successful transition to JIS, a new case management system to replace our aging AS400 system.
- Community Outreach:** The courts implemented a strategic legal kiosk program, placing kiosks throughout Ottawa County to allow for better engagement with our community.
- Professional Development:** Ongoing training and development opportunities allowed our judicial officers and staff to stay abreast of legal developments and best practices.
- Structural Enhancements:** The courts prepared for transitions both in job duties and in location, as the courts await the finale to a long planning and construction process for the Family Justice Center.

As we navigate these changes, we are confident that our court will emerge stronger and more resilient. We extend our sincere appreciation to each member of our court family for their dedication and hard work. Together, let us continue to uphold the principles of justice and build a judiciary that not only adapts to change but thrives in its embrace.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jon A. Van Allsburg".

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

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "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 2023 Annual Report

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## *The Best is Yet to Come*

Typically, each year the Annual Report for the Circuit and Probate Courts focuses on a theme selected by the Courts for their All-Staff Meeting. For 2023, we chose the theme of “The Best is Yet to Come,” highlighting the many changes the Courts had and are continuing to experience, while also striving to recognize the efforts of our staff to adapt to those challenges.

The Courts began their strategic planning initiative in 2005 and have reviewed and generated a new Strategic Plan about every three years since. Our current Strategic Plan provides renewed inspiration and guidance as the Courts continue the important work of “doing justice – one case at a time”. Specific strategic focus areas include Improving the Court User Experience (Access, Services, Programs); Improving the Employee Experience (Inclusion, Satisfaction, Well-being); Efficient Court Operations; and Funding, Resources, and Facilities. The significant work of this Strategic Planning Team, led by the Chief Judges and Court Administrator, is important evidence of how seriously the Courts evaluate and improve upon our past performance.

Our Strategic Planning Team members have considered several future scenarios and are using the many lessons learned during the pandemic, together with updated trends analysis and stakeholder survey data in this revitalization of the Courts’ Strategic Plan. To put our plans into place with fidelity, we have formed several smaller strategic planning teams to focus on particular issues identified in our Strategic Plan. Teams are focusing on increasing access to justice for non-English speakers, effective onboarding of new court employees, and assessing and increasing our effective use of technology, to name a few.

Many other projects were also worked on during 2023 – we continue to work toward a new case management system to meet the requirements of the state and court alike. We have been participants in the construction of the new Family Justice Center, to ensure the fiscal responsibility and functionality of this new building.

Everyone worked together to maintain case processing, court hearings, collections, provision of treatment services, great public service, and much needed support for co-workers. Despite constantly changing rules and new duties, our employees have consistently risen to the occasion. The rule of law has been safeguarded in Ottawa County and the effective administration of justice continues.



# Judicial Officers

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## *The 20th Judicial Circuit and Ottawa County Probate Court Judges*

*“Judges are like umpires. Umpires don't make the rules. They apply them. The role of an umpire and a judge is critical. They make sure everybody plays by the rules. But it is a limited role. Nobody ever went to a ballgame to see the umpire.” – Supreme Court Chief Justice John Roberts*

The role of a judge within a court system is one of great importance, embodying the essence of justice, impartiality, and the application of law. Serving as the ultimate arbiter of disputes and the guardian of the rule of law, judges play a multifaceted role that is integral to the functioning of a fair and just legal system.

At its core, the primary function of a judge is to serve as an impartial adjudicator. They are expected to remain neutral and detached from external influences, ensuring that their decisions are based solely on the merits of the case and the principles of justice. This impartiality is fundamental to upholding public trust in the judiciary and safeguarding the integrity of the legal system.

Furthermore, judges act as procedural overseers, ensuring that court proceedings are conducted in accordance with established rules and standards of due process. They manage courtroom proceedings, rule on evidentiary matters, and ensure that all parties are afforded a fair opportunity to present their arguments and evidence. By maintaining order and fairness in the courtroom, judges uphold the principles of procedural justice and protect the rights of litigants.

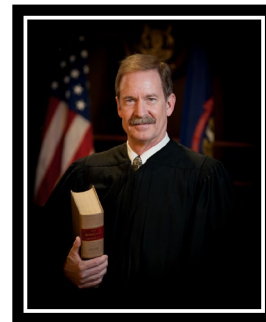
Beyond their roles as adjudicators and procedural overseers, judges also serve as guardians of the broader principles of justice, equality, and the rule of law. Through their decisions, judges contribute to the development of legal principles and the evolution of societal norms. Their rulings set precedents that guide future cases and shape the trajectory of legal doctrine. Moreover, judges have a duty to uphold the fundamental rights enshrined in our Constitutions, safeguarding individuals' liberties and ensuring equality before the law.

The Circuit and Probate Courts in Ottawa County are fortunate to have a learned and collegial group of elected judges. The Probate Court has one judge who handles all probate cases and assists the Circuit Court with Family Division cases, as well as presiding over 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.

In 2023, we welcomed a fifth Circuit Court judge. Hon. Paul F. Kraus was elected in November of 2022 and took office in January of 2023, filling a new seat created by the state legislature. The caseload analysis performed in 2019 showed a need for 10 judges between the Circuit, Probate and District Courts in Ottawa County, which were served by only nine judges. Ottawa County also had the highest ratio of population to circuit court judge among the ten largest counties in Michigan at 72,623 to 1. Moreover, each circuit and probate court judge in Ottawa County was estimated to be spending 2,891.92 hours working on 2019 case filings, or an average of 55.6 hours per week. This level of work was not sustainable over time. With the support of Ottawa County, the Michigan legislature approved the new seat, and Judge Kraus was elected to an eight-year term.

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

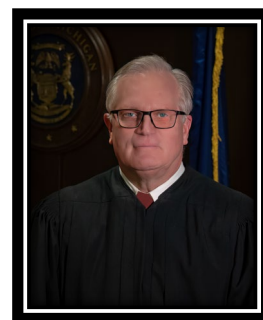
Judge Van Allsburg graduated from West Ottawa High School and Central Michigan University. He attended Detroit College of Law (now Michigan State University College of Law) and graduated with honors. After practicing law for two years in Oakland and Wayne counties, he moved back to Holland and joined 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 Family Division cases and business court matters, and until 2021 handled administrative appeals and appeals from the district court. In November 2016, Van Allsburg was appointed Chief Judge by the Michigan Supreme Court. He is a past president of the Michigan Judges Association and is a member 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 presides over the Ottawa County 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**



The Honorable Jon Hulsing has served as judge for the 20<sup>th</sup> Circuit Court in Ottawa County, Michigan since 2006. His docket consists of both criminal and civil cases. He has been the Chief Judge Pro Tempore since 2016. In 2018, he was elected by all of Michigan's circuit court judges to be a representative on the Judicial Tenure Commission which investigates allegations of judicial misconduct. He now serves as the Commission's Chairperson.

In addition to six years of private law practice, Judge Hulsing served as an Assistant and Senior Assistant Prosecutor in Ottawa County from 1995 to 2006. In 1983, he began his public service career as a deputy with the Ottawa County

Sheriff's Office and then as a patrolman with the Wyoming Police Department. He previously served as a member and committee co-chair of the Michigan Judges Association. He graduated *summa cum laude* with a Juris Doctorate from Thomas M. Cooley Law School and has a Bachelor of Science degree from Grand Valley State University. In 2020, he became one of only 22 national commissioners with the Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies (CALEA) which establishes best practices for law enforcement agencies.

### **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, with a diverse Family Division docket, including domestic relations, juvenile, and child welfare cases.

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

Judge Miedema 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. Miedema hears felony criminal cases, general civil cases, and divorce cases.

### **Paul F. Kraus, Judge, 20th Circuit Court**



Judge Kraus became Ottawa County's fifth Circuit Court Judge on January 1, 2023. Judge Kraus serves in the Family Division of the Circuit Court and his docket includes adoptions, child neglect/abuse cases, juvenile delinquency, divorce/custody, personal protection orders, and other domestic matters. Judge Kraus was appointed by the State Bar Association of Michigan to a task force devoted to the promotion of professionalism and civility in the practice of law.

Prior to his election, Judge Kraus worked for the Ottawa County Prosecutor's Office, serving as a senior assistant prosecuting attorney as well as the family unit division director. In that capacity, he advocated for protecting children with a docket of neglect and abuse cases and a felony child abuse caseload. Kraus provided legal representation to the Ottawa County Department of Health and Human Services and served on the Ottawa County Child Death Review Team. Prior to his Ottawa County employment, Kraus was an Assistant Attorney General for the Iowa Department of Justice for nearly ten years. Judge Kraus has Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Science in Education degrees from Drake University and a Juris Doctorate degree from The University of Iowa.



## Caseload Trends

The following caseload trends provide some context for the daily activity of the Circuit and Probate judges. Additional statistical details are contained in the Trial Division, FOC, Juvenile Court and Probate Court sections of this Annual Report. Overall caseloads were stable during the past several years; however, once the COVID pandemic hit in March 2020, regulations restricting courthouse access and “stay at home” protective orders resulted in a significant reduction in the overall 2020 caseload. In 2021, our caseload numbers slowly began to return to their pre-pandemic state. In 2022 and 2023, caseloads seem to have stabilized, including the juvenile docket, which added 18-year-olds in 2022.

TABLE 1: CIRCUIT COURT CASELOAD TREND <https://www.courts.michigan.gov/courts/trial-courts/><sup>1</sup>

TRIAL DIVISION	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	% Change (2022-2023)
Appeals	43	50	58	54	55	+1.9%
Criminal	969	750	818	776	806	+3.9%
Civil	386	301	304	388	431	+11.1%
<b>Total Trial Division Filings</b>	<b>1,398</b>	<b>1,101</b>	<b>1,180</b>	<b>1,218</b>	<b>1,293</b>	<b>+6.2%</b>

FAMILY DIVISION (Includes FOC and Juvenile Court)	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	% Change (2022-2023)
Divorce	1,030	851	914	867	935	+7.8%
Other Domestic Relations	602	511	504	519	533	+2.7%
Personal Protection Orders	665	661	680	660	657	-0.1%
Delinquency (does not include Probation Violations)	740	655	745	847	981	+15.8%
Juvenile Traffic	32	49	23	107	1	-99.1%
Child Protective	88	71	75	59	54	-8.5%
Adoptions	120	100	98	102	111	+8.8%
Misc. Family	125	102	119	143	122	-14.6%
<b>Total Family Division Filings</b>	<b>3,402</b>	<b>3,000</b>	<b>3,172</b>	<b>3,304</b>	<b>3,396</b>	<b>+2.8%</b>
<b>Grand Total Filings and Reopened Cases</b>	<b>4,800</b>	<b>4,101</b>	<b>4,352</b>	<b>4,522</b>	<b>4,689</b>	<b>+3.7%</b>

TABLE 2: PROBATE COURT CASELOAD TRENDS

OTTAWA COUNTY PROBATE COURT CASELOAD TRENDS	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	% Change (2021-2022)
Estates, Trusts	414	344	505	464	471	+1.5%
Civil, Other	17	12	8	18	17	-0.2%
Guardians	232	177	212	226	232	+2.7%
Conservators	45	47	51	56	56	0%
Civil Commitments	405	457	433	410	489	+19.3%
<b>Grand Total Filings and Reopened Cases</b>	<b>1,113</b>	<b>1,037</b>	<b>1,209</b>	<b>1,174</b>	<b>1,265</b>	<b>-7.8%</b>

<sup>1</sup> For additional caseload information, visit: <http://courts.mi.gov/education/stats/Caseload/Pages/default.aspx>.

**Historical Roster**  
**Ottawa County Circuit Court Judges**

<b>EPAPHRODITUS RANSOM</b> 1836 – 1838	<b>RAYMOND L. SMITH</b> 1948 – 1972
<b>CHARLES W. WHIPPLE</b> 1839 – 1848	<b>CHESTER A. RAY</b> 1967 – 1970
<b>EDWARD MUNDY</b> 1848 – 1851	<b>WENDELL A. MILES</b> 1970 – 1974
<b>GEORGE MARTIN</b> 1851 – 1857	<b>JAMES E. TOWNSEND</b> 1973 – 1990
<b>LOUIS S. LOVELL</b> 1858 – 1858	<b>GEORGE R. CORSIGLIA</b> 1974 – 1974
<b>FLAVIUS J. LITTLEJOHN</b> 1859 – 1867	<b>CALVIN L. BOSMAN</b> 1975 – 2010
<b>MOSES B. HOPKINS</b> 1868 – 1869	<b>WESLEY J. NYKAMP</b> 1991 – 2006
<b>AUGUSTINE H. GIDDINGS</b> 1869 – 1873	<b>EDWARD R. POST</b> 1993 – 2016
<b>JOHN W. STONE</b> 1874 – 1874	<b>JON A. VAN ALLSBURG</b> 2005 – present
<b>DAN J. ARNOLD</b> 1874 – 1892	<b>JON H. HULSING</b> 2006 – present
<b>HANNIBAL HART</b> 1892 – 1892	<b>KENT D. ENGLE</b> 2011 – present
<b>PHILIP PADGHAM</b> 1893 – 1911	<b>KAREN J. MIEDEMA</b> 2017 – present
<b>ORIEN S. CROSS</b> 1912 – 1929	<b>PAUL F. KRAUS</b> 2023 – present
<b>FRED T. MILES</b> 1930 – 1947	

**Historical Roster**  
**Ottawa County Probate Court Judges**

<b>EDMUND H. BADGER</b> 1838 – 1839	<b>CHARLES E. SOULE</b> 1885 – 1892
<b>DR. TIMOTHY EASTMAN, II</b> 1839 – 1843	<b>JOHN VAN BUREN GOODRICH</b> 1893 – 1901
<b>WILLIAM HATHAWAY, JR</b> 1844 – 1856	<b>EDWARD P. KIRBY</b> 1901 – 1916
<b>AUGUSTUS W. TAYLOR</b> 1857 – 1864	<b>JAMES J. DANHOF</b> 1917 – 1932
<b>GEORGE B. PARKS</b> 1865 – 1868	<b>CORA VANDE WATER</b> 1933 – 1948
<b>EDWARD BOLTWOOD</b> 1869 – 1870	<b>FREDERICK T. MILES</b> 1949 – 1976
<b>EDWIN BAXTER</b> 1870 – 1872	<b>JACK A. VANDE BUNTE</b> 1977 – 1988
<b>SAMUEL L. TATE</b> 1873 – 1884	<b>MARK A. FEYEN</b> 1989 – present

## 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 and juvenile delinquency and child protective proceedings. Based on the assigned docket, Attorney Referees hear testimony and recommend orders in a variety of Circuit Court Family Division cases.

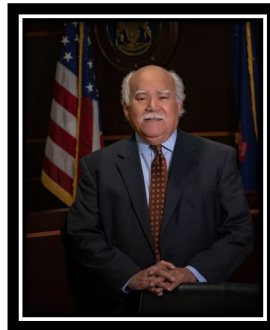
Delinquency and child protective petitions are scheduled for preliminary hearings shortly after filing. Domestic relations hearings are typically scheduled within three to four weeks after filing. The Court employs three full-time Attorney Referees. The Court contracts with an experienced Attorney to serve as a substitute referee, as well as using the Friend of the Court to serve as a substitute referee to provide docket coverage when needed.

Generally, Attorney Referees conduct 3,000-4,000 judicial hearings every year, playing 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 Attorney Referees provide direct service to the public and assist the elected judges with their caseloads.

As Judicial Officers, the Attorney Referees also hear neglect and abuse cases to alleviate some strain on the judges' dockets. Most referee hearings were conducted virtually via Zoom in 2023. Attorney Referee David Macias retired from his position on December 31, 2023.



**Peter Armstrong, Jr.**  
Attorney Referee



**David V. Macias**  
Attorney Referee



**Erin M. Magley**  
Attorney Referee



**Jennell L. Challa**  
Substitute Referee



**Joseph P. Kozakiewicz**  
Substitute Referee

## *Family Division (Grand Haven)*

TABLE 3: REFEREE HEARINGS IN GRAND HAVEN

DOMESTIC/CIVIL PROCEEDINGS	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	% Change (2022-2023)
Support Hearings	480	296	260	304	371	+22.0%
Parenting Time Hearings	369	255	255	295	352	+19.3%
<i>Pro Confesso</i> Divorce Hearings	108	129	63	187	71	-62.0%
Paternity Arraignment/Support Hearings	613	544	475	380	272	-28.4%
<b>Total Family Division Domestic/Civil Referee Hearings</b>	<b>1,570</b>	<b>1,224</b>	<b>1,053</b>	<b>1,166</b>	<b>1,066</b>	<b>-8.5%</b>

## *Family Division/Juvenile Court (West Olive)*

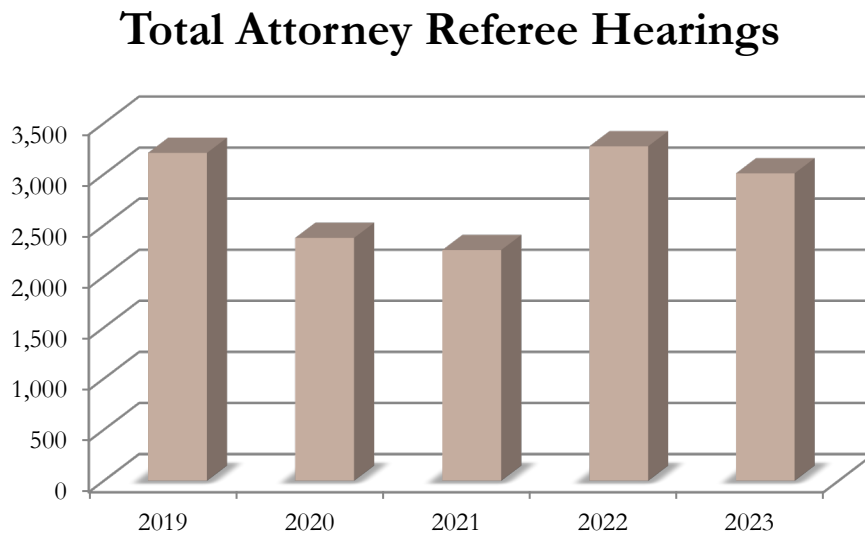
TABLE 4: REFEREE HEARINGS IN JUVENILE CASES

DELINQUENCY PROCEEDINGS	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	% Change <sup>8</sup> (2022-2023)
Preliminary Hearings	192	172	280	282	250	-12.8%
Pre-Trial Conferences	580	464	382	549	677	+18.9%
Pleas of Admission/No Contest Hearings	75	58	60	59	63	+6.3%
Original Disposition Hearings	201	222	143	217	266	+18.4%
Dispositional Review Hearings	307	426	96	135	253	+46.7%
Consents/Holds/Other	109	80	97	70	72	+2.8%
Saturday Preliminary Hearings	14	13	28	19	23	+17.4%
CHILD PROTECTIVE PROCEEDINGS	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	% Change <sup>8</sup> (2022-2023)
Preliminary Hearings	80	83	264	385	315	-22.2%
Adoption Release/Consent/Emancipation/ Emergency Removal/Other	81	56	34	16	24	+33.3%
<b>Total Family Division/Juvenile Court Referee Hearings</b>	<b>1,639</b>	<b>1,153</b>	<b>1,205</b>	<b>2,108</b>	<b>1,943</b>	<b>-8.5%</b>

TABLE 5: TOTAL ATTORNEY REFEREE HEARINGS

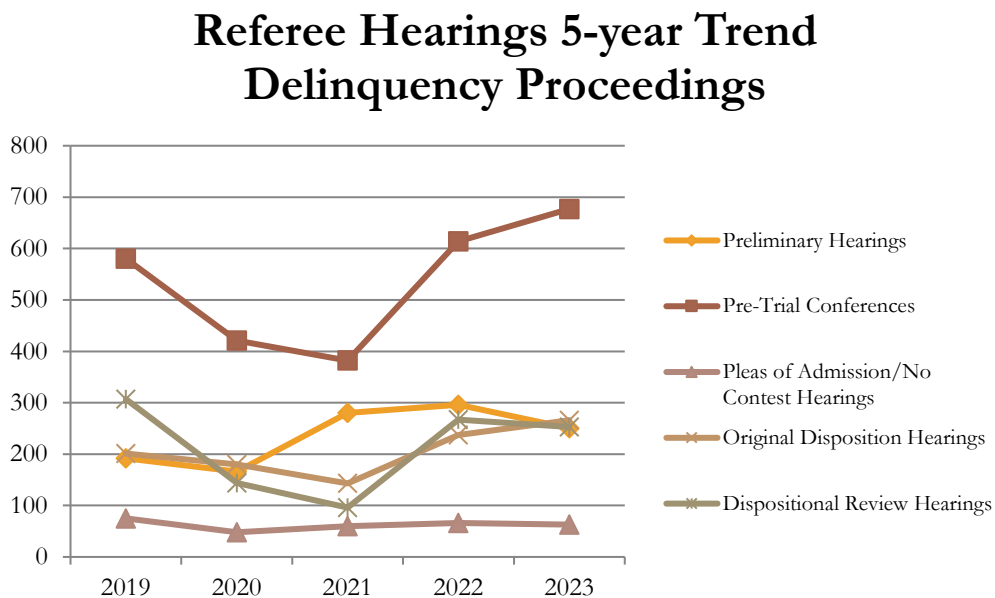
ATTORNEY REFEREE HEARINGS	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	% Change <sup>8</sup> (2022-2023)
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>3,209</b>	<b>2,377</b>	<b>2,258</b>	<b>3,274</b>	<b>3,009</b>	<b>-8.1%</b>

FIGURE 1: REFEREE HEARINGS – 5-YEAR TREND, TOTAL



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.

FIGURE 2: REFEREE HEARINGS – 5-YEAR TREND, DELINQUENCY PROCEEDINGS



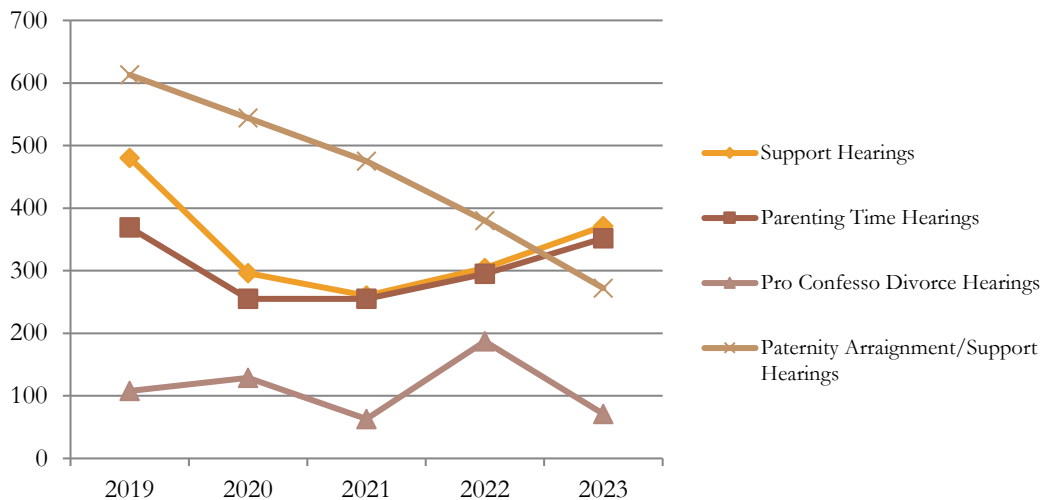
The competing trends noted in Figure 2 below show four major areas of Attorney Referee hearings which are primarily conducted in the Ottawa County Courthouse in Grand Haven. During the past five years there has been a notable decline in repeated child support hearings, which suggests existing court orders are being properly followed and there are fewer significant changes in circumstances

<sup>2</sup> Due to changes in data tracking, Dispositional Review Hearings appear to increase significantly in 2018.

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, along with the CARES Act (Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act) funding to assist families during the pandemic, 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 seemed to have leveled off after experiencing a sharp increase in 2019. 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.

FIGURE 3: REFEREE HEARINGS – 5-YEAR TREND, DOMESTIC/CIVIL PROCEEDINGS

### Referee Hearings 5-year Trend - Domestic/Civil Proceedings



# Court Administration

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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.

Effective court administration is essential for guaranteeing access to justice for all citizens, regardless of their background or socioeconomic status. By managing court resources, schedules, and processes, court administrators help streamline proceedings, reduce backlogs, and ensure cases are heard in a timely manner.

Moreover, court administration plays a pivotal role in promoting transparency and accountability within the legal system. Through meticulous record-keeping and reporting, administrators provide insights into court operations, enabling stakeholders to identify areas for improvement and address systemic issues. Transparent court administration enhances public confidence in the judiciary, reinforcing the belief that decisions are made impartially and in accordance with the law. Additionally, administrators oversee the implementation of policies and procedures aimed at upholding ethical standards and promoting professionalism among court personnel, fostering an environment of integrity and trust.

In the 20th Circuit and Ottawa County Probate Courts, daily operational management, and oversight of the courts, including supervision of all court employees depicted on the following organizational charts, is conducted by the Courts' Leadership Team, which includes the Court Administrator, Juvenile Court Director, Friend of the Court, Trial Division Director, and Probate Register.



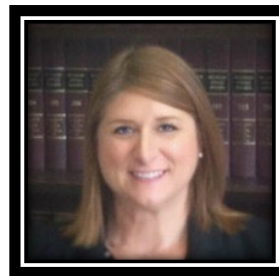
**Susan M. Franklin, JD, MPA**  
**Court Administrator**



**Thom A. Lattig, MS**  
**Juvenile Court Director**



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



**Cheryl L. Zorn, MPA**  
**Trial Division Director**



**Johanna Wallace, AA**  
**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 evolved during the past eighteen 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.

### 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, following procedures and policies that are perceived to be fair, 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 financial 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

We exemplify and deliver the highest standards of justice and public service.

To reach this Vision of the Courts, the Circuit and Probate courts are committed to providing leadership in the following manner.

- ❖ 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 the justice system and community partners.
- ❖ 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.



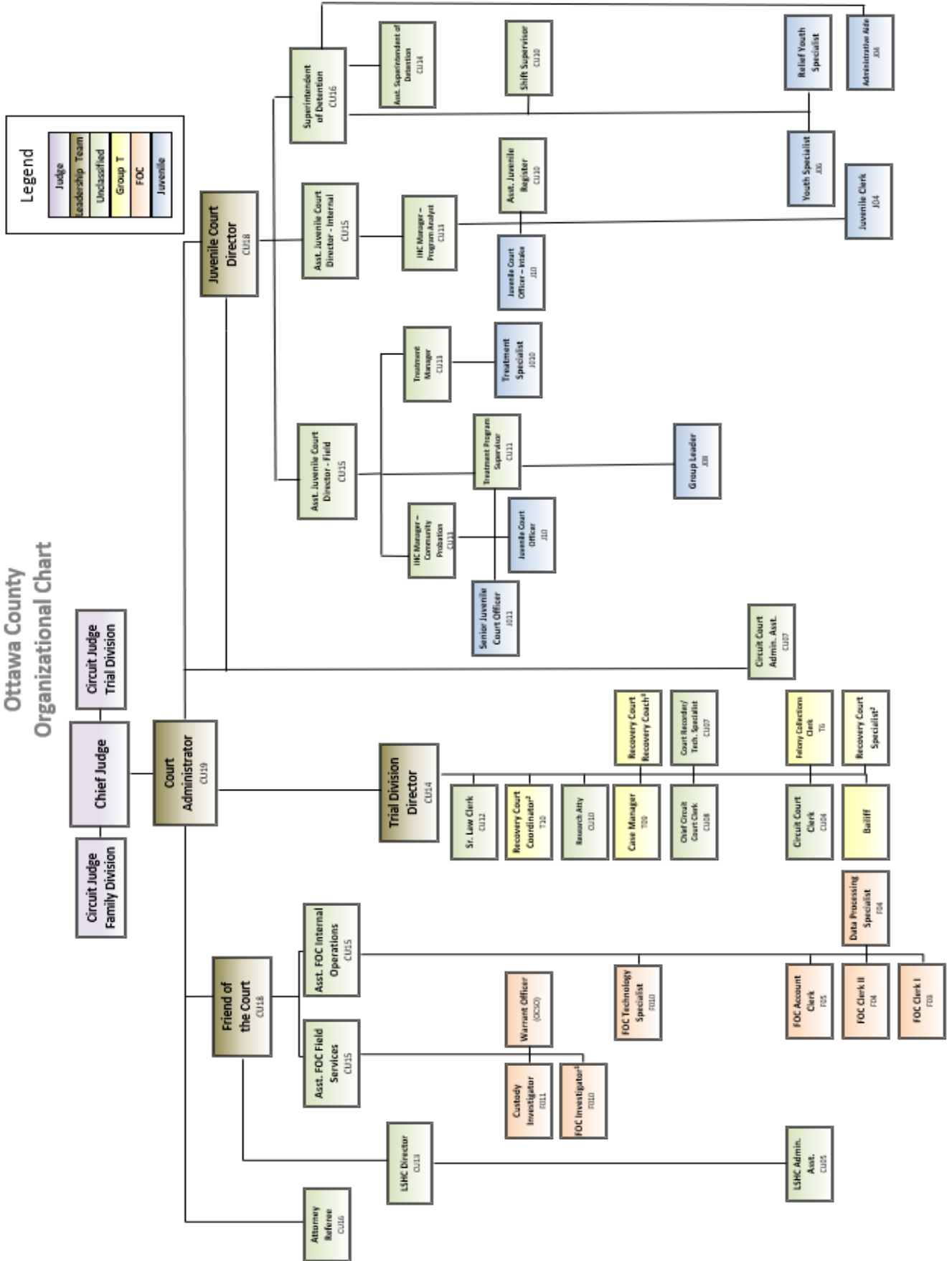
All the efforts discussed above have been identified by judges and court employees to demonstrate how the courts’ high standards for justice and public service may be operationalized daily. Clear identification of the courts’ mission and vision was a critical first step toward achieving effective strategic 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.



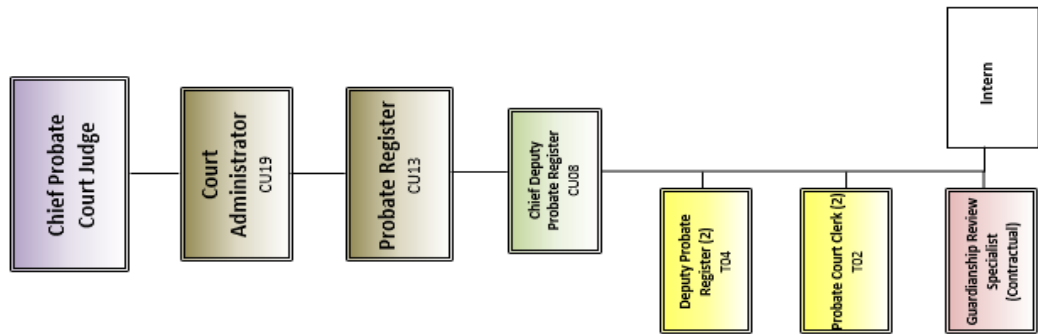
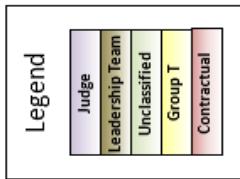
A significant amount of time in the strategic planning process was devoted to identifying the Courts’ Core Values. While an emphasis on the “four pillars” of freedom, equality, truth, and justice (also found etched upon the Michigan Hall of Justice at the state capital) might be expected for a court system, our Strategic Planning Oversight Team also chose to focus on values such as empathy, integrity, equity, diversity, and inclusion. Those important words were used to create the outline of a court building, with an open door to represent that our Courts are here to serve the public.

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 with attorneys, litigants, treatment 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.

# 20th Circuit Court Ottawa County Organizational Chart



# Ottawa County Probate Court Organizational Chart



## *Court Wide Continuing Projects*

**Strategic Planning** – Maintaining the Strategic Plan<sup>3</sup>, periodically updating and revising goals, objectives, and priority projects, is an important function of court administration. In 2021, the Strategic Planning Team 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 updated trends analysis, SWOT analysis, surveys of court employees and external stakeholders, and revising the Strategic Focus Areas which will drive innovation until the Courts’ next strategic planning update in 2024.

**Case Management System Transition** – The District and Circuit Courts decided in 2021 to use the State’s Justice Information Services (“JIS”) case management system and are working to create a smooth transition, expected to be complete in 2024.

**Family Justice Center** – To provide better coordinated and centralized Family Division services to 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 will also move frequently used court services closer to the population centers within Ottawa County. Phase I of the project includes 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. During 2020, Ottawa County conducted extensive contract negotiations with the architects of DLZ and Granger Construction, intending to implement the IPD (Integrated Project Delivery) method of building. Although the pandemic slowed the process, the building design phase was substantially completed in 2021, and groundbreaking occurred in 2022. The courthouse is expected to be substantially complete in 2024.



**Electronic Filing (e-filing) of Court Documents** – The Circuit Court and the Ottawa County Clerk/Register’s Office were early adopters of e-filing technology and subsequently were selected as one of five pilot counties for the Michigan Supreme Court e-filing project. Throughout 2021, court and clerk personnel continued to work with the State Court Administrative Office and ImageSoft, Inc. to establish a fully functional e-filing portal, providing attorneys and litigants with the opportunity to remotely file documents in established cases. Toward the end of 2018, the Ottawa County Probate Court was selected as the test site for the statewide probate court “standard solution.” The standard solution was subsequently launched for most Probate Court filings. As the acceptance of e-filing technology grows, this innovation will provide great access to the courts and increase public trust and confidence in the judicial branch of government.<sup>4</sup> In fact, the first major test of this technology was during the COVID pandemic when e-filing became a primary access point for the courts. Since

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.miottawa.org/Courts/Probate/pdf/2021-2024\\_StrategicPlan.pdf](https://www.miottawa.org/Courts/Probate/pdf/2021-2024_StrategicPlan.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> <https://mifile.courts.michigan.gov/>

the project was already underway, the Circuit and Probate Courts were able to remain open and continue operations, while many other trial courts in Michigan were forced to temporarily close to the public.

**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 emergency drills with the Sheriff’s Department
- ❖ Reviewing key card access to the buildings
- ❖ Reviewing and revising the West Olive incident report procedures

During 2023, the Courts continued to participate in security improvements through staff emergency planning teams and with the County CPTED (Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design) activities, including participation in an active assailant drill.

**Public Education** – Throughout each year the courts are actively engaged in a variety of public education efforts. School groups occasionally toured the courthouses and the Juvenile Detention Center where they learned about court process, observed judicial hearings, and 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.

**Legal Kiosks** – One of the Courts’ strategic planning teams applied for and received a grant to purchase and program 11 legal kiosks to be placed throughout Ottawa County. These kiosks are intended to provide for increased accessibility, strong Internet connections and a user-friendly format to allow patrons who are unable to travel to courthouses, or who have inadequate internet access or electronic devices, to access legal services as if they were in a courthouse.

**Online Dispute Resolution (ODR)** – The 20th Circuit Court began the use of online dispute resolution tools in child support collection matters in 2016, and the successes of that project have led the Court to expand the use of these tools into domestic relations matters. In 2021, parenting time disputes were also handled via ODR. The COVID-19 pandemic has also compelled the rapid growth of virtual hearings, and the courts expect that some of this training and virtual hearing capacity will continue beyond the end of the emergency, giving the court expanded ability to conduct hearings with remote participants.

**Court Social Media Presence** – Based on preliminary discussions within the Strategic Planning Oversight Team (SPOT), a Court Social Media Committee was established to develop a comprehensive social media policy that would fully comply with SCAO social media standards. Subsequently, court related social media platforms were developed on Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram, YouTube, and Twitter. The purpose of this effort is to increase public education and awareness of court operations.

## *Financial Overview*

As an independent 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, and in cases where there is no ability to pay, fees are waived according to court rule. 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. In addition to state reimbursements, the Courts rely heavily on County general fund appropriations to cover the cost of most employees and daily operations.

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, considers 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.

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

## *Legal Self-Help Center*

The Legal Self-Help Center (LSHC) supports the work of the courts in Ottawa County by providing individuals with the forms and education necessary to access court services. Once individuals have accessed court services, the self-help center provides support in navigating court processes.

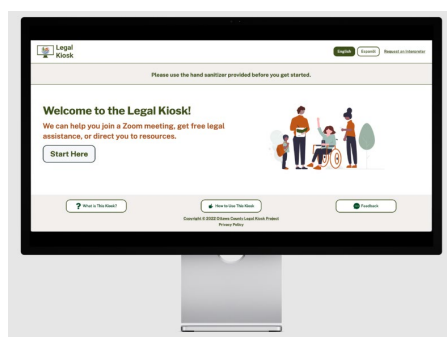
LSHC staff regularly interact with individuals who are interacting with the court for the first time (e.g., divorce and custody cases) and those who have been involved with the court for many years (e.g., child support cases). These individuals are often stressed and working through major life changes. Experienced and knowledgeable LSHC staff provide outstanding customer service and treat court users with respect and compassion. The LSHC staff spend considerable amounts of time with court users to ensure that they understand court processes and their options for moving forward, without giving legal advice.

In 2023, the LSHC logged over 1,500<sup>5</sup> hours of service and navigated more than 3,163 requests for assistance<sup>6</sup>. The LSHC Director and Administrative Assistant provided services in person, by phone, and by email.

Last year, self-represented litigants in Ottawa County filed 458 new divorce cases<sup>7</sup>, or around 51% of all new divorce filings<sup>8</sup>. Over 80% of these self-represented filers utilized paperwork from the Legal Self-Help Center<sup>9</sup>.

Ottawa County also continued to support eleven kiosks throughout Ottawa County that allow court users to access the court in remote locations. Court users can participate in a court hearing, download, and print court forms, make payments on their case, and e-file documents in their case.

With the Family Justice Center opening in 2024, the LSHC was approved for one additional staff person, a Legal Self-Help Center Specialist. This position is currently funded through a grant from the State Court Administrator's Office focused on the expansion of services for self-represented litigants. The LSHC will have two locations in 2024 to better serve the court users in Ottawa County. The current location in the Grand Haven Courthouse will remain open and a new location will be added in the Family Justice Center in West Olive.



<sup>5</sup> 1500 hours provided by paid staff.

<sup>6</sup> In person = 1853; Phone = 1161; Email = 149

<sup>7</sup> 257 divorces without children (DO) and 201 divorces with children (DM).

<sup>8</sup> Total new divorce filings by self-represented litigants and attorneys were 893.

<sup>9</sup> 369 of 458 self-represented litigants (80%) utilized LSHC paperwork to file for divorce.

## 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.

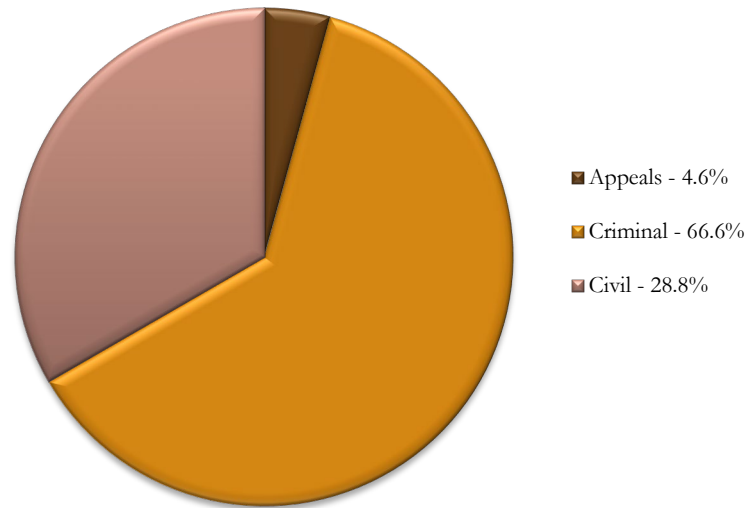
Throughout 2023, Judge Miedema and Judge Hulsing presided over criminal, civil and personal protection order cases. During most of the year, Judge Miedema also handled 100% of non-domestic personal protection orders, while Judge Hulsing heard the appellate cases. Judge Van Allsburg heard business court cases, a third of the divorce, and 40% of the other domestic relations cases. Judge Engle was assigned a third of the divorce cases, 30% of the domestic relations cases and child protective proceedings. Judge Kraus's new docket consisted of a third of the divorce matters, as well as a portion of the juvenile delinquency cases and child protective proceedings.

As a whole, from 2022 to 2023, the Trial Division caseload increased by 6.2%. The appellate caseload increased by nearly 2%, while the criminal caseload (new filings and reopened cases) increased by nearly 4%. The civil caseload experienced the largest increase, with an 11% increase. The numbers of divorce and domestic relations case filings in the Family Division are also up. Unfortunately, the average complexity and time involved in these cases (particularly in those known as "high conflict" cases) continues to increase as well. The Family Division's caseload as a whole increased 3.7% from 2022 to 2023.



FIGURE 4: 2023 TRIAL DIVISION CASELOAD

### 2023 Trial Division Caseload



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, one of the primary criminal and civil judges, Judge Miedema, routinely handled most requests for adult personal protection orders in non-domestic matters, which would otherwise be heard by the Family Division. Likewise, due to the current split of the Family Division between the Grand Haven and West Olive courthouses, Trial Division staff assists Family Division staff with the processing and scheduling of disparate case types. This collaboration and sharing of workloads are a cultural norm in Ottawa County and is reflective of the courts’ core values noted above.

### New and Reopened Case Filings Trial Division

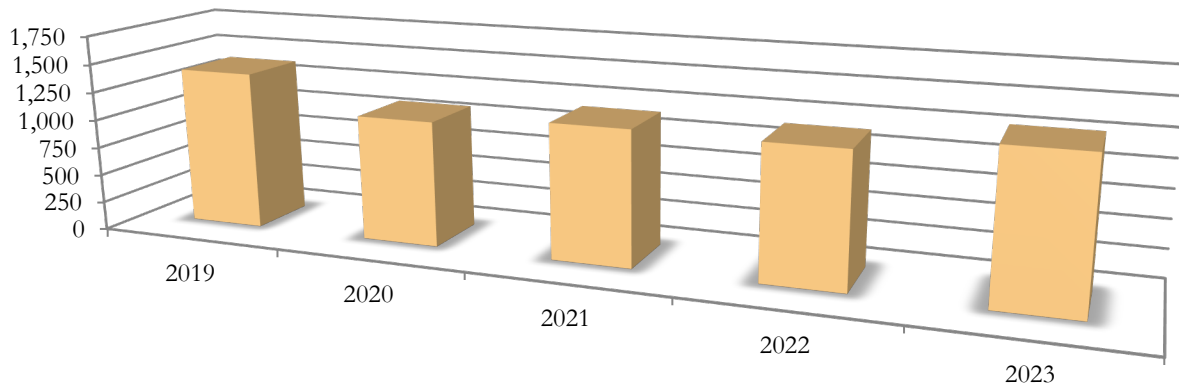


FIGURE 5: TRIAL DIVISION NEW AND REOPENED CASE FILINGS

## Jury and Bench Trials Numbers Continue to Rise

The Constitution preserves the right of trial by jury, and the right to a speedy and public trial by an impartial jury.

In 2023, the 20<sup>th</sup> Circuit Court held 34 jury trials, one more than the previous year. Of those, 28 were criminal trials, three were civil trials, two were juvenile and one was for a probate case. In total, 2,107 jurors were called to serve. The Trial Division also held 49 bench trials in 2023, representing a 58% increase in bench trials over 2022.

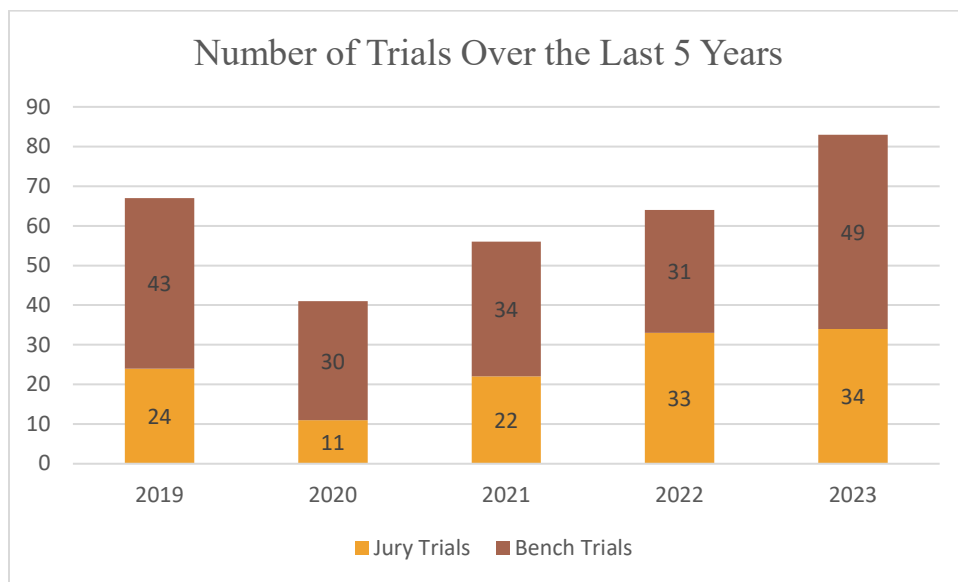


FIGURE 6: JURY AND BENCH TRIALS OVER THE LAST 5 YEARS



# *Ottawa County Recovery Court*

## *2023 Summary*

2023 marked the recovery court's 19th year of operation. The Recovery Court has now accepted over 500 participants, has a 75% graduation rate, and two rigorously designed evaluations have demonstrated with scientific proof that the recovery court reduces recidivism more effectively than incarceration and/or traditional probation for our participant population (73% less likely to be rearrested after 3-years, and a 20% reduction in felony re-arrests over 5-years post-discharge from the recovery court).

We are proud that we have achieved these results while remaining 100% grant funded. We are proud that our team remains composed of agencies and people who volunteer their time and talents to make our recovery court work.

During 2023 we had many accomplishments:

- A record 35 participants graduated recovery court.
- Hired a new peer recovery coach.
- Co-organized Recovery Fest on the Lakeshore during National Recovery Month (September).
- Supported the opening and program planning of the Holland Community Recovery Center, a drop-in center for persons in recovery.
- Hosted sober social events with participants and their family and friends, including disc golf and cornhole tournaments, social outings that included a basketball game and bowling, and pumpkin carving and cookie decorating contest for our participants' children.

### *Participant Success Story*

Participant entered the Recovery Court in spring of 2022, when he was homeless, unemployed, uninsured, no vehicle, financially broke, and lacking access to amenities for daily living (e.g., clean clothing, healthy food, etc.). Compounding this was involvement with family court for unpaid child support, a criminal history with over 15 prior convictions, and a daily methamphetamine addiction that masked a history of significant trauma and undiagnosed mental illness.

The first several months in Recovery Court were rocky to say the least. However, persistent effort on the part of recovery court staff and small incremental changes in behavior by the participant, opened the door for an amazing transformation. Now, only weeks away from graduation, participant has been sober for nearly two years (the longest period of sobriety participant has experienced), mental health is properly diagnosed and managed, has maintained stable employment for over a year, purchased a car, lives independently in an apartment, is active in the recovery community, and independently volunteers to help fellow participants and recovery court staff. Now a graduate of the recovery court, this participant remains in school with a high GPA, has a job, owns a home, and remains in contact with recovery court staff.

## Family Division - Friend of the Court (FOC)



### *Caseload Facts*

Throughout 2023, Friend of the Court staff handled a Title IV-D caseload (child support) of 11,239 cases, representing an 8% decrease from 2022. Caseload numbers fluctuate throughout the year based on new filings and cases that close once the child support obligation is fully paid. Historically, the FOC has maintained a caseload of approximately 11,000 cases.

To enforce court orders on these cases, 2,385 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 pay their court ordered child support obligation), 851 bench warrants were issued, and over \$38 million in child support payments were collected and disbursed to families in need. In addition to these enforcement efforts, staff directly assisted clients by holding 5,592 client meetings in the office or remotely, both on appointment and on a limited walk-in basis. To help ensure child support orders are updated to reflect significant changes in circumstances, staff conducted 2,223 case reviews and recommended child support modifications where appropriate. Based on federal child support performance measures, the 20th Circuit FOC is one of the most effective operations in Michigan, ranking at the top of the 16 largest counties and collecting \$7.63 for every dollar spent.

In addition to the child support enforcement efforts of the Friend of the Court, there were 159 cases in 2023 in which the 20th Circuit Court received a petition for a special assessment regarding child custody or parenting time issues. In 57% of these cases, FOC staff were ordered to conduct an extensive investigation and provide the Court with recommendations. Diversion conferences conducted by FOC staff resolved 12% of these cases, saving significant time and resources for all involved. Often, custody investigators are required to appear in court and testify regarding the investigation and their recommendations. In addition to these in-depth child custody assessments, the FOC further supports the Court by providing detailed psychological evaluations in select cases.

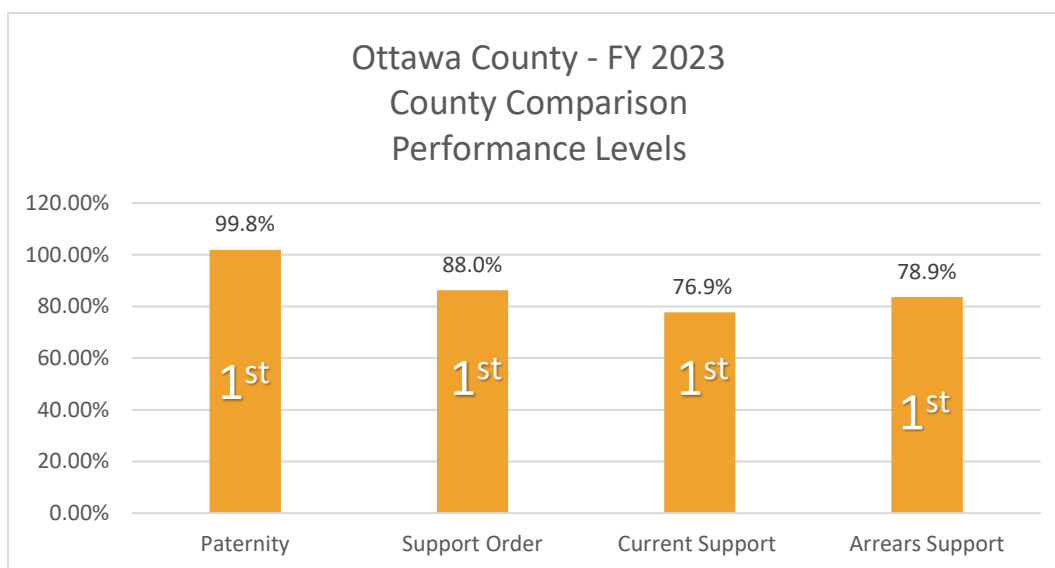
## *FOC Performance Measures*

Child support collection falls under Title IV-D of the Social Security Act. The Friend of the Court office operates as an 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 Program (CRP) Contract. **For 2023, the FOC received reimbursement of \$3,389,970.51** (federal reimbursement of \$3,098,668.95 and the state reimbursement of \$291,301.56) to help defray operating costs.

The Friend of the Court office also offsets 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 enforcement is also measured, and incentives are earned on this factor at a rate of 15% of medical support collections.

When the Friend of the Court office in Ottawa County measures itself against the nine counties with similar sized IV-D programs (caseloads of 10,000 – 34,000 cases), 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 2023, the total Federal incentive dollars earned was \$441,366 plus an additional medical incentive of \$58,434 (**\$499,800 in incentives earned overall**). **Total reimbursements and incentives reduced Ottawa County general fund dollars needed for operating costs by \$3,889,770.51 in 2023.**

Additionally, the Friend of the Court's cost effectiveness rate was measured at a collection rate of \$7.63 for every dollar spent.



# FOC Achievements

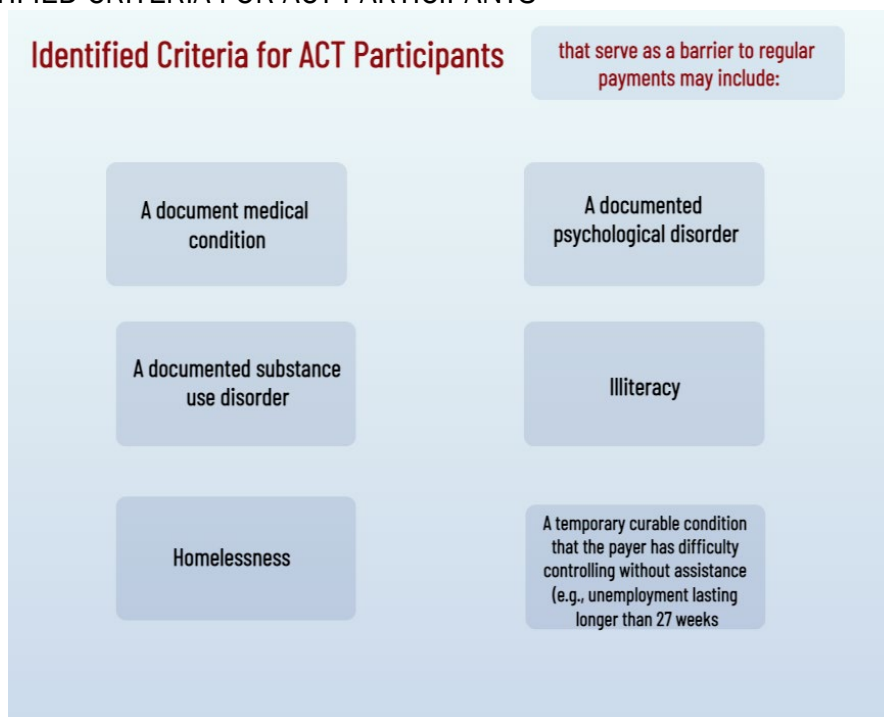
## Alternative Contempt Track (ACT) Program

In January 2021, the State Court Administrator’s Office approved the 20th Circuit Court’s Administrative Order 2021-01 “Alternative Contempt Track Docket” plan.

The Alternative Contempt Track (ACT) docket is a form of problem-solving court available for difficult child support cases. ACT was designed to allow the court an intermediate solution alternative to criminal non-support and/or incarceration as a result of civil contempt for non-payment. ACT participant payers identify specific personal issues that are barriers to their success in meeting their child support obligation and work with a specialized FOC Investigator in creating a case service plan to address barriers. The FOC then collaborates with a variety of county non-profit organizations for services to address each participant’s individualized needs.

ACT addresses the needs and challenges of participants in a holistic manner, connecting participants with local services including education, employment, mental health, and substance abuse treatment. ACT participants must volunteer to be in the program, which is one year in duration, with the potential for immediate re-entry.

FIGURE 8: IDENTIFIED CRITERIA FOR ACT PARTICIPANTS



The ACT docket is assigned to Chief Judge Jon A. Van Allsburg who holds hearings for ACT participant cases each month. At these hearings, progress on the court-ordered case service plan is described, participants are recognized for steps toward success and encouraged to continue to make improvements. Case services plans and court orders are modified as needed.

ACT statistics for 2023 include:

- 12 individuals referred to ACT.
  - 9 individuals were unwilling to voluntarily participate in the program.
  - 5 active participants
  - 2 participants were re-admitted for a second year.

2 participants were discharged from the program for non-compliance.

5 individuals actively participating represent a total of 8 cases/dockets.

3 Bench warrants were issued in 2023.

Services received based on qualifying factors.

3 participants received counseling for substance abuse.

3 participants were admitted to substance abuse treatment centers.

2 participants are receiving counseling through Ottawa County CMH

1 participant is receiving counseling from Samaritas.

5 participants received MI Works referrals.

1 participant is receiving adult education services/GED.

1 participant achieved steady gainful employment.

2 participants received housing assistance referrals to Good Samaritans

3 participants received referrals to obtain mobile phones via MDHHS.

1 participant was able to get a primary doctor and receive medical care.

1 participant was able to be referred to a back pain specialist.

1 participant was able to file their tax return.

Payments for 2023

5 participants were ordered reduced payment amounts.

Total monthly charges for all cases were \$1,857 for 2023. Monthly payments were reduced to a total of \$527 after starting the program.

3 participants began making monthly payments.

\$1,069.40 collected from ACT participants.

Challenges faced by ACT program and participants in 2023:

This year FOC had many referrals to the program, but individuals were unwilling to voluntarily participate. The small number of participants who chose to participate received effective services and gained success in many areas of their lives.

Mental health, substance abuse and housing issues have been the biggest challenges for participants to overcome. Although some participants were able to qualify and obtain a housing voucher, they were unable to find affordable housing or were not able to qualify as renters due to poor credit score and criminal record.

### *ACT Success Story –*

One ACT participant was referred to Zeeland Adult Education to work on his GED. He was also referred to READ Ottawa as he had a 3rd grade reading and writing level. He was able to get his reading levels to a 5th grade level and was transferred to a program through Fruitport Public Schools to work on getting a certificate of completion. He is due to complete the program in 2024.

## Future program goals:

- Partnerships/collaboration with Michigan Rehabilitation Services
- Program incentives.
- Program visibility in the community.
  - Completion/graduation ceremony
  - Continue to get the word out about ACT to the general public.
  - Media coverage/social presence
- Drug/alcohol testing for those struggling with addiction to go along with treatment.
  - Helps to hold participant accountable to sobriety.
- Peer led group meetings.
  - Empower participants.
  - Networking
  - Special guest speakers/agencies/resources and presentations on various topics as determined by the needs of participants.
- Day program
  - “One stop shop” of community resources/agencies for participants
  - Coordinate with other specialty courts in Ottawa County for collaboration and participant accountability and to avoid duplicate services.
- Continue to change the perception of the Friend of the Court
  - FOC is accessible.
  - FOC is family centered.
  - FOC is helpful.
  - FOC cares about the individual.
- Funding sources to grow program to include up to 10 participants annually.





# Family Division - Juvenile Court and Juvenile Detention Center



## Caseload Facts

The Juvenile Court and its staff made a concerted effort to ensure appropriate programming was available for delinquent youth, family, caregivers, and related agencies in 2023. To professionally assess and manage delinquency cases, Juvenile Court staff provided a variety of services within the community. The complexity of many cases also remains high, with many youths exhibiting more mental health and substance abuse issues. This change in complexity required a customized approach to the provision of services and, in some cases, more costly residential treatment. Delinquency cases account for 29.9% 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.

### 2023 Family Division Caseload

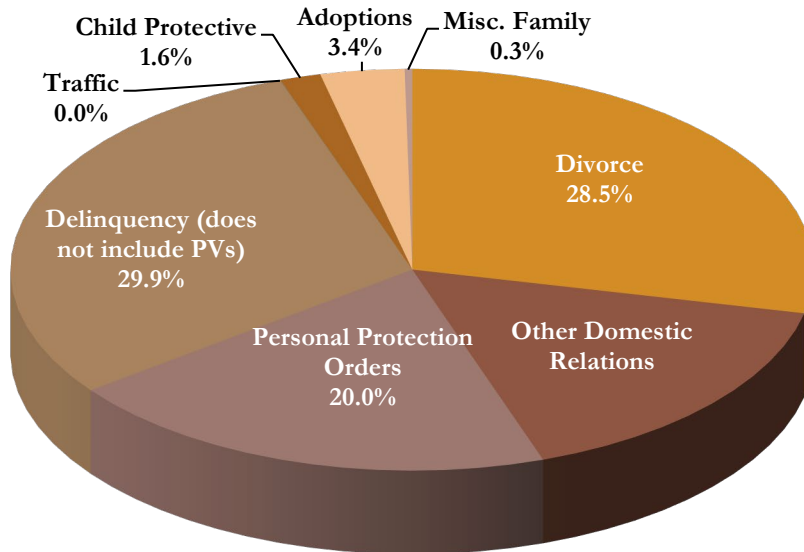


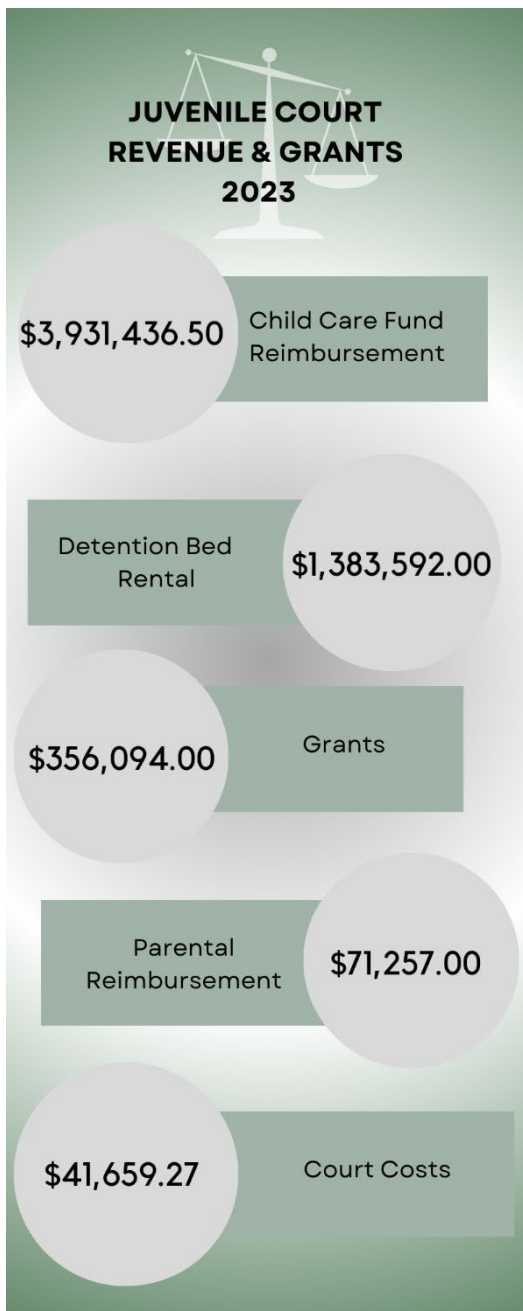
FIGURE 9: 2023 FAMILY DIVISION CASELOAD

## Juvenile Court Funding

	FY23 Budget	Actual FY23 Spend	Under Budget By:
General Fund	\$1,783,831.00	\$1,692,418.29	
Non-Child Care Fund Eligible Expenses	\$773,482.50	\$731,017.34	
Juvenile Neglect Abuse Placement Costs	\$350,000.00	\$215,360.16	
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$2,907,313.50</b>	<b>\$2,638,795.79</b>	<b>\$268,518</b>
Juvenile Detention	\$3,399,255.00	\$3,128,182.98	
Juvenile Delinquency Placement Costs	\$501,050.00	\$110,583.79	
Juvenile Programming	\$936,964.44	\$999,165.24	
Juvenile Treatment	\$860,258.44	\$805,315.17	
Juvenile Probation	\$1,471,707.12	\$1,457,848.76	
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$7,169,235.00</b>	<b>\$6,501,095.94</b>	<b>\$668,139</b>
<b>FY23 Total Board Approved Budget</b>	<b>\$10,076,548.50</b>	<b>\$9,139,891.73</b>	<b>\$936,656.77</b>

TABLE 6: JUVENILE COURT FUNDING





As a County funded entity, the 20th Circuit, Juvenile Court offsets and recoups operational costs whenever possible utilizing the following strategies:

- ❖ Michigan’s Child Care Fund provides 50% reimbursement for state eligible costs related to the direct care of, and community-based programming, for juveniles. For youth eligible for Raise the Age (RTA) funding (age 17 at the time a petition is filed), programs and services are 100% reimbursed through a state grant.
- ❖ The Ottawa County Juvenile Detention Center (JDC) generates revenue through renting beds to other counties in need of detention or programming for court-involved youth. As the only nationally accredited center in the state, the JDC has a great reputation among the juvenile courts in the state for providing quality care and treatment of their court-involved youth. Thus, at any given time, the Court contracts with as many as 30 counties for bed rental.
- ❖ Attorneys are appointed to children and parents in Delinquency and Neglect/Abuse cases when they are unable to afford legal representation. At times, it is necessary for a child to be placed outside the home of his or her parents. The parents of court-involved youth are billed to recoup certain costs expended by the courts for attorneys and/or out-of-home placements.
- ❖ The Court is currently utilizing the Child Parent Legal Representation grant to help provide enhanced legal services in Neglect/Abuse cases. One goal of this grant is to expedite permanency and reduce the number of days a youth remains in out of home care.

- ❖ The County Juvenile Officer grant offsets the salaries of five Juvenile Court positions.
- ❖ The Court is required to assess various costs, including restitution to crime victims, which generates some revenue. In these cases, the fees assessed offset the cost of programs and services offered to court-involved youth.

FIGURE 10: JUVENILE COURT FINANCIALS – FY 2023

## Juvenile Detention Center

The Ottawa County Juvenile Detention Center is a 40 bed, 24 hours, 7 days a week facility serving the youth of Ottawa County, and when available, renting beds to other jurisdictions. The Ottawa County Juvenile Detention Center is the only American Correctional Association accredited juvenile detention center in Michigan. Juveniles detained receive education, exercise, and treatment services. In Fiscal Year 2023, for Ottawa County youth in the Juvenile Detention Center:

- Total Number of Intakes: 236
- Unique Number of Youth: 141
- Average Daily Population (Youth): 10
- Average Length of Stay (Days): 15.5

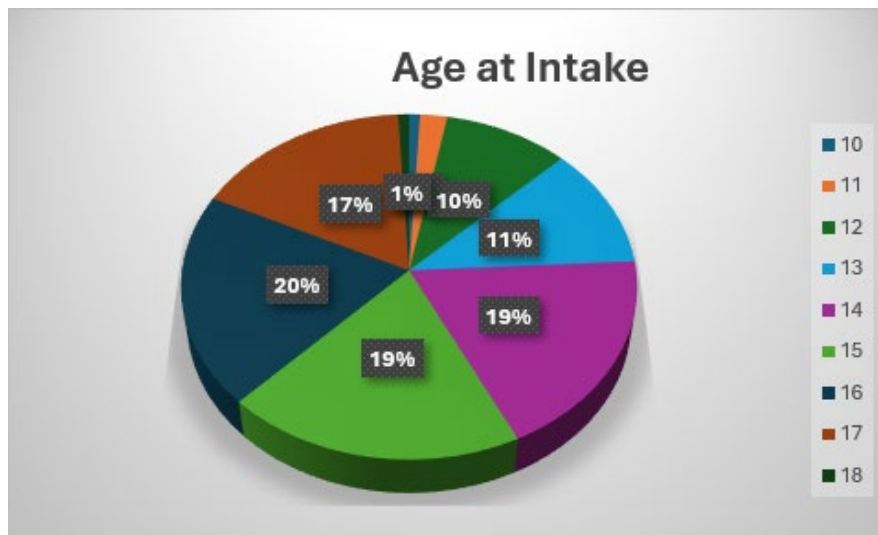


FIGURE 11: JUVENILE DETENTION CENTER: AGE AT INITIAL INTAKE

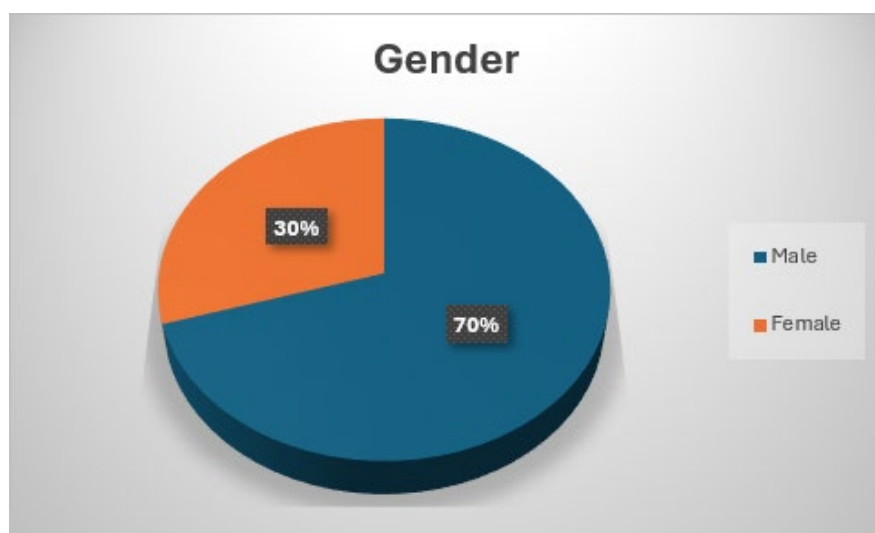


FIGURE 12: JUVENILE DETENTION CENTER: GENDER

## Juvenile Court Programs

The 20<sup>th</sup> Circuit Court, Juvenile Court, offers a continuum of programs and services designed to meet the individual needs of court-involved youth and their families. These programs and services concentrate in the areas of 1) protecting the community; 2) holding the youth accountable; 3) building competency and skills; and 4) specialized/individualized treatment. The programs and services form a continuum, reflecting therapeutic and restorative interventions in the least restrictive environment. Balancing accountability with the understanding that youth are still developing emotionally, mentally, and physically, the court utilizes its court and community services to guide youth in a positive direction and away from a life of criminal behavior.

Educational opportunities, employment initiatives, mentorships, pro-social events, and skill-building activities are all part of the continuum offered to court involved youth. These programs allow youth to develop a sense of belonging and purpose within themselves, their family and community systems. Community involvement plays a pivotal role in the rehabilitation process, so the court collaborates on different initiatives that provide our youth a supportive, learning, and connective environment.

In 2023, the 20<sup>th</sup> Circuit, Juvenile Court had the following highlights:

The Juvenile Justice Institute, which is a collaborative educational school between the Court and Lighthouse Academy, had two students earn their high school diploma.

Education is a pillar to success for our youth. Providing a safe learning environment that is tailored to their behavioral and educational needs is critical to setting the youth on a life course of success.



Summer programming allowed some of our youth to locally rock climb, fish, ride, and fix bikes, take cooking lessons, and do community service. Providing structured, extra-curricular activities in the local community fosters connection and pride in our youth. The rehabilitation and restorative process is enhanced by community involvement.

In October, the juvenile court held a Fall Festival for youth, parents, and siblings. The event is to promote positive, healthy family fun. The families enjoy an evening of games, decorating pumpkins and baked goods, have dinner, get candy, and participate in a scavenger hunt. Building healthy family bonds is essential to a youth's positive development and the formation of healthy lifelong relationships.



The 20<sup>th</sup> Circuit, Juvenile Court appreciates its community collaborations as it strives to achieve the ultimate goal of helping our court involved youth grow into responsible and productive members of their community.

## *Michigan Juvenile Justice Reform*

In June of 2021 Governor Whitmer signed Executive Order 2021-6. That order required that a Juvenile Justice Task Force be convened to analyze Michigan's Juvenile Justice system and provide recommendations for changes to state law, policy, and appropriations based on the findings of the task force. Courts were justifiably concerned about a reform effort based on one specific tragic event and additional negative publicity based on partial truths. Many juvenile courts provided excellent service to youth and families, and they had data to indicate the success of their programming. However, rather than resist the opportunity to put ourselves under the microscope, Michigan courts chose to lead the Juvenile Justice Reform effort with an eye toward making good services better. This is really the only way the reform effort could be successful, as Michigan courts employ the experts in many Juvenile Justice matters including best practices in probation supervision, community-based treatment for juveniles, treatment for youths placed out of their homes, juvenile specialty court programming, and strength-based treatment approaches.



On July 18, 2022, Michigan’s Task Force on Juvenile Justice Reform, including Juvenile Court Director Thom Lattig, approved a comprehensive blueprint for transforming juvenile justice statewide and the much-awaited priority package of legislative juvenile justice reforms was introduced at the end of May (HB 4625 – 4643) and the bi-partisan bills were signed into law Dec. 12, 2023, by Lt. Gov. Garlin Gilchrist II. The enhanced Child Care Fund reimbursement (75/25) as well as other legislation and court rules will require the use of evidence-based risk/needs screening and assessment tools, mental health screening tools, and detention screening tools.

The Child Care Fund (CCF) was enhanced to focus on establishing a minimum framework of juvenile justice best practices statewide. These best practices will be supported by an increase in the community-based services/supervision reimbursement rate for counties to incentivize and support the development, expansion, and strengthening of community-based services (including diversion-consent calendar) and formal alternatives to detention and incarceration.

Under progressive judicial and court leadership, the 20<sup>th</sup> Circuit Juvenile Court has employed many of the required changes prior to the reform taking place. Thom Lattig’s participation in these reform efforts has highlighted the many best practices already in place in Ottawa County - risk and needs assessment, trauma screening tools, and evidence-based services have been part of the court’s continuum of services for 10 years. With his leadership, a detention screening tool will be implemented and services in diversion/consent calendar will be refined to meet future Child Care Fund requirements. The court will work collaboratively with MDHHS, SCAO, and community stakeholders to continue “administering justice, and restore wholeness in a manner that inspires public trust.”

# Probate Court

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## 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 continues to enhance its effectiveness using mediation, virtual hearing technology, e-filing (MiFile), document imaging, remote payment capability, and digital case management. These initiatives, managed by the professional and well-trained Probate Court employees, help ensure excellent customer service and a positive experience for court users.



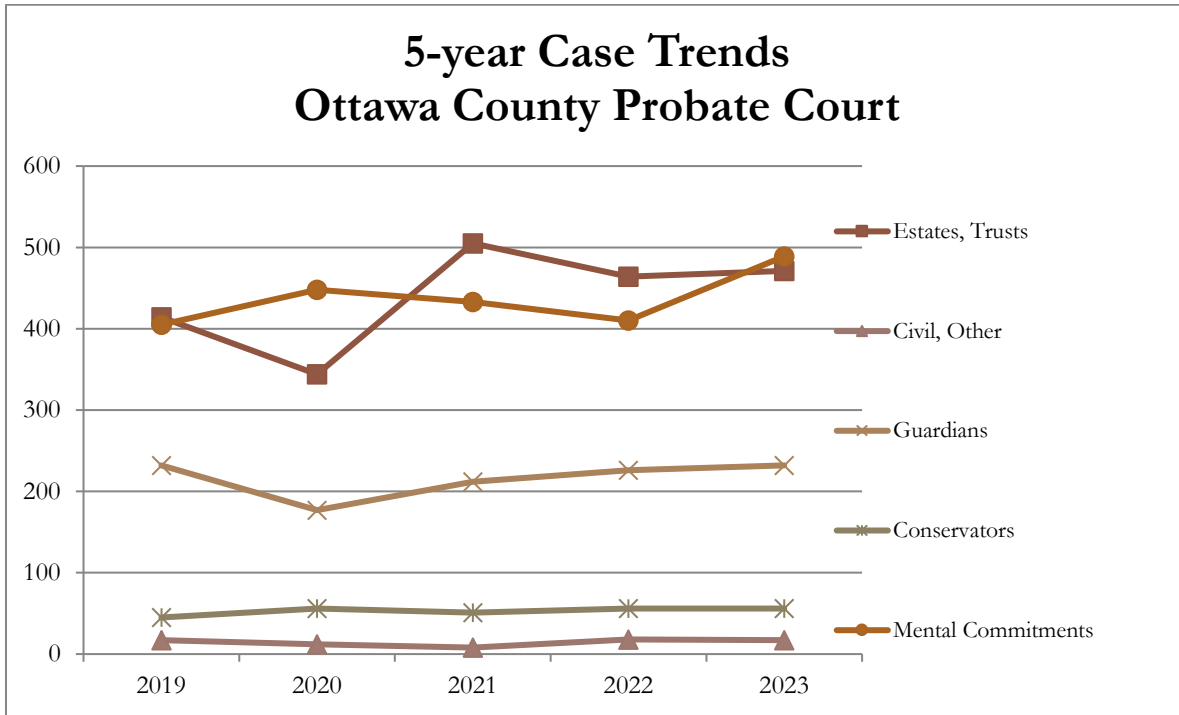
During 2023, the Probate Court continued to experience a stable seven-year trend with more than 1,200 new case filings. Among the new and reopened cases, most categories remained stable. More than one-third of the Probate caseload involves individuals needing the protection of the Court in guardianship, conservatorship, and mentally ill cases. In cases where individuals need assistance managing financial assets, there were 244 adults and minors with Court appointed conservators. In addition to the regularly appointed guardians, there were 790 developmentally disabled individuals with guardians supervised by the Court.

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 over 14,000 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 where individuals can locate forms and instructions to guide them through a variety of Probate proceedings.

The 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.



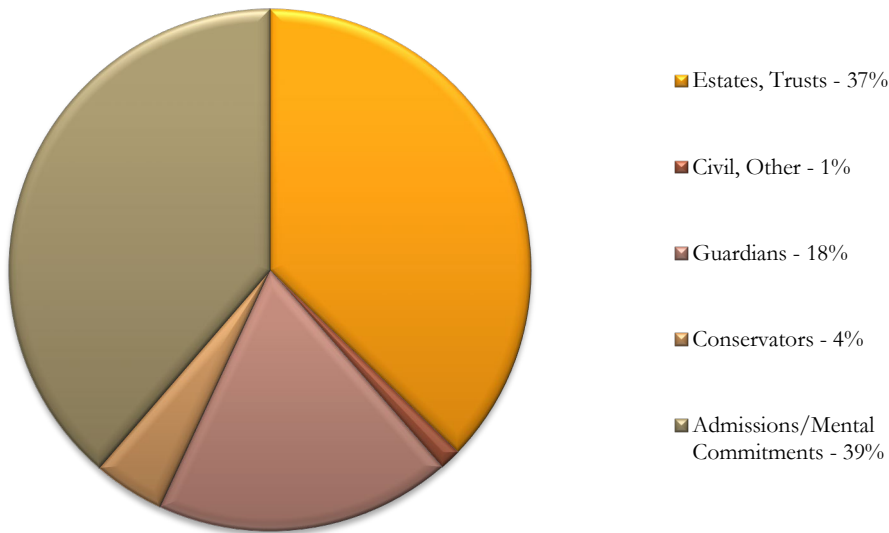
FIGURE 13: 5-YEAR CASE TRENDS, OTTAWA COUNTY PROBATE COURT



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, the cases are generally grouped into one of five categories: estates and trusts, civil, guardianships, conservatorships, and mental commitments. The Probate Court assists 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 39% of the Court’s new cases and require careful coordination with families, attorneys, hospitals, and mental health treatment providers.

FIGURE 14: 2023 PROBATE COURT CASELOAD

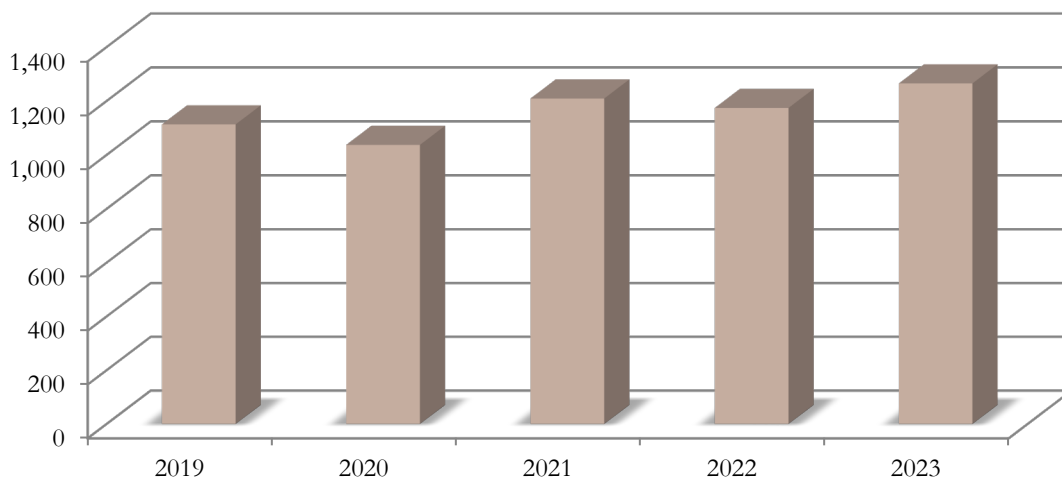
## 2023 Probate Court Caseload



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 for these “helpers” (guardians and conservators) to assist. Regular case reviews are conducted to provide accountability. The below chart shows the number of new and reopened case filings in the Probate Court in 2023 and emphasizes the significant number of cases for which one judge and six employees are responsible.

FIGURE 15: PROBATE COURT NEW AND REOPENED CASE FILINGS

### Probate Court New and Reopened Case Filings



## *Probate Court Initiatives*

The Ottawa County Probate Court continues to work with the State Court Administrative Office and ImageSoft, Inc. as the first Probate Court in Michigan to launch the MiFile electronic case filing system for Probate Court. The Ottawa County Probate Court has served as the pilot Probate Court for this program. E-filing is now mandatory for attorneys and discretionary for self-represented litigants in Ottawa County.

# 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
- 

## Staff Facts

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### *20th Judicial Circuit Court*

- 5 Circuit Court Judges
- 117 Full Time Staff
- 8 Part Time Staff (includes JDC relief)
- 4 Temporary Staff (includes Bailiffs)
- 4 Grant Supported Staff
- 2 Ottawa County Sheriff Deputies

**140 Total**

### *Ottawa County Probate Court*

- 1 Probate Court Judge
- 6 Full Time Staff

**7 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

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

#### Juvenile Court Services

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