

**2024 ANNUAL REPORT  
HIGHLAND COUNTY COMMON PLEAS COURT  
GENERAL AND DOMESTIC RELATIONS DIVISIONS**

This is the seventeenth annual report prepared by Judge Rocky A. Coss for the purpose of informing the public of the operations of the Court during the past year as well as comparing the case filings and activities of the Court to past years. It covers activities of both the general and domestic relations divisions.

**ANNUAL CASE FILINGS**

Total case filings in 2024 increased over 2023. The total number of cases filed or reopened in both divisions in 2024 was 819 compared to 741 in 2023, an 11% increase. Overall annual case filings since 2020 have averaged 733 cases. The General Division had 533 filings while the Domestic Relations Division had 286.

**CRIMINAL CASES**

There was a significant decline in criminal case filings in 2024. There were 168 new and reopened criminal cases filed compared to 214 filed in 2022, which is a 26% decrease. The average annual criminal case filings over the past five years is 206.

These statistics are based on the requirements for filing case management reports with the Ohio Supreme Court. A new case represents arraignment on an indictment and a reopened case is one which had been closed prior to adjudication such as a defendant being unavailable after arraignment. The total number of cases does not include indictments that were filed in 2024 with the Clerk but have not yet been served on the defendant. Also, it does not include cases bound over to the grand jury in which indictments were not returned in 2024. Therefore, there will be a variance between the Clerk of Courts' case numbers and this report.

The statistics regarding criminal cases do not include any post-conviction proceedings in criminal cases such as probation violations, restitution hearings, modification of probation conditions, judicial release hearings, sealing of records, drug court sessions and other proceedings that occur in many criminal cases after they are closed for Ohio Supreme Court reporting purposes.

**FORECLOSURE CASES**

There was a total of 67 new and reopened foreclosure filings in 2024 compared to 63 in 2023.

**OTHER CIVIL CASES**

There were 299 new and reopened civil cases filed in 2024 compared to 217 filed in

2023. This represents an increase of over 27%. The five-year average for annual civil filings is 209 cases.

## **JURY TRIALS**

The Court conducted 7 jury trials in 2024 compared to 10 in 2023. The Court has conducted an average of 7 jury trials per year since 2009.

## **DOMESTIC RELATIONS CASES**

Domestic Relations cases also increased significantly. There were 150 new cases and 136 reopened cases filed in 2024 for a total of 286 which represents a 16% increase over 2023 when there were 160 new and 87 reopened cases filed for a total of 247. The average number of annual case filings over the past five years is 284. Reopened cases include motions filed after a case was completed such as modification of child custody/parental rights, modification of child support, motions to enforce property issues in a prior decree or motions to cite for contempt of orders in prior decrees.

## **CASE MANAGEMENT**

The Supreme Court has adopted time guidelines within which cases should be completed. For example, the time guideline for criminal cases is six months from the date of arraignment. The guideline for foreclosures to be complete is twelve months from the date of filing and for most other civil cases it is twenty-four months. There have been no past pending criminal cases in the General Division of this Court since April of 2009 and no past pending civil cases since March of 2010. There have been no past pending cases in the Domestic Relations Division since March of 2010.

## **DRUG COURT DOCKET**

The New Way to Recovery Drug Court Docket received its three-year certification in December of 2019 and a renewal of its certification by the Ohio Supreme Court Commission on Specialized Dockets for an additional three-year period ending in December of 2025.

There are currently 28 active participants in the drug court docket. Since July of 2019, 104 offenders have been accepted in the docket. 47 participants have graduated since the program's start.

Due to the number of offenders in the drug court docket, the Court conducts drug court docket sessions on both mornings and afternoons of the second and fourth Fridays of each month so that the sessions will be shorter and allow more time for review of individual participants' cases. Drug court sessions are open to the public but are not live streamed.

The docket consists of four phases that must be successfully completed with a minimum participation period of 18 months and 12 months sober prior to graduation.

## **REMOTE HEARINGS AND AUDIO-VIDEO TECHNOLOGY PROGRAMS**

In 2024, the Court conducted 23 video hearings through its courtroom teleconferencing system primarily in cases in which defendants are incarcerated in prisons throughout Ohio. During 2023, the Court conducted 516 Zoom hearing sessions in the General Division many of which involved multiple cases. The Domestic Relations Division conducted 24 hearings by zoom.

The utilization of remote technology allows parties and attorneys to save both time and expenses but avoiding travel time and parties having to take off work to appear for brief hearings. It saves the county sheriff's office significant expenses in transporting defendants from prisons throughout Ohio to the court, as well as transport of defendants in the Highland County Justice Center almost daily. In many instances, the parties and attorneys request hearings be conducted by Zoom rather than in person.

The Court's audio-video recording system allows the Court to live-stream the proceedings in the general division on its You-Tube channel. This was necessary to meet the constitutional requirement that court proceedings be open to the public during the Covid 19 pandemic safety measures that were adopted by the Court which limited the number of persons who could be in the courtroom during proceedings.

Livestreaming proceedings increased the public's access to court hearings. The Court's You-Tube channel currently has 1,770 subscribers. The most viewed live-streamed hearings are usually jury trials which have had 80 or more viewers during a single trial. During jury trials, the recordings are not accessible to ensure that witnesses and others cannot view them in violation of the separation of witnesses rule. After the trial is completed, the recordings are made public once the trial is completed and can be viewed by the public. Domestic Relations cases and Drug Court Docket hearings are not livestreamed.

## **CASE MANAGEMENT TECHNOLOGY UPGRADES**

Recent legislation requires all courts in Ohio to have some form of electronic filing. This Court has accepted filings by email and facsimile since 2011. Voluntary E-filing was implemented for civil cases in 2023 and the Court has opened that for criminal cases and domestic relations cases. E-filing allows the electronic filing of documents directly with the case management system and eliminates the need for the Clerk's office to copy and mail out copies of many documents in the file.

## **FISCAL MANAGEMENT**

The Court's 2024 general fund budget was \$318,272. The actual general expenditures for the year were \$283,808 which was 11% under budget. Each year since 2009 except for 2010 when a capital murder case required large expenditures of unbudgeted expenses, the Court has spent less than the amount appropriated for general fund expenses. For historical comparison, the Court's 1998 general fund budget was \$218,296.88.