

# 2020 ANNUAL REPORT



## Fairfield County Common Pleas Court, General Division

Judge Richard E. Berens

224 E. Main Street, Lancaster, OH 43130

Judge David A. Trimmer

[www.fairfieldcountyohio.gov/commonpleas](http://www.fairfieldcountyohio.gov/commonpleas)





# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introductory Note.....	4
2020 Highlights .....	5
Case Statistics .....	7
Adult Probation Report .....	8
Budget Narrative .....	9
Expenditures.....	10
Revenues .....	11
Grants .....	12
Directory .....	13







## *A Word from the Bench*

2020 was a year of change and challenge. No one could have anticipated the extent to which the COVID pandemic would cause us all to rethink how we go about our daily lives. Through it all, the Court remained open for business (although it was not "business as usual"): video hearings, social distancing, and masks became the norm, not the exception. What remained constant, for us, is what is at the heart of what a Court should be for its community— a place where disputes are fairly heard and decided.

Beyond a year of change and challenge, 2020 was also a year of progress. Our Annual Report highlights the work and accomplishments of the Court and its dedicated staff. The Court responded to unprecedented circumstances by finding ways to be more accessible and responsive to those it serves and to be an asset to the greater Fairfield County community.

We look forward to a new year ahead. The unique challenges of 2020 will not disappear with the turning of a calendar page, but as we reflect on how we have risen, individually and collectively, to face them, there should be no doubt that we are more capable than ever of continuing our important work in serving our community, whatever the next year may bring.

*Judge Richard E. Berens*

# 2020 HIGHLIGHTS

## CIVIL JUSTICE PROGRAM

The Court was one of only six courts state-wide to receive funding as part of the Ohio Supreme Court's 2021 Civil Justice Program. After a competitive application process, the Court received \$50,000 to increase access to justice for self-represented litigants.

The grant award has helped the Court to accomplish two main goals. First, it allowed the Court to expand its CSPO Legal Assistance fund, a program that provides legal assistance to low-income individuals involved in protection order litigation. Second, it funded a partnership with Southeastern Ohio Legal Services ("SEOLS") to provide free legal advice and guidance to qualified litigants. This partnership, called The Belay Initiative, aims to provide individuals with self-help resources and legal assistance to ensure financial stability and economic security.

"Through this grant, we hope to help people overcome barriers to employment and success by easing the burden of navigating an often overwhelming and confusing civil justice system," said Court Administrator Jillian Boone. "I am so grateful the Supreme Court recognized the potential of these programs to increase access to justice in Fairfield County."



## STAFF ACCOMPLISHMENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

- ◆ Kathy Hartman reached a milestone of 25 years of public service
- ◆ Laurie Henderson reached a milestone of 20 years of public service
- ◆ Lynne Gordon completed her Associate's Degree from Ohio University
- ◆ Nic Varda joined the Community Control Department as a Probation Officer
- ◆ Mackenzi Cvetan joined the Community Control Department as a Bond Officer and graduated from Ohio University with a Bachelor's Degree in Criminal Justice
- ◆ Willie VerSteeg passed the Ohio Bar Exam and joined the Court as a Staff Attorney
- ◆ Jill Boone was appointed to the Board of the Ohio Association of Court Administrators
- ◆ Probation Officer Tim Norris helped to create a new, more effective, intake risk assessment tool for probationers





# 2020 HIGHLIGHTS

## *continued*

### ADAPTIVE TECHNOLOGY

Like much of the world, COVID-19 forced the Court to adapt quickly, efficiently, and effectively. A large part of that transition was the acquisition of, and familiarization with, new technology systems. Through grant funding, the Court was able to purchase two videoconferencing systems for each courtroom as well as several webcams, scanners, and tablets to help staff work effectively from home when necessary. Moreover, in collaboration with the Fairfield County Commissioners, IT Department, and Sheriff's Office, the Court also utilized the GoToMeeting video platform to conduct **over 1,000** remote video hearings from March through December 2020. Conducting a large portion of the Court's docket via videoconference allowed the Court to continue to resolve cases in a timely manner while still ensuring the health and safety of its staff, the parties, and the public.



### INCREASED JAIL SERVICES

Through various grant programs, the Court, Sheriff's Office, and New Horizons Mental Health Services came together to increase programming and services to incarcerated individuals in 2020. The Court utilizes an on-call substance abuse counselor to perform assessments, make recommendations, and facilitate pretrial release decisions. A mental health crisis team also provides crucial services to the Court by performing diagnostic assessments, wellness checks, and pink slip referrals to inmates exhibiting signs of mental illness or distress.



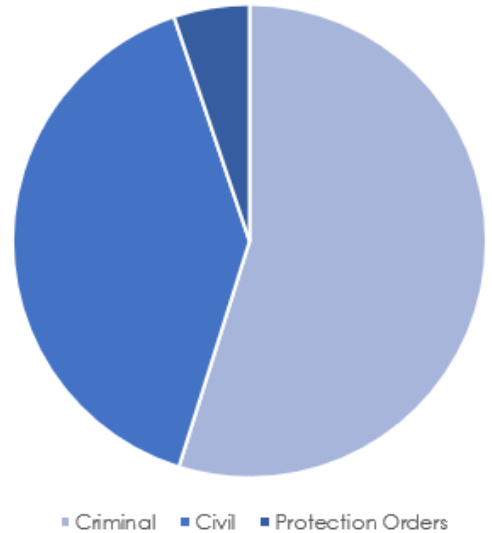
The Court was awarded the Commissioner's 2020 Customer Service Award in recognition of its efforts to implement virtual hearings, reduce transports, and improve efficiency and safety.

# CASE STATISTICS

2020 was another busy year for the Court, with the filing of 654 criminal cases, 472 civil cases, and 63 civil stalking protection order petitions. With the assistance of technology, the Court continued to efficiently manage its docket and effectively resolve disputes despite the COVID-19 pandemic.

Court performance can be measured in several ways, including the evaluation of the Court's clearance rate (which identifies how well the Court keeps pace with its incoming caseload) and overage rate (which identifies the percentage of cases pending past Supreme Court time guidelines). In 2020, the Court surpassed the state-wide target rates and/or state-wide averages for both of these measures.

2020 Case Filings



Clearance Rate	Target Rate	State Avg.	Fairfield County
	100%	/ 101%	115% (civil)
	100%	/ 98%	110% (criminal)
Overage Rate	Target Rate	State Avg.	Fairfield County
	10%	/ 5%	7% (civil)
	10%	/ 23%	22% (criminal)

More information about statistical performance measures and state-wide averages can be found at <https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/JCS/courtSvcs/dashboards/default.asp>.



# ADULT PROBATION REPORT

Number of Individuals Currently on Probation:	2073
Number of Individuals Currently on Pretrial Supervision:	270

The Fairfield County Common Pleas Community Control Department had a challenging and rewarding year in 2020. We were faced with the unpredictable challenges that our county and state has persevered through this past year in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic. We adjusted and acclimatized our department to the new landscape and found unexpected opportunities to deliver service. We were able to branch out and formulate new innovative streams of information gathering and handling. Two Officers left our department during the year. Luckily, we were able to replenish our staff with two new employees, Bond Officer Mackenzi Cvetan and Probation Officer Nicolas Varda. They have proven to be valuable members of our team and we look forward to their continuing growth and input in the future!

Like every government entity, our department has been forced to adapt to many new challenges this year in light of COVID-19. It has also solidified a key principle: supervising persons on bond and probation is fundamentally personal in a sense that visual, spoken, and personal affect are key to any interaction. The Department turned to technology to try to continue these personal interactions in a safe way, utilizing Go-To-Meeting, Zoom, and FaceTime reporting. Additionally, Officers now have webcams installed in their individual workstations, which allows them to attend virtual hearings with the Court and conduct jail visits with probationers. County IT also assisted with the acquisition and installation of desktop scanners and laptops, both of which help officers to perform their essential job duties while working from home or in the field.

We are enthusiastic about the coming year, and we continue to depend on our valuable and passionate staff to innovate, adapt, and reach new levels of supervision and service to our community.

Number of Successful Completions of Supervision:	137
Number of Individuals Referred to Treatment:	216
Number of Specialized Docket Participants:	45



# BUDGET NARRATIVE



In 2020, the Court and Community Control Department budgeted \$2,658,432 in anticipated general fund expenditures. Actual general fund expenditures for both departments totaled \$2,422,768. The largest general fund expenditures for both departments in 2020 were employee salary and benefits (such as health insurance and OPERS). Court-appointed attorneys' fees, transcription costs, and electronic monitoring of individuals under pretrial and probation supervision were three of the largest non-personnel related general fund expenditures incurred in 2020.

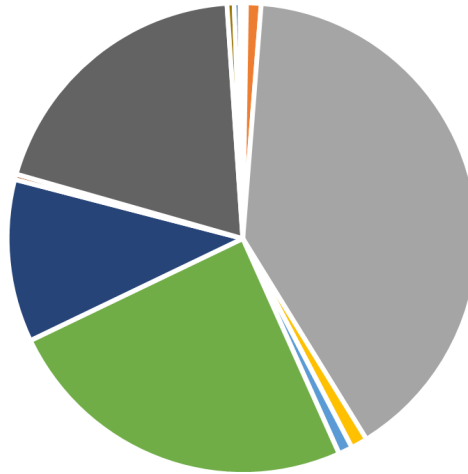
The Court continued to seek ways to offset these general fund expenditures through grant opportunities and special revenue funds, such as filing fees and probation supervision fees. This year, the Court applied for and/or collaborated on 6 grants, totaling over 1 million dollars in fiscal assistance to the Court and its community partners.

These grant awards assisted the Court in effectively monitoring and serving individuals on bond and probation, acquiring new technology systems, and implementing innovative programs to increase access to justice.



# FINANCIAL DATA: GENERAL FUND EXPENDITURES

## Actual General Fund Expenditures 2020



- Training, Membership, and Dues \$5,937
- Juror Expenses \$24,289
- Employee Salaries \$968,214
- Transcription Costs \$27,511
- Other Professional Services \$23,186
- Court Appointed Attorney Fees \$595,558
- Electronic Monitoring \$270,347
- Drug Testing \$9,047\*
- Employee Benefits \$472,745
- Office Supplies \$11,867
- Other Contractual Expenses \$9,682
- Equipment and Software \$4,578

(Line items totaling less than \$1,000 omitted from chart)

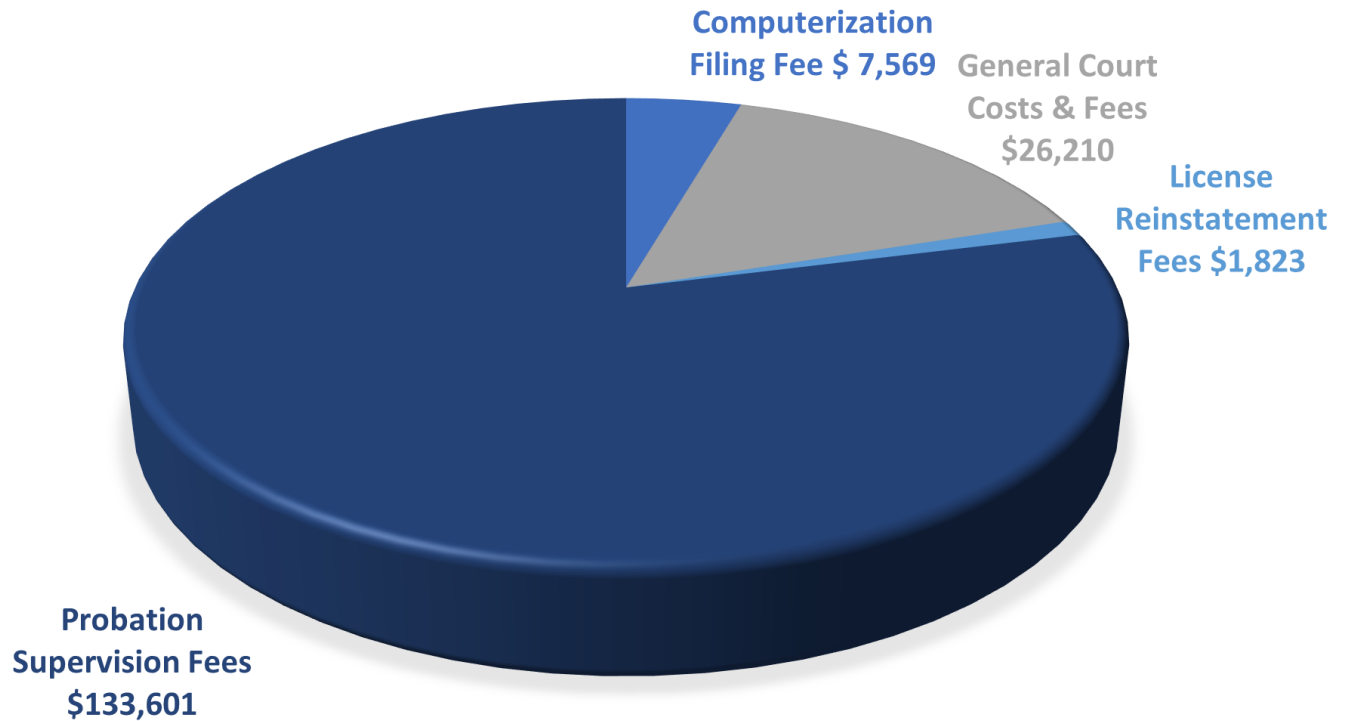
\*Page 10 outlines overall drug testing expenditures

## 2020 Anticipated vs. Actual General Fund Expenditures



# FINANCIAL DATA: REVENUE SOURCES

## 2020 REVENUES



The Court utilizes these revenue sources to offset general fund expenditures as well as expand and improve pretrial and probation supervision. In 2020, these revenue funds have been used to pay for drug testing, Probation Officer training and equipment, technology improvements, and office supplies.

For example, the Court and Probation Department spent over \$117,000 drug testing individuals on bond / probation supervision last year. However, grant and special revenue funds covered 76% (\$108,718) of those costs.



# FINANCIAL DATA: GRANT AWARDS

## 2020 GRANT AWARDS & COLLABORATIONS

- Intensive Supervised Probation Grant (ODRC): **\$371,816 (over 2 years)**  
*(funds probation officers' salaries and support services for ISP probationers)*
- Targeted Alternatives to Prison Grant (ODRC): **\$723,952 (over 2 years)**  
*(collaboration with Commissioners and Sheriff to hire additional staff, provide mental health and substance abuse services in the jail and purchase equipment)*
- Addiction Treatment Program Grant (OMHAS/ADAMH): **\$30,000**  
*(collaboration with ADAMH to provide wrap-around services to specialized docket participants)*
- Recovery Court Grant (OMHAS/ADAMH): **\$40,000**  
*(funds salary of probation staff and recovery supports for specialized docket participants)*
- Technology Grant (Ohio Supreme Court): **\$13,000**  
*(funded comprehensive videoconferencing systems for two courtrooms)*
- Civil Justice Reform Grant (Ohio Supreme Court): **\$50,000**  
*(increases access to justice by providing legal assistance to qualified individuals)*



# DIRECTORY

## **Chief Probation Officer & Director of Community Control**

Angel Sanderson 740-652-7344

## **Community Control Officers**

B. Casey Jones (ISP SPO\*) 740-652-7346

Dan Jones (Basic SPO\*) 740-652-7345

Danielle Pizzuto 740-652-7348

Austin Miller 740-652-7353

Nic Varda 740-652-7454

Tim Norris 740-652-7354

Laurie Henderson 740-652-7342

Wayne Moss 740-652-7347

Samantha Green 740-652-7425

Michael Welker 740-652-7398

Tiffany Westhoven 740-652-7341

Mackenzi Cvetan (Pretrial) 740-652-7453

Katie Spires (Pretrial) 740-652-7352

Andrew Dreyer (Pretrial) 740-652-7351

Lynne Gordon (PSI\*) 740-652-7343

## **Court Administrator & Magistrate**

Jillian Boone 740-652-7424

## **Assignment Commissioners / Administrative Assistants**

Misty Conkle (J. Berens) 740-652-7431

Traci Dresbach (J. Berens) 740-652-7435

Kathy Hartman (J. Trimmer) 740-652-7427

Shannon Seesholtz (M. Boone) 740-652-7434

## **Court Services Coordinator**

*(Jury / Transcripts / Attorney Fees)*

Kelly Starkey 740-652-7433

## **Bailiffs / Staff Attorneys / Paralegals**

Willie Ver Steeg (J. Berens) 740-652-7432

Kelly Munn (J. Trimmer) 740-652-7430

### **\*Acronym Key**

ISP = Intensive Supervised Probation  
Basic = Basic Level Probation Supervision  
SPO = Senior Probation Officer  
PSI = Pre-Sentence Investigator

