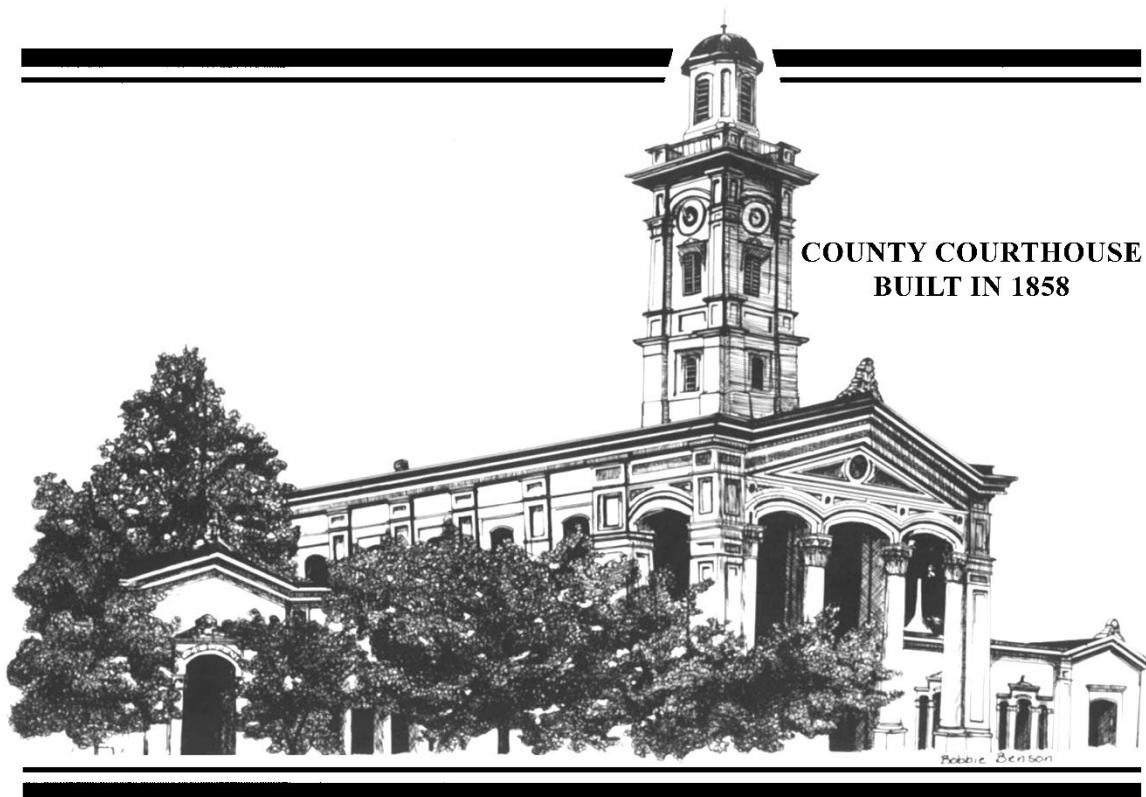


ROSS COUNTY COURT OF COMMON PLEAS
PROBATE-JUVENILE DIVISIONS
2 N. PAINT STREET, SUITE A
CHILLICOTHE, OHIO 45601
(740) 774-1177/774-1179

2023 ANNUAL REPORT



J. Jeffrey Benson, Judge

Ross County Commissioners and Citizens of Ross County:

Attached please find the Annual Report of the Ross County Probate/Juvenile Court. We continue to strive to be staffed and structured in a manner that will best serve the needs of every citizen of Ross County. We will continue to budget/ utilize our resources, prioritize our services, and promote coordination of efforts among the other Ross County Courts and our support agencies.

The information set forth in the Annual Report is intended to document the increased demands upon and services provided by the Ross County Probate/Juvenile Court. Thank you in advance for your continued cooperation and support.

J. Jeffrey Benson

J. Jeffrey Benson
Ross County Court of Common Pleas
Probate and Juvenile Divisions

PROBATE DIVISION

THE RECORDS OF THE PROBATE COURT OF ROSS COUNTY, OHIO PRE-DATE THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE STATE OF OHIO IN 1803

INTRODUCTION TO THE PROBATE DIVISION

The Probate Division of the Court of Common Pleas has jurisdiction concerning estates of deceased persons, guardianships of incompetent persons and minor children, adoptions, trusts, mental illness proceedings, marriage licenses, civil actions, and various miscellaneous matters.

There were 1,143 probate court cases filed in 2023. This is a 14.9% decrease from 2022 when there were 1,313 probate court cases filed.

CASE FILINGS

■ Estates

The Probate Division of the Court of Common Pleas of Ross County, Ohio, reports that:

- 372 new estate cases were filed and 32 were reopened.
- In 2023, there were 453 terminations or closings, leaving 251 estates pending at the end of 2023.

■ Guardianships

Thirty-seven (37) new guardianships were filed in 2023.

- 31 were guardianships of an incompetent person.
- 5 of the guardianship cases were guardianships of minors.
- 1 emergency guardianship case was filed and none were reopened.
- At the end of 2023, 360 guardianships were being supervised by the Court.

■ Trusts

Two (2) trusts were filed in 2023.

- At the end of 2022, there were 38 cases pending.
- 1 case was terminated
- 39 trust cases were pending at the end of 2023.

■ Civil Actions

Seventeen (17) new civil actions were filed in 2023.

- At the end of 2022, 8 civil actions were pending.
- 16 cases were terminated
- 9 civil actions were pending at the end of 2023.

■ Adoptions

Thirty-one (31) new adoptions were filed in 2023.

- 13 adoptions by individuals or Agencies.
- 8 step-parent adoptions.
- 10 adult adoptions.
- 0 foreign adoptions.
- 0 court ordered placements.
- 32 adoptions were completed in 2023.

■ Mental Illness

One hundred sixteen (116) mental illness cases were filed in 2023

- 22 were from Veteran's Administration Medical Center
- 96 were from Adena Regional Hospital
- 31 were from Scioto Paint Valley Mental Health Center
- 8 were out-patient filings
- 4 were out-of-county filings
- 0 were for an Involuntary Treatment for Alcohol and/or Drug Abuse.

■ Assisted Outpatient Treatment (AOT)

In November 2019, the Court implemented the Assisted Outpatient Treatment (AOT) program. AOT is the practice of delivering outpatient treatment under court order to adults with severe mental illness who meet specific criteria, such as a prior history of repeated hospitalizations or arrests. It is a tool for assisting those individuals most at risk for the negative consequences of not receiving treatment. AOT laws have been shown to reduce hospitalization, arrest and incarceration, homelessness, victimization, and also to prevent violent acts associated with mental illness, including suicide and violence against others.

Also known as “involuntary outpatient treatment” or “outpatient commitment,” AOT commits local mental health systems to serve participants at the same time it commits participants to adhere to their treatment plans. Developed for patients with their healthcare providers, these plans are highly individual but typically include case management, personal therapy, medication and other tools known to promote recovery. By creating a partnership between the individual and the mental health system, AOT greatly increases medication adherence, reduces costs from hospital readmission and other revolving-door circumstances and promotes mental health recovery in qualifying individuals. AOT participants receive due process protections and orders are made only after a hearing before a magistrate or judge.

With the exception of Connecticut, Maryland, and Massachusetts, every state and the District of Columbia have enacted laws to authorize the use of AOT. The Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs and SAMHSA have deemed AOT to be an evidence-based practice, and its use has been endorsed by the American Psychiatric Association, American College of Emergency Physicians, International Association of Chiefs of Police, National Sheriffs' Association and National Alliance on Mental Illness.

In 2023, the program had 18 participants which included 13 males and 5 females. Overall, participants in the Ross County AOT Program saw a decrease in hospitalizations, shorter hospitalizations when needed, a decrease in arrests and jail time and a decrease in mental illness filings compared to participant history before entering the AOT program. Additionally, participants had fewer days of homelessness due to the usage of shelter care or respite until

more permanent housing could be obtained. A majority of participants expressed satisfaction with the AOT program and felt it was beneficial to their treatment and general well being.

■ **Minors Settlements**

Ten (10) new applications for approval to settle injuries to minors were filed in the year 2023 along with one case reopened.

- 3 cases were pending at the end of 2022.
- 11 cases were terminated in 2023 leaving 3 cases pending.

■ **Change of Name, Birth Correction, Birth Registration**

House Bill 7 took effect August 17, 2021 which brought about several changes in these types of cases. To apply, the applicant must be a resident of Ross County for at least sixty (60) days. Further, applicants must file a photocopy of their birth certificate, social security card, and/or driver's license or State ID (if any).

Forty-eight (48) change of name applications, birth registrations and birth corrections were filed in 2022.

- 29 applications were for the change of name of an adult
- 15 applications were for the change of name of a minor
- 2 applications were for the name conformity of an adult
- No applications were for the name conformity of a minor
- 1 application was for birth registration
- 1 application was for birth correction

■ **Marriage License**

Four hundred thirty-four (434) marriage licenses were issued in 2023.

■ **Other**

There were forty-four (44) additional probate filings made in 2023.

- 4 INRE filings
- 18 Wills were placed on deposit with the Court for safekeeping.
- 15 applications for Adult Protective Services
- 0 Health Care Power of Attorney
- 0 Probate Power of Attorney
- 4 Disinternment
- 3 Unauthorized money received from inmate

PROBATE FINANCES

\$118,176.03 in court costs was paid in the Probate Division.

\$578,007.92 was expended in the Probate Division.

All pending litigation is current.

PROBATE CASE COMPARISONS

Probate Case Table

Year	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Estates	303	301	338	325	459	445	404
Trusts & Guardianships	82	54	62	33	60	39	39
Civil Actions	17	18	15	7	13	11	17
Adoptions	37	28	31	44	35	52	31
Mental Illness	65	137	100	87	161	177	116
Others	594	751	573	543	573	539	536
Total	1098	1289	1119	1039	1356	1313	1143

JUVENILE DIVISION

INTRODUCTION TO THE JUVENILE DIVISION

The Juvenile Division of the Court of Common Pleas has jurisdiction concerning juveniles, including: delinquency, unruly, school truancy, juvenile traffic offender, alternative school assignments, dependency, neglect, abuse, and other juvenile matters. This division also has jurisdiction concerning adults: custody, paternity, child support, visitation, and contributing to the delinquency and/or unruliness of a minor. The Juvenile Division also has jurisdiction concerning adults in regards to school truancy matters: failure to cause and compel the child under their charge to attend school in accordance with law, and aiding and abetting the unruliness of the minor by failing to cause the child under their charge to attend school in accordance with law.

There were 1,124 juvenile court cases filed in 2023. This is a 13.6% increase from 2022 when there were 971 cases filed.

CASE FILINGS

■ Delinquent

- A delinquent child is a child who commits a violation that would be a crime if committed by an adult.
 - There were two hundred eleven (211) delinquent cases filed in 2023. Of these cases, there were three hundred twenty-two (322) charges filed.
 - Of the three hundred twenty-two (322) charges, eighty-one (81) were felonies.
 - 2 were 1st degree felonies
 - 18 were 2nd degree felonies
 - 16 were 3rd degree felonies
 - 22 were 4th degree felonies
 - 23 were 5th degree felonies
 - BIND OVER – A bind over is a delinquent case in which the State files a motion to transfer jurisdiction of the case to the General Division of Ross County, Ohio to try the juvenile as an adult. In 2023, there were zero motions for bind over/motion for discretionary transfer filed.

■ Unruly

There were one hundred two (102) unruly cases filed in 2023.

- Of those cases:
 - 49 were for Unruly conduct
 - 50 were for Habitual Truant
 - 3 were for Home Truancy (runaway)
 - 0 were for Curfew

■ Adult

There were one hundred eight-three (183) adult cases filed in 2023.

- The charges filed were:
 - 2 were for contributing to the delinquency of a minor.
 - 0 was for contributing to the unruliness of a minor.
 - 141 were for failure to cause and compel school attendance.
 - Cause and compel charges are related to a parent(s), guardians(s) or custodian(s) not causing the child under their charge to attend school in accordance with the law.
 - 40 cases were for parent educational neglect or failure to attend parent education classes.

■ Traffic

Two hundred five (205) traffic citations were filed against juveniles in 2023. Of those citations, there were two hundred twenty-six (226) charges filed.

▪ Abuse, Neglect, Dependent

One hundred eighty-seven (187) dependent, neglect and abuse cases were filed in 2023.

- Six (6) were for abuse. An abused child is one who is a victim of physical, sexual abuse or born positive for drugs.
 - 1 was for sexual abuse
 - None were for physical abuse
 - 5 were for babies born with positive drug tests
- No cases of neglect were filed in 2023. A neglected child is a child who lacks proper parental care due to the faults or habits of their parents, guardians, or custodians.
- One hundred eighty-one (181) were dependent filings. A dependent child is a child who lacks proper care, through no fault of his parents, guardians, or custodians.
 - 131 were generally defined as dependency
 - 50 were for drug abuse
 - 0 involved physical abuse
 - 0 involved sexual abuse

In 2023, the top 5 drugs, noted in the statement of facts, used by parents of dependent, neglect and abused children, at the time the complaint was filed, were methamphetamine, amphetamine, marijuana, cocaine, and fentanyl.

In 2023, the top 5 drugs in which the babies tested positive, noted in the statement of facts, at the time the complaint was filed, were amphetamine, cocaine, fentanyl, methamphetamine, and marijuana.

▪ Paternity Child Support, Visitation, Custody

One hundred fifty-four (154) cases were filed regarding paternity, child support, visitation and custody.

- 47 were paternity proceedings.
 - Paternity cases establish the parent/child relationship for children born of unwed parents.
- 70 were child support cases.
- 37 were custody/visitation cases.
- 0 were Paternity Declaration (Adult)

▪ Grandparent Power of Attorney/Child Caretaker Authorization Affidavit

Description: House Bill 130 creates two ways for grandparents to obtain “care, physical custody, and control” over grandchildren *without changing legal custody*: 1) Power of Attorney (POA) completed by parent(s), a custodian, or a guardian of a child; and 2) Child Caretaker Authorization Affidavit (CAA), created by the grandparent when the child’s parent(s), guardian, or custodian cannot be located. The documents must be properly signed and notarized. They are valid for one year, unless terminated earlier as specified in the bill. They may be renewed after one year, subject to court review.

- Sixteen (16) grandparent power of attorney/child caretaker authorization affidavits were filed in 2023.

▪ **Marriage Consent**

No applications for marriage consent were filed in 2023.

▪ **Juvenile Civil Protection Order**

Amended Substitute House Bill 10 authorized juvenile courts to issue and enforce civil protection orders against juveniles who commit certain offenses of violence, aggravated trespass, sexually oriented offenses, or domestic violence regardless of the familial relationship between the parties.

- There were seven (7) filings for juvenile protections orders in 2023. All filings were for juvenile civil protection orders.
 - 3 were dismissed
 - 3 were granted
 - 1 is pending

▪ **Miscellaneous Cases**

Fifty-nine (59) miscellaneous cases were filed in 2023.

- 7 INRE cases were filed.
- 51 assignments to Paint Creek Youth Center (Lighthouse) were filed.
- 0 parental agreements were filed.
- 0 courtesy supervision cases were filed.
- 0 requests to fingerprint a juvenile were filed.
- 0 interstate compact case was filed.
- 0 permanent surrender cases were filed.
- 1 was for a search warrant.

JUVENILE FINANCES

\$62,649.92, in court costs, was paid in the Juvenile Division.

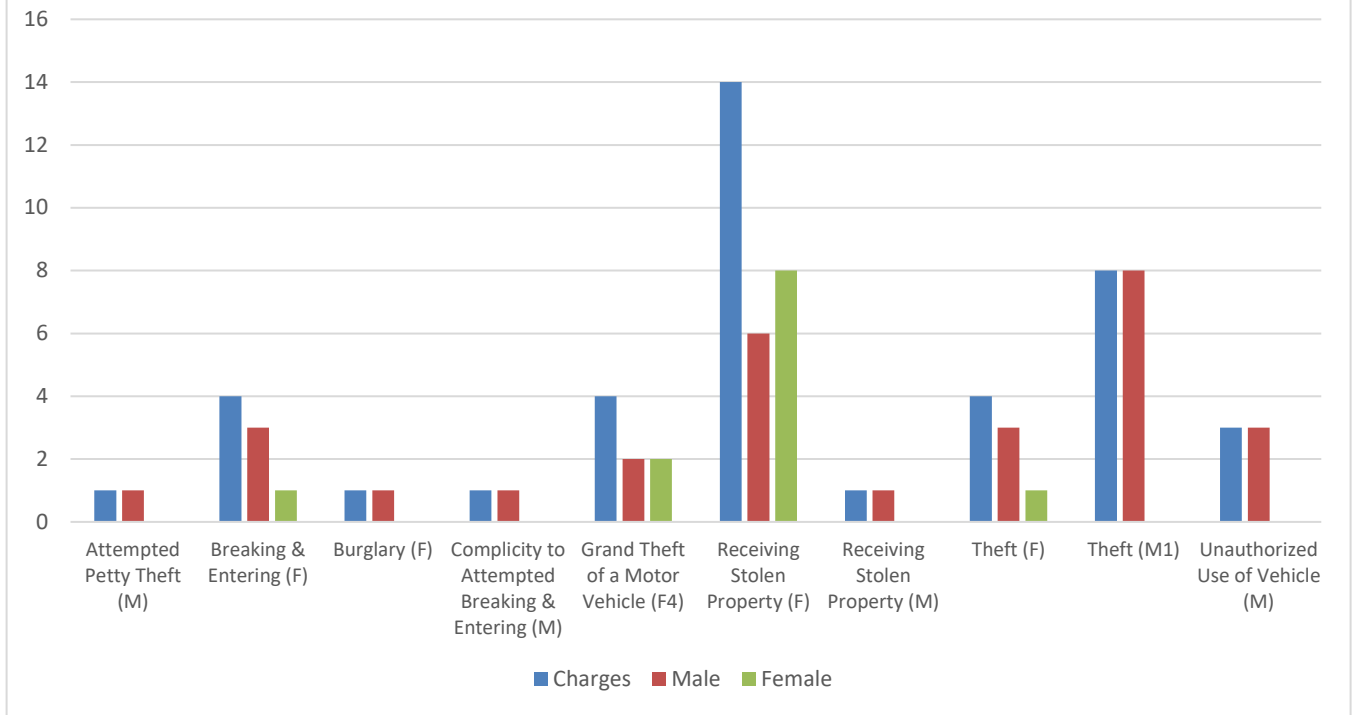
\$946,296.22 was expended in the Juvenile Division.

JUVENILE CASE COMPARISONS

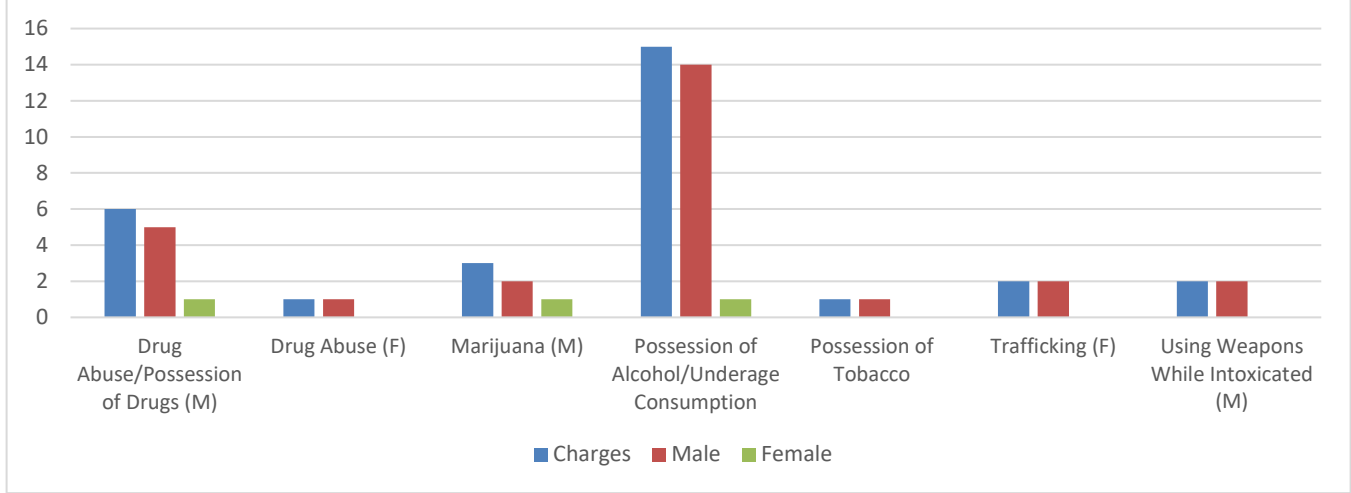
Year	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Delinquent (cases not charges)	367	320	255	176	129	143	211
Unruly	112	149	105	59	54	68	102
Traffic (cases not charges)	285	268	251	200	216	223	205
Abuse/Neglect/ Dependent	250	227	149	163	189	159	187

Adult	149	166	235	53	126	204	183
Paternity/Custody/Child Support	212	205	202	159	154	121	154
Grandparent Power of Attorney/CA	24	29	13	18	12	10	16
Juvenile Civil Protection Order	4	3	3	2	3	5	7
Miscellaneous Filings	47	48	53	53	53	38	59
Total	1450	1415	1266	883	941	971	1,124

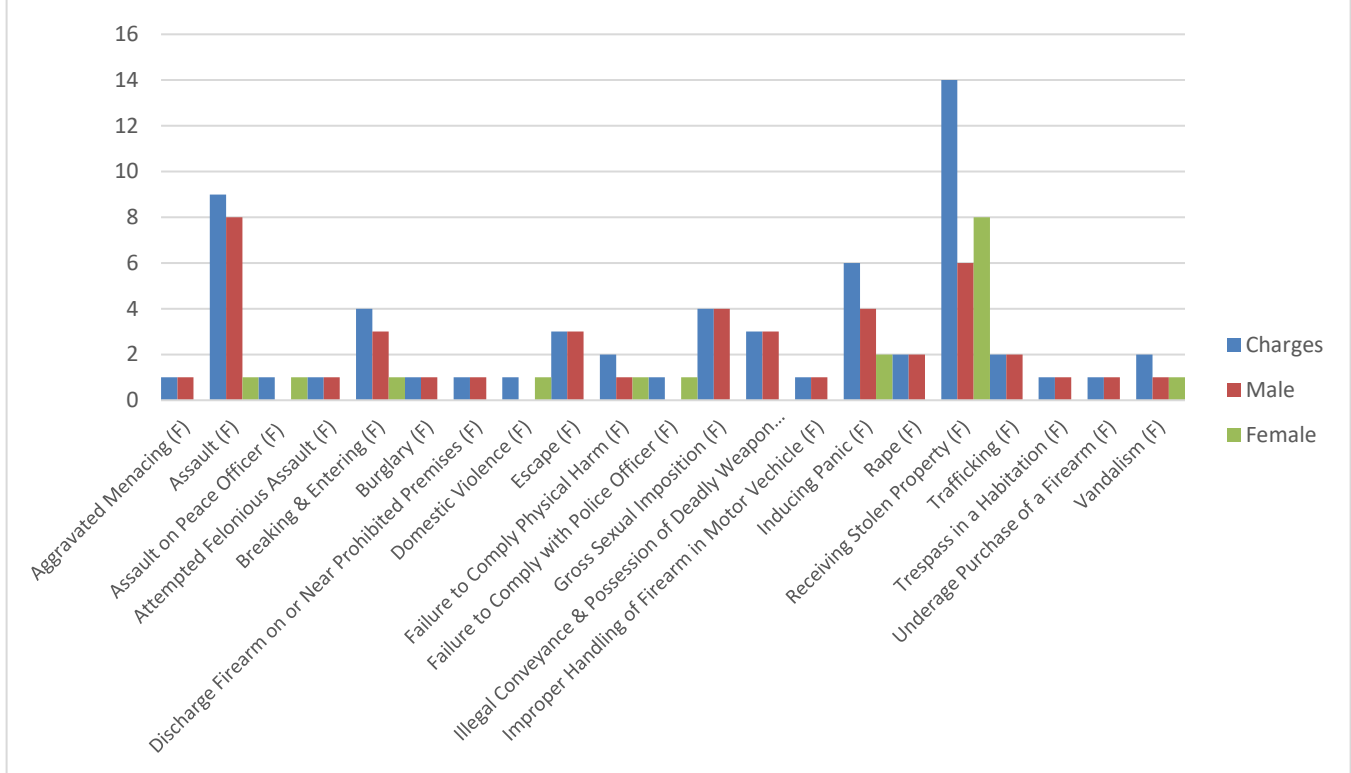
Theft Related Offenses w/Male-Female Ratios



Drug-Alcohol Related Offenses w/Male-Female Ratios

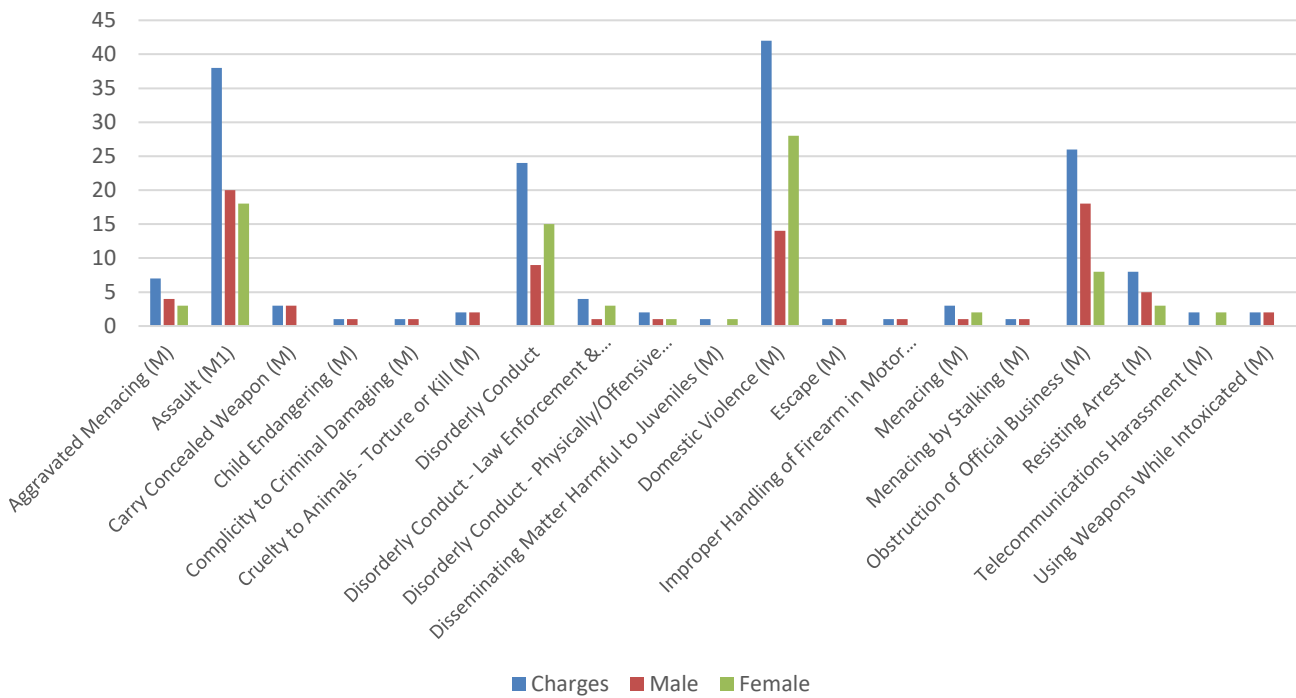


Felony Offenses of Violence w/Male-Female Ratios

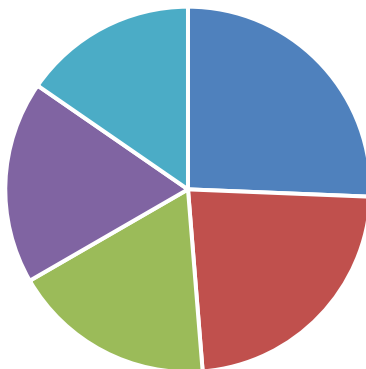


Misdemeanor Offenses of Violence

w/Male-Female Ratios

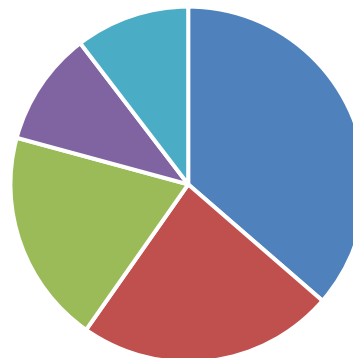


Top 5 Male Delinquent Offenses



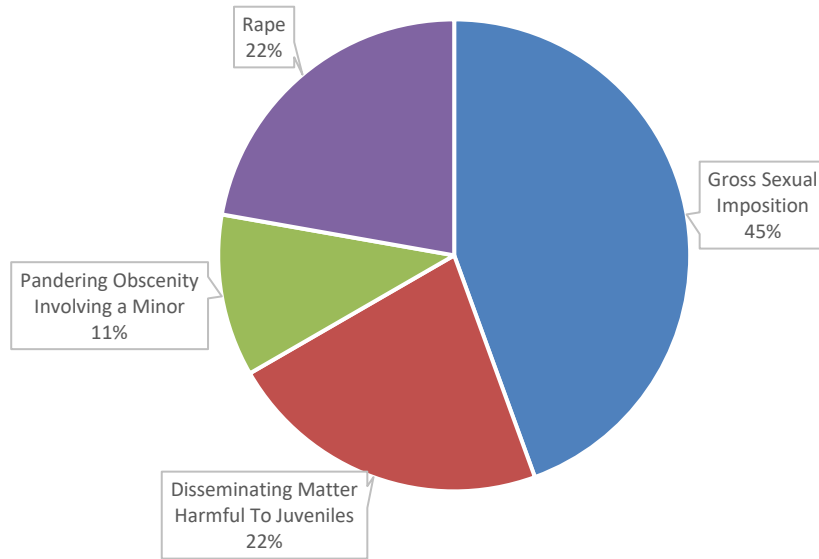
- Assault (M1)
- Obstruction of Official Business (M)
- Domestic Violence (M)
- Possession of Alcohol/Underage Consumption
- Criminal Mischief

Top 5 Female Delinquent Offenses



- Domestic Violence (M)
- Assault (M1)
- Disorderly Conduct
- Obstruction of Official Business (M)

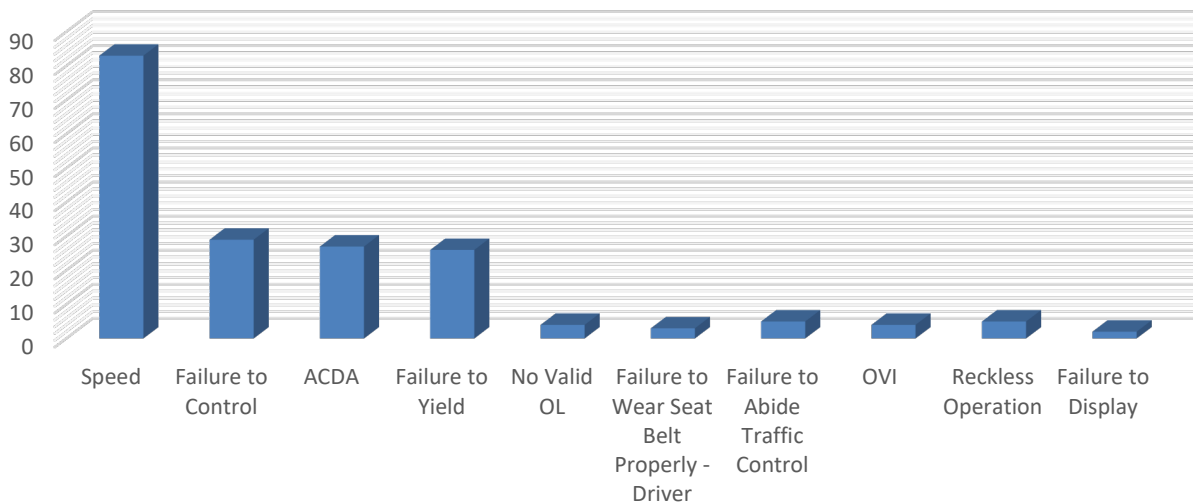
Sex Related Offenses



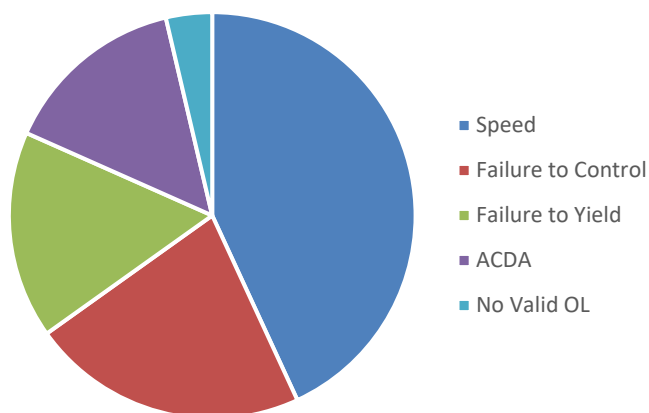
NOTE: The average miles per hour over the posted speed limit for juveniles cited in Ross County for the year 2023 was 21.73. The average miles per hour over the posted speed limit has continued to rise:

2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
17.46	18.2	18.2	19.5	20.64	21.73	22.64

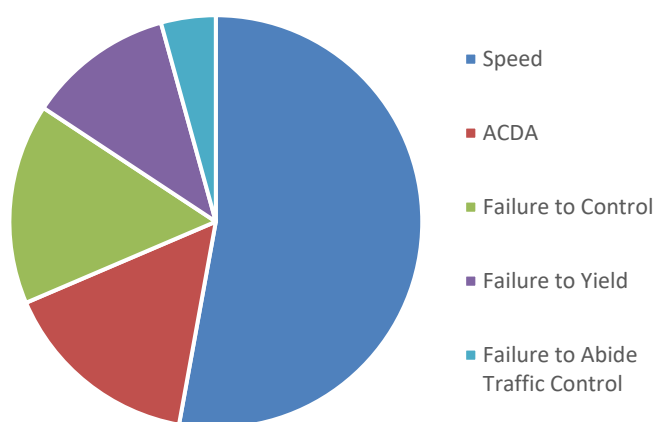
Top 10 Juvenile Traffic Offenses



Top 5 Male Traffic Offenses



Top 5 Female Traffic Offenses



JUVENILE PROBATION DEPARTMENT

INTRODUCTION TO THE JUVENILE PROBATION DEPARTMENT

The Juvenile Probation Department monitors juveniles placed on probation by the Judge or Magistrates in the Juvenile Court. The juvenile court assesses youth for community risk, level of care and brokers a range of services for youth and families. When necessary, the Juvenile Court will assume the care and custody of unruly and delinquent youth and it will ensure that the education, comprehensive mental and behavioral health intervention services, and treatment are provided to youth and families to promote family preservation. Oversight of RECLAIM Ohio and the development of programs and services remains under the administration of juvenile programs.

The Juvenile Probation Department also:

- Prepares and files monthly reports for the individuals on probation.
- Prepares and files reports and memos ordered by the Juvenile Court.
- Locates residential placements and non-residential treatment programs for juveniles with substance abuse, sexual behaviors, and mental/behavior health issues.
- Monitors the probationer's school attendance.
- Assigns community service worksites and monitors the juvenile's performance.
- Utilizes various risk assessments to identify the youth's highest risk to have further involvement with the court and/or law enforcement.
- Develops plans in accordance with the risk assessments to address youth and their family's needs to prevent further involvement with juvenile justice.
- Monitors service delivery in accordance with case plan activities.

- Completes Pre-dispositional investigations.
- Recommend and supervise placements of unruly/delinquent youth.
- Facilitates reunification efforts between youth and family
- Facilitates social service development for youth and family.
- Supervises and case manage youth at risk for removal from the home.
- Participates in identifying community service gaps and the development of collaborative relationships that proactively meets the needs of youth and family in the community.
- The Juvenile Probation Department further administers drug tests and monitors children placed on electronic monitoring; and various other duties as directed by the Juvenile Court.

JUVENILE PROBATION DEPARTMENT CASE LOAD

The Juvenile Probation Department began 2023 with 60 probationers and received 48 new referrals.

- 108 youth had their probation terminated, were referred to Pre-Dispositional Intervention or had their case dismissed in 2023.
- Of the 194 juveniles involved with probation in 2023:
 - 73 were female.
 - 121 were male.
- 34 youth remain on probation for 2024.

Not all youth referred to the probation department for monitoring were placed on formal probation. Some of those cases were pre-adjudication supervision, community service, and/or mediation agreements.

Restitution

\$1,605.00 in restitution was collected in 2023.

- 8 new youth were ordered to pay restitution totalling \$5,000.95 in 2023.

Reunification Outcomes

The Court placed 3 juveniles in 2023.

- All were male
- 1 was Caucasian.
- 2 were black/African-American
- 0 were Hispanic
- 2 were reunified with a parent
- 1 youth remains in care at the start of 2024

Electronic Monitoring

In 2023, the Juvenile Probation Department had a total of 30 youth placed on electronic monitoring. The cost of electronic monitoring was \$11.00 per day.

The use of electronic monitoring is an effective tool for the probation department that permits youth from being removed from their home and is an effective alternative to the high cost of residential placement and secure facilities.

Department of Youth Services

In 2023, two (2) juveniles were committed to the custody of the Ohio Department of Youth Services. Commitment to the Department of Youth Services is only for felony offenders. One was female and one was male.

ROSS COUNTY JUVENILE COURT DIVERSION PROGRAM

Court Contracted Services

Lighthouse Youth Services started working out of the Juvenile Probation Department in 2015 to provide mental/behavioral health and alcohol and other drug services to court involved youth. A primary focus is providing outpatient sex offender treatment to youth who have been adjudicated or identified as having inappropriate sexual behavior and involved with the Court. The other focus is providing treatment to youth exhibiting alcohol and other drug related problems. This past year, Lighthouse developed a program focusing on adolescent girl's using the Girls Circle Model. This program has been a positive impact on the teen girls in our community. In 2018, Lighthouse obtained a grant to develop and maintain a diversionary program in conjunction with the Juvenile Court. This program was successful within the juvenile court; however, Lighthouse was not rewarded a renewal on this grant. It was showing such positive outcomes that in July 2019 Judge Benson approved a new diversion program to be operated in conjunction with Lighthouse.

Ross County Juvenile Court Diversion Program

The following policy changes are to address how the court handles various cases filed with in the juvenile court. The goal is to divert more juveniles from formal court sanctions by linking them with appropriate services. Previously our mediation program focused on first time offenders, unruly offenses, and truancy. Our goal is to utilize the program developed by Lighthouse Youth Services focusing on diversion services on certain delinquent offenses. The following criteria shall be considered for each offender in order to be eligible for the expanded diversion services.

1. The following offenses will be considered for further evaluation:
 - a. Offenders with the first-time filings of Theft, Criminal Mischief, Underage Consumption, Drug Possession, Disorderly Conduct, Disorderly Conduct-Fighting, Trespassing and Second Unruly filings shall be considered.
 - b. Offenders with a previous filing in the court that had a past successful Mediation and/or probation may be considered.

If the youth meet the above criteria and the Judge or Magistrate refers to the Diversion Program the following shall occur:

1. A meeting with the Chief Probation Officer and Lighthouse Youth Services, Program Coordinator, shall be arranged with the youth and their family via a letter informing them of the date, time and location of the meeting.
2. They will be given the option to participate in the program to prevent further court action when they arrive at the meeting. If they refuse to participate or fail to appear the case shall be referred back to the Magistrate for further determination.
3. An agreement shall be signed acknowledging the charges against them and that they agree to comply with the terms of the Diversion Program.
4. After a formal assessment is completed by Lighthouse Youth Services the youth and family will have 90-120 days to complete their treatment goals and diversion agreement.
5. These terms can include but are not limited to individual, group and/or family counseling, drug screening, alternative education plans, restitution and community service.

6. Failure to comply with the terms set forth in the diversion agreement and treatment plan could result in further court action.
7. If the youth successfully completes the agreement the case against them shall be dismissed.
8. Weekly case reviews will be held between the Probation Department and Lighthouse Youth Services.
9. Written monthly updates shall be provided to the Judge and Magistrates by the Chief Probation Officer or other designated Officer.

The Judge or Magistrate may still refer a case to a Pre-Dispositional Intervention which is a diversion program for those youth initially sent to formal proceedings; however, through judicial discretion their case are referred to diversion programming after arraignment but prior to disposition.

- 20 cases were carried over from 2022.

In 2023, forty-seven (47) cases were referred to the program making a total of 67 youth involved with diversion for the year.

- 21 positive completions.
- 8 cases returned to court due to failure to comply with the terms of their agreement.
- 38 carried over to 2024.

This program has allowed for probation officers to maintain a lower volume case load of primarily moderate and high-risk offenders which allows for more focus to be placed on those offenders for the safety of the community.

JUVENILE PROBATION DEPARTMENT FINANCES

\$212,950.37 was expended in the Juvenile Probation Department in 2023.

\$609,370.96 was expended by the county for the IVE Department in 2023.

Of that total \$487,272.26 was paid for by the county and \$122,098.70 was paid for by the IVE Department.

\$3,973.34 was expended in the CASA/TANF/VOCA program in 2023. However, \$64,151.58 was carried over to reimburse the General Fund for CASA salaries/fringes.

\$5,037.12 was expended in the Family Dependency Treatment Court program in 2023.

Introduction to Court Alternative Programs

The Juvenile Court has had a high degree of involvement and interest in community programs and collaborative ventures that support youth and families. The court has initiated diversion programs and fostered alternative strategies to divert youth from court sanctions and out of home placements. With dwindling budgets and increased pressures to serve unruly and delinquent youth the court has identified alternative resources to administer justice, rehabilitate juveniles, promote public safety and provide opportunities to strengthen families.

MEDIATION/GUARDIANSHIP INVESTIGATION

In 2023, the Mediator/Guardianship Investigator/Court Advocate was assigned one hundred nine (109) cases. Of these were:

- 27 were for unruly cases
- 11 were for custody cases
- 0 were for adult cases
- 58 were for juvenile truancy cases
- 37 were for guardianship cases
- 1 was for a delinquent case
- 15 were for adult protective services cases

Family Dependency Treatment Court

Judge Benson began the journey of building a Family Dependency Treatment Court in 2017. The program provides collaborative evaluation and treatment services to parents suffering from substance use disorders and have lost or are at risk of losing custody of their children due to abuse, neglect, or dependency. These intensive services are offered and provided to participants with the expectation that the parents will eliminate substance use and will address mental health treatment resulting in a more fully functioning parent, which facilitates case plan compliance and permanency for the children and family.

In February of 2017, Ross County Court of Common Pleas, Juvenile Division earned initial certification from the Ohio Supreme Court's Commission on Specialized Dockets to begin implementation of a Family Dependency Treatment Court. In May of 2017, the court received final certification and was recertified for another 3 years in 2020 and again in 2023. The program is comprehensive and takes a holistic approach to treating not only the parent but the family. The program is challenging and requires participants to be actively engaged in services for mental health, substance use treatment, parenting, education, employment/job skills training and any other supportive services the participant and/or family needs to be self-sufficient.

- Enrollment:
 - 22 carry over from 2022
 - 8 new participants in 2023
 - Totaling 30 cases for the year.
- Program Case Resolution:
 - 8 successfully graduated the program
 - 0 unsuccessful discharges, due to non-compliance with treatment, legal charges, unable to abstain and/or non-compliance with program rules/court orders.
 - 4 neutral resolution

CASA

The Ross County Court Appointed Special Advocate Program (CASA) began in July of 2017 when Ross County was awarded funding to begin implementation of a CASA Program. In 2019, Ross County CASA received VOCA funding to help support the costs of the program and additional funds were received through Ohio CASA to provide

services and operational costs to help expand the program. VOCA funding was awarded to the program in October 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022 and 2023. In 2023, we received a grant that helped support us to hire a new Volunteer Coordinator position for our program which was hired on mid January of 2023.

In 2023, the CASA program had a rollover in cases from 2021-2022 of 94 children, we received 157 new referrals in 2023 ending our 2023 year with 251 children in total. We had 6 total active volunteers who gave 500 hours. Despite the turnover in the turnover of directes and a few CASA volunteers, CASA advocated continue to make a huge impact on the voice of the child in our Juvenile Court, at the end of 2023 we were setting up a training to bring on 11 new CASA volunteers.

The Staff

THE STAFF OF THE PROBATE-JUVENILE DIVISIONS

- ❖ Judge J. Jeffrey Benson became the Ross County Probate/Juvenile Court Judge on February 9, 2015. Prior to his election to the bench, Judge Benson was a self-employed trial lawyer in Ross County for over thirty-three years. He received his Law Degree from Capital University in 1982 after graduating from Otterbein University in 1979. Judge Benson previously served three years as an Assistant Ross County Prosecuting Attorney, seven years as a member of the Chillicothe City Council, and eight years as a member of the Chillicothe City School District Board of Education. He is married to Shawn T. (Stephens) Benson and the proud father of four (4) boys. Judge Benson started the Family Dependency Treatment Court on May 5, 2017, the CASA Program on July 1, 2017 and the AOT Program in 2019.
- ❖ Magistrate Christine B. Hannan joined the Probate and Juvenile Court of Ross County in 1995 and retired in 2011. She was re-appointed as Magistrate. At the time of her initial appointment as Referee/Magistrate, Mrs. Hannan was an assistant prosecuting attorney for Ross County and a practicing lawyer with the law firm of Ward, Kellenberger, Nusbaum and Wissler. She received her Law Degree from Capital University School of Law in 1980 after graduating from Ball State University in 1977. Mrs. Hannan retired from the Court November of 2023.
- ❖ Magistrate James S. Szorady Jr. joined the Probate and Juvenile Court of Ross County in October of 2021. Prior to serving as Magistrate, Mr. Szorady served as the Supervising Attorney for eight years at the Public Defender's Office. Mr. Szorady received his B.A. in Telecommunications from Bowling Green State University in 2005 and his J.D. from Capital University in 2008.
- ❖ Magistrate Jennifer L. Ater joined the Probate and Juvenile Court of Ross County in October 2023. Prior to serving as Magistrate, Ms. Ater was head of the Juvenile Division of the Ross County Prosecutor's Office for four years, having been an assistant prosecuting attorney there for thirteen years. In addition, she operated a local private law firm for twenty-five years. Ms. Ater received her law degree from Case Western Reserve School of Law in 1995 after graduating from Miami University in 1992.
- ❖ Administrator of Juvenile Programs, Cheri Smitley, joined the Probate and Juvenile Court in 2005. She holds a Bachelor of Science Degree in Community Health Education, Master Degree in Management and Public Administration and is a Licensed Independent Chemical Dependency Counselor. Mrs. Smitley started with the Court as a Title II grant project director.

- ❖ Director of Probate Services, Brandy McCord, joined the Probate and Juvenile Court in 2000. Mrs. McCord joined the Probate and Juvenile Court as a social worker. In 2011, upon the retirement of Linda Young, Mrs. McCord was the Community Liason Officer. She holds a Bachelor of Arts in Criminology from Ohio University in 1998. She also received a Master of Arts in Sociology with a specialization in Crime and Deviance from Ohio University in 2003.
- ❖ Data Systems Analyst, Lisa M. Bair, joined the Probate and Juvenile Court in 1990. Mrs. Bair started with the Probate and Juvenile Court as a court reporter and was formally appointed to the position of Data Systems Analyst in 2000.
- ❖ Administrative Clerk/Mediation Secretary, Pam Kangur, joined the Probate and Juvenile Court in 2021. Mrs. Kangur started with the Probate and Juvenile Court as a Deputy Clerk and was appointed to the position of Administrative Clerk/Mediation Secretary in 2022.
- ❖ Deputy Clerk, Billie Lytle, joined the Probate and Juvenile Court in 1993. Mrs. Lytle started with the Probate and Juvenile Court as a deputy clerk and is currently working in the Court's probation department.
- ❖ Chief Juvenile Clerk, Lois Smith, joined the Probate and Juvenile Court in 1993. Mrs. Smith started with the Probate and Juvenile Court as a deputy clerk in the Court's Juvenile Division. In 2005, Mrs. Smith was promoted to Chief Juvenile Clerk.
- ❖ Bailiff, Joseph Glandon, joined the Probate and Juvenile Court in 1996. He has a Bachelors Degree in Elementary Education from Ohio University. Mr. Glandon started with the Probate and Juvenile Court as a Probation Officer. He is now serving as court bailiff.
- ❖ Deputy Clerk, Penny Fannon, joined the Probate and Juvenile Court in 1995. Mrs. Fannon started with the Probate and Juvenile Court as a deputy clerk and is currently working in the Court's Probate Division.
- ❖ Probation Officer, Matt Sutherland, joined the Probate and Juvenile Court in 1998. He has a Bachelors Degree in Criminal Justice and an Associates Degree in Law Enforcement Technology from Ohio University. Mr. Sutherland started with the Probate and Juvenile Court as a probation officer and currently retains that position. He is also a state certified guardianship investigator and was certified as a mediator in dispute resolution and domestic relations through the Supreme Court of Ohio.
- ❖ Deputy Clerk, Tonya Wright, joined the Probate and Juvenile Court in 1998. Mrs. Wright started with the Probate and Juvenile Court as a deputy clerk and is currently working in the Court's Probate Division.
- ❖ Deputy Clerk, Tammy Kellough, joined the Probate and Juvenile Court in 2001. Mrs. Kellough started with the Probate and Juvenile Court as a deputy clerk and continues to maintain her position working in the Court's Juvenile Division.
- ❖ Deputy Clerk, Stephanie Wells, joined the Probate and Juvenile Court in 2007. Miss Wells works with the Probate and Juvenile Court as a deputy clerk and is currently working in the Court's Probate Division.
- ❖ Chief Probation Officer, Shanna Haybron, joined the Probate and Juvenile Court in 2007. Ms. Haybron started with the Probate and Juvenile Court as a reunification probation officer in the Title IV-E Department. In 2016, she was promoted to Chief Probation Officer. She holds a Juvenile Sex Offender Counseling Certification from the University of Louisville.

- ❖ Reunification Probation Officer, Quincey Bailey, joined the Probate and Juvenile Court in 2010. He holds a Bachelor of Science Degree and a Juvenile Sex Offender Counseling Certification from the University of Louisville. Mr. Bailey works as a probation officer in the Juvenile Probation Department.
- ❖ Deputy Clerk, Kristi Riley, joined the Probate and Juvenile Court in 2018. Mrs. Riley started with the Probate and Juvenile Court as a deputy clerk and is currently working as an intake clerk in the Court's front office.
- ❖ Deputy Clerk, Penni J. Woods, joined the Probate and Juvenile Court in 2018. Mrs. Woods started with the Probate and Juvenile Court as a deputy clerk and is currently working as an intake clerk in the Court's front office.
- ❖ Juvenile Probation Assistant, Erika Harris, joined the Probate and Juvenile Court in 2019. Mrs. Harris started with the Probate and Juvenile Court as a Deputy Clerk, was promoted to the position of Court Reporter and now serves as the Juvenile Probation Assistant.
- ❖ Court Advocate/Mediator, Martin D. Dunn, joined the Probate and Juvenile Court in January of 2021. Mr. Dunn was a chemistry teacher and coach in the Chillicothe city School District for 30 years until his retirement in June 2013. Mr. Dunn held the position of Attendance Officer for Chillicothe High/Middle Schools after retirement until his acceptance of the Court Advocate/Mediator role. He is certified as a mediator in dispute resolution in juvenile and domestic relations through the Supreme Court of Ohio. He has also completed the Court Investigators Training through the Ohio Judicial Conference in 2021. He received a Bachelor of Science Degree in Pre-Medicine from Alabama State University in May 1981 and a Masters Degree in Education from The Ohio State University in August 1983.
- ❖ Court Reporter, Deanna Menendez, joined the Probate and Juvenile Court in 2021. Miss Menendez started with the Probate and Juvenile Court as a Deputy Clerk and was subsequently promoted to the position of Court Reporter
- ❖ Deputy Clerk, Ryan Reeves, joined the Probate and Juvenile Court in 2022. Miss Reeves started with the Probate and Juvenile Court as a Deputy Clerk and was then promoted to court reporter.
- ❖ Deputy Clerk, Ashley Toops, joined the Probate and Juvenile Court in 2022. Mrs. Toops started with the Probate and Juvenile Court as a Deputy Clerk in the juvenile probation department and was then assigned as a clerk in the Court's Juvenile Division.
- ❖ CASA Director, Britni Brown, joined the Probate and Juvenile Court in 2023. Mrs. Brown started with the Probate and Juvenile Court as the CASA Director and maintains that position.
- ❖ Deputy Clerk, Toni Detillian, rejoined the Probate and Juvenile Court in 2023. Mrs. Detillian started with the Probate and Juvenile Court as a deputy clerk and works as an intake clerk in the Court's front office.
- ❖ Juvenile Probation Officer, Kimberly Sollars, joined the Probate and Juvenile Court in 2023. She has a Bachelor of Science Degree in Criminal Justice from the University of Cincinnati.
- ❖ CASA Volunteer Coordinator, Carrie Ayers, joined the Probate and Juvenile Court in 2023. Mrs. Ayers started with the Probate and Juvenile Court as the CASA Volunteer Coordinator and maintains that position.