



STATE OF MICHIGAN  
17TH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT COURT

MARK A. TRUSOCK  
CIRCUIT COURT JUDGE

SUITE 11200 B  
180 OTTAWA AVENUE NW  
GRAND RAPIDS, MICHIGAN 49503-2751

November 2, 2022

To the Citizens of Kent County,

This annual report summarizes the exceptional work of the 17th Circuit Court, the Probate Court, and many of the excellent programs that we are involved in.

The purpose of the Court is to serve the citizens of this County. This is accomplished by the admirable and dedicated work of the Judges, Clerks and Court Staff. For me, it is an honor to work with so many loyal and hard-working individuals.

I am pleased to report that we remain united and focused on serving the community of Kent County.

To better assist the community we serve, we have developed and work with many specialty courts which include: Treatment and Support Court (mental health), Youthful Sex Offender Treatment Program, D.E.T.O.U.R.S Girls Program, Truancy Court, Drug Court, Sobriety Court, Veteran's Court, Specialized Business Court, and Juvenile Mental Health Court.

The State of Michigan has long recognized the Kent County Courts as one of the top courts in the State. I have consistently observed that the work done by this Court is accomplished with integrity and fairness. The citizens of Kent County can truly be proud of the 17<sup>th</sup> Circuit and Probate Court.

Respectfully,  
*Mark A. Trusock*

Hon. Mark A. Trusock

17<sup>th</sup> Circuit Court Chief Judge

# CIRCUIT COURT

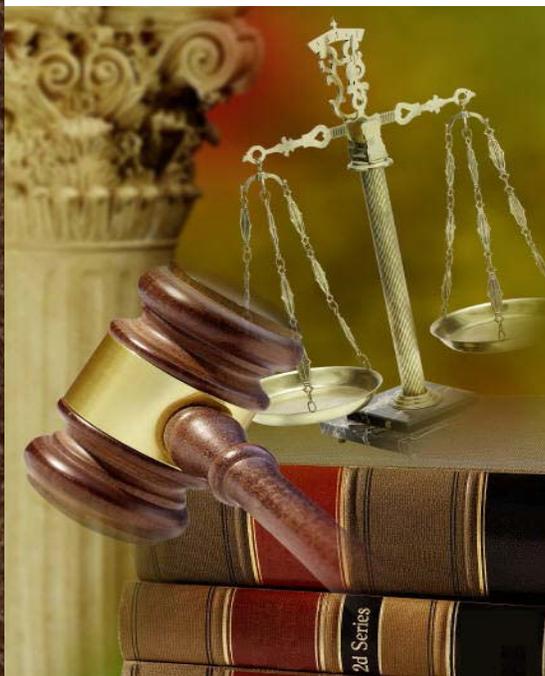
## VISION STATEMENT:

The 17th Circuit Court will achieve excellence and be recognized as a leader by providing an accessible, effective, efficient, and innovative court operation.



## MISSION STATEMENT:

The 17th Circuit Court will provide a system of justice that assures equal access for the fair and timely resolution of matters brought before the Court.



# CIRCUIT COURT

## CIRCUIT COURT AUTHORITY/ADMINISTRATION:

The 17th Circuit Court is the trial court of general jurisdiction in Kent County and has county-wide jurisdiction over all actions except those given by state law to another court, including:

- Criminal matters in which the potential sentence is incarceration of more than one year
- Domestic relations matters
- Personal protection orders
- Juvenile matters pertaining to delinquency or criminal activity
- Child protective proceedings
- Parental consent waivers
- Adoptions
- Emancipations
- General civil actions involving claims of \$25,000 or more
- Cases appealed from another court by an administrative agency
- Superintending control over other courts within the judicial circuit, subject to final superintending control of the Supreme Court
- Final decisions of the Circuit Court may be appealed to the Court of Appeals

Administratively, each multi-judge circuit has a chief judge appointed by the Michigan Supreme Court. The chief judge is the presiding officer and director of administration for the court. With the assistance of the Court Administrator, the chief judge develops and implements policies of the court; supervises caseload management; directs assignment of the court's business; supervises performance of the court's personnel; manages the court's finances; effects compliance with court rules and provisions of law.

## CIRCUIT COURT LOCATIONS:

*Court Administrator  
Andrew Thalhammer*

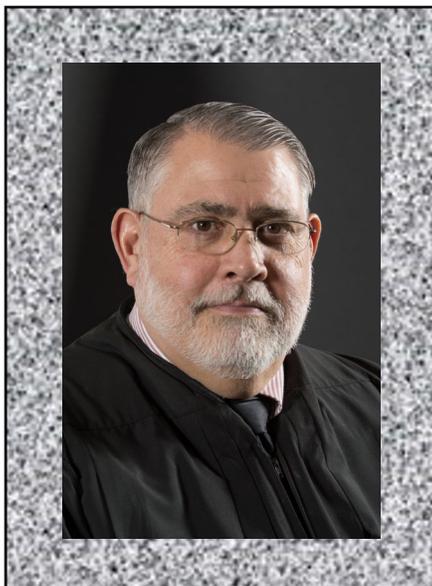
**COURTHOUSE**  
180 Ottawa Avenue NW  
Grand Rapids, MI 49503

**FRIEND OF THE COURT**  
82 Ionia Avenue NW  
Grand Rapids, MI 49503

**JUVENILE CENTER / DETENTION**  
1501 Cedar Street NE  
Grand Rapids, MI 49503

**Court Website**  
[www.accesskent.com](http://www.accesskent.com)

# JUDGES



## **MARK A. TRUSOCK**

### **CHIEF JUDGE**

Judge Trusock graduated from Michigan Technological University (MTU) in 1974. After college, Judge Trusock worked for a large insurance company from 1975 to 1984. In 1983 he obtained a Chartered Life Underwriter (CLU) from the American College in Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania. In 1985 Judge Trusock graduated from the Thomas M. Cooley Law School in Lansing, Michigan. For the next 21 years, he worked for the partnership of Lannen and Trusock. At Lannen and Trusock he worked with civil, criminal, family, juvenile and appellate cases in courts throughout the state of Michigan. Judge Trusock was elected in November of 2006 to fill a new judicial position. Judge Trusock is assigned to the Civil-Criminal Division of the Circuit Court.

Court Clerk - Renee Pegg  
Court Clerk - Whitney Smith  
Law Clerk - Rob Dordan

Phone (616) 632-5008  
Fax (616) 632-5023



## **KATHLEEN A. FEENEY**

### **CHIEF JUDGE PRO TEMPORE**

Judge Feeney is the Chief Judge Pro Tem of the Kent County Circuit Court and the first woman either appointed or elected to that bench. She graduated with high honors from Michigan State University's Honors College and was the Outstanding Woman Law Graduate from the University of Illinois College of Law. Judge Feeney worked for Foster, Swift, Collins & Smith P.C., and Mika, Meyers, Beckett & Jones as well as the Michigan Court of Appeals' as Judge Jane E. Markey's judicial counsel before being appointed to the bench in 2000. In 2016, Judge Feeney received the Justice Marilyn J. Kelly Award for Outstanding Judicial Service from the State Bar of Michigan Family Law Section and was recognized as a 2018 Leader in the Law from *Michigan Lawyers Weekly*. Judge Feeney is the Vice President of the Michigan Judges Association. She created the Truancy Court and helped establish the Courthouse Therapy Dog Program where comfort dogs are provided for children and vulnerable adults who are involved in criminal or domestic relations cases.

Court Clerk - Kate Lewis  
Court Clerk - Elizabeth Shearer

Phone (616) 632-5087  
Fax (616) 632-5096



## **DEBORAH L. MCNABB**

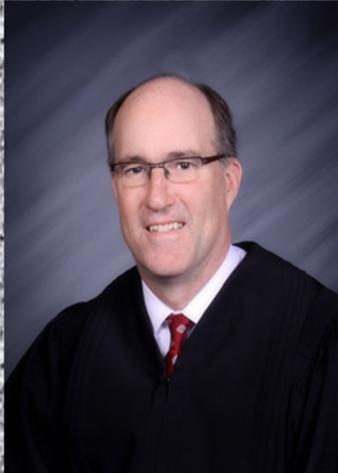
### **PRESIDING JUDGE—FAMILY DIVISION**

Judge McNabb was elected in November 2016 to fill a new judicial position. She received her BA from Alma College and her JD from DePaul University College of Law. Before being elected circuit judge, Judge McNabb served as a Circuit Court Referee in the Family Division for 25 years. Judge McNabb is assigned to the Family Division of the Circuit Court and was appointed Presiding Judge of the Family Division in January 2018. Judge McNabb also presides over the Kent County Juvenile Treatment and Support Court (JTASC). She serves on the Kent County Families and Children Coordinating Council, the Executive Board of the Michigan Judges Association (MJA) and, as co-chair of the MJA Family Division Committee. Judge McNabb is also a member of the Juvenile Justice and Child Welfare Committee of the National Association of Women Judges and has been named a Fellow of the Michigan Bar Foundation as well as of the American Bar Foundation.

Court Clerk - Lisa Gibson  
Court Clerk - Tylaer Van Noller

Phone (616) 632-5219  
Fax (616) 632-5105

# JUDGES



## **T.J. Ackert**

Judge Terence J. "T.J." Ackert took the bench on September 1, 2015. A graduate of the University of Michigan and University of Toledo College of Law, he served clients throughout Michigan and the Midwest for thirty one years. He was affiliated as a Shareholder with the firm Smith Haughey Rice & Roegge, P.C. from 1984 to 2007, and then as a Member of Miller Johnson Snell & Cummiskey, PLLC from 2007 until 2015. For most of his private practice, Judge Ackert served as a business counsel and trial attorney advising closely held and family owned businesses in both transactional and litigation matters involving an array of industries including manufacturing, construction, technology, and start-ups. He received the distinction of being listed in Best Lawyers in America® for Business Organizations, Closely Held Companies and Family Business Law, Corporate Law and Mergers and Acquisitions Law. Judge Ackert has served on numerous business, civic and charitable boards, including President of the Grand Rapids Bar Association in 2013. Judge Ackert currently serves on the Tribal State Federal Judicial Forum, the Michigan Court Improvement Program Task Force and the Michigan Child Welfare Leadership Workgroup. Judge Ackert is assigned to the Family Division and the Specialized Business Docket of the Circuit Court.

Court Clerk - Sue DeYoung  
Court Clerk - Courtney Bryant

Phone (616) 632-5091  
Fax (616) 632-5092



## **CURT BENSON**

Judge Benson was elected in Nov. 2018 and took the bench on January 1, 2019. Previously, Judge Benson was a litigator and a tenured professor of Western Michigan University Thomas M. Cooley Law School where he taught Evidence, Civil Procedure, Contracts, Torts, and a LLM level insurance law course. Judge Benson retired from full time teaching and took the title Distinguished Professor Emeritus. In his 30 years as a litigator and educator, Judge Benson tried many criminal and civil jury trials throughout Michigan. He has argued cases before the Michigan Supreme Court, Michigan Court of Appeals, circuit, probate, and district courts, federal district and bankruptcy courts, Worker's Compensation Bureau, American Arbitration Association, Driver's License Appeal Division, as well as FINRA securities arbitrations and mediations in New York and case evaluations in New Jersey. He is a published author of several law review articles and book chapters and a frequent speaker to local bar associations and social organizations explaining recent developments in the law and discussing topics ranging from legal history to preventing violence in public schools. He earned a B.A. from Western Michigan University and graduated from Western Michigan University Thomas M. Cooley Law School.

Court Clerk - Nicole Minerick  
Court Clerk - Keri Abraham

Phone (616) 632-5012  
Fax (616) 632-5016



## **PAUL J. DENENFELD**

Judge Denenfeld took the bench on August 10, 2009. He received his BA degree from Western Michigan University and his JD from the University of Cincinnati. Before taking the bench, Judge Denenfeld was a partner in the law firm Yates, LaGrand & Denenfeld, PLLC. Prior to that, he was the senior litigator with the Federal Public Defender office in Grand Rapids, and was the chief of the special litigation division of the Public Defender Service for the District of Columbia. For nearly 10 years, he was a civil rights and civil liberties attorney in Detroit. Judge Denenfeld has also spent considerable time working on the rule of law in several former Soviet republics. Judge Denenfeld is assigned to the Civil/Criminal Division of the Circuit Court.

Court Clerk - Deb Morris  
Court Clerk - Kathy Vazquez

Phone (616) 632-5033  
Fax (616) 632-5036

# JUDGES



## CHRISTINA ELMORE

Judge Christina Elmore was elected to the 17th Circuit Court and began her term on January 1, 2019. She is currently assigned to the Civil/Criminal Division. Before she was elected to this court, she was a judge on the 61<sup>st</sup> District Court for the City of Grand Rapids. Judge Elmore began her legal career as an attorney for the United States Air Force, where she served both on active duty and in the reserves. Judge Elmore was also an assistant prosecutor for the Kent County Prosecutor's office briefly, before she became an Assistant Attorney General for the Michigan Department of Attorney General. Following her stint at the Attorney General's Office, Judge Elmore spent 8 years in private practice where she continued to prosecute individuals for failing to pay child support as a Special Assistant Attorney General and was defense counsel on felony and misdemeanor criminal cases, represented parents and children in child abuse and neglect cases, advocated for juveniles in delinquency cases, and assisted clients with various other legal matters. Judge Elmore earned her law degree from Tulane Law School and her bachelor's degree from the University of Michigan. She is also a proud alumnus of Ottawa Hills High School.

Court Clerk - Chnell Guydon  
Court Clerk - Conni Mutchler

Phone (616) 632-5215  
Fax (616) 632-5212



## PATRICIA D. GARDNER

Judge Gardner received her B.A. from the University of Michigan in 1980. Thereafter, she attended University of Michigan Law School, graduating with a Juris Doctor Degree in 1983. Judge Gardner practiced general civil litigation from 1983-1988. Judge Gardner was a partner in a law firm, specializing in probate practice and family law from 1989-1996. She was appointed by Governor Engler to the Kent County Probate Court in January of 1997. Judge Gardner served as Presiding Judge of the Family Division of the Circuit Court from 2010-2016 and Chief Judge Pro Tem of the Probate Court. Judge Gardner is a member of the State Bar of Michigan, Grand Rapids Bar Association, Probate Judges Association, and Women Lawyers Association. Judge Gardner is active in the community serving on a number of non-profit boards.

Court Clerk - Shelley Hughston  
Court Clerk - Renee Marzean

Phone (616) 632-5070  
Fax (616) 632-5074



## MAUREEN GOTTLIEB

Judge Maureen A. Gottlieb was elected in November 2020 to the Kent County Circuit Court and took the bench in January 2021. Prior to taking the bench, she was a Circuit Court Referee in the Family Division of the Kent County Circuit Court since January 2017. Almost her entire career before taking the bench in 2017 was spent with Legal Aid of Western Michigan. There, first as a staff attorney and then managing attorney, she represented low income and elderly clients pro bono in civil cases with a special focus on family law matters. Judge Gottlieb received her undergraduate degree cum laude from the University of Notre Dame with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Political Science. She went on to earn her law degree from the University of San Diego School of Law. She grew up in Holland, Michigan and attended West Ottawa High School.

Court Clerk - Brenna Weber  
Court Clerk - Tiffany Simpson

Phone (616) 632-5215  
Fax (616) 632-5212

# JUDGES



## G. PATRICK HILLARY

Judge Hillary was elected in November of 2000 to fill the judicial position vacated by the retirement of Judge John P. Steketee, and started on the bench in January of 2001. He earned a Bachelor of Science Degree in Business Administration in 1979 and his Juris Doctorate in 1983. Judge Hillary practiced law since 1983 and was a sole practitioner prior to being elected Probate Judge. Judge Hillary's private practice included experience in the area of business, corporate, real estate, wills/trusts, estate planning and family law. He served as presiding judge of the Circuit Court Family Division from 2004-2009. Judge Hillary has served on numerous boards in the community and created the Parents and Children Section of the Grand Rapids Bar Association. He also taught as Adjunct Professor at Davenport College and Thomas M. Cooley Law School. Judge Hillary participated as a member of the National Child Welfare Advisory Board in Washington D.C. which assisted in the enactment of laws to protect children brought into the United States without any adult supervision.

Court Clerk - Nicole Ludge  
Court Clerk - Dianne Hill

Phone (616) 632-5206  
Fax (616) 632-5084



## SCOTT A. NOTO

Judge Noto was elected to the Circuit Court in November 2020 and began his term on January 1, 2021. He received his BA from the University of Chicago and JD from Loyola University Chicago School of Law. Prior to his election, he was in private practice, representing clients in civil and criminal matters. He has also served as a Judge Advocate on active duty in the US Army and the Army Reserve since 2009.

Court Clerk - Kristen Brink  
Court Clerk - Angela Artale

Phone (616) 632-5203  
Fax (616) 632-5212



## GEORGE J. QUIST

Judge Quist took the bench on January 23, 2012. He received his BA from Hope College and his JD from George Washington University. Before taking the bench, Judge Quist was a magistrate and administrative law judge with the State of Michigan. In addition to 12 years experience as an adjudicator before taking the bench, Judge Quist was a civil litigator for 9 years. From January 2012 through May 2015, Judge Quist was assigned to the Family Division of the Circuit Court. As of June 1, 2015, Judge Quist is assigned to the Civil/Criminal Division of the Circuit Court.

Court Clerk - Stacy Dilworth  
Court Clerk - Marceedes Langlois  
Law Clerk - Kristine Baker

Phone (616) 632-5099  
Fax (616) 632-5016

# JUDGES

## J. JOSEPH ROSSI



Judge Rossi was elected in November of 2016 and began judicial service on January 1, 2017. Judge Rossi attended the University of Notre Dame where he obtained a degree in English in 1988 and a Juris Doctorate in 1995. Between his undergraduate years and law school, Joe served as an infantry officer in the U.S. Marine Corps, including combat service in Operation Desert Storm and as a Special Operations instructor. Prior to his election he served as an Assistant U.S. Attorney for eight years in Grand Rapids, as well as working at the private law firms Smith Haughey Rice and Roegge and Drew Cooper and Anding. His legal experience includes appearances in many Michigan Courts, as well as Federal Courts in Michigan, Ohio, Illinois and Indiana. Joe also continued to serve in the Marine Corps Reserve, where he was called to active duty twice in 2004 and 2007. His final tour was on the Joint Chiefs of Staff at the Pentagon, where he worked under the Director of Global Special Operations and Counterterrorism. Joe retired from military service in 2012 at the rank of lieutenant colonel. Joe's community service includes his parish finance council and several veterans and military support organizations. Joe serves in the Circuit Court's Specialized Business docket and in the Court's Civil-Criminal division.

Court Clerk - Lisa Baird  
Court Clerk - Denise Lange  
Law Clerk - Kalie Tyree

Phone (616) 632-5020  
Fax (616) 632-5074

## CHRISTOPHER P. YATES



Judge Yates took the bench on April 22, 2008. He received his BA from Kalamazoo College and his JD and MBA from the University of Illinois. Before taking the bench, Judge Yates served as a law clerk to a federal trial judge and a federal court of appeals judge, then as an Assistant U.S. Attorney, then in the Office of Legal Counsel at the U.S. Department of Justice, and as the Chief Federal Public Defender for the Western District of Michigan. Most recently, he worked in private practice as a partner in two Grand Rapids law firms, Willey, Chamberlain & Yates and then Yates, LaGrand & Denefeld. Judge Yates is assigned to the Court's Specialized Business Docket.

Court Clerk - Molly Norton  
Court Clerk - Claire Merino  
Law Clerk - Julie Allen

Phone (616) 632-5026  
Fax (616) 632-5096

# REFEREES

**ADAM C. KOMAR**  
Clerk - Kiersten Chulski  
Phone (616) 632-5170

**LYNN PERRY**  
Clerk - Kelli Klein  
Phone (616) 632-5148

**MARIE E. KESSLER**  
Clerk - Echo Matson  
(616) 632-5165

**CRAIG FREDERICK**  
Clerk- Tracy Dewey  
Phone (616) 632-5104

**JOHN D. KMETZ**  
Clerk - Rebecca Levay  
Phone (616) 632-5150

**ARTHUR P. WINTHER**  
Clerk- Marie Bolen  
Phone (616) 632-5147

**Peter Kulas-Dominguez**  
Clerk- Julie Bailey  
Phone (616) 632-5251

# FINANCIAL REVIEW

## CIRCUIT COURT BUDGET

UNAUDITED

	Appropriated	Expended
PERSONNEL COSTS	\$36,089,546	33,662,606
OPERATION COSTS	17,275,011	14,427,712
CAPITAL OUTLAY	226,300	141,876
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$53,590,857</b>	<b>\$48,232,194</b>

## 2020 REVENUES COLLECTED BY THE CIRCUIT COURT AND ITS DIVISIONS

State Grants	\$14,096,490
Federal Grants	6,625,872
Other Grants	62,820
Medical & Medicaid	228,229
Board & Care	163,802
Court Costs	1,332,125
Service Fees	572,401
Filing Fees	340,885
Certified Copy Fees	0
Name Search and Motion Fees	250,697
Other Fees	247,916
Overseeing Fees	24,511
Jury Fees	56,861
Collection Fees	73,978
Bond Forfeitures	30,045
Other Reimbursements	384,670
Penal Fines	11,449
Refunds/Rebates	3,484
Total Revenues Collected	\$24,506,235
Total 2018 County Contributions	\$23,725,959
<b>GRAND TOTAL</b>	<b>\$48,232,194</b>

### STATE COURT EQUITY FUND

In addition to the above revenues, Kent County received \$2,583,671 during State Fiscal year 2020-2021 in Court Equity Fund monies. Pursuant to MCL 600.151(a) these funds are to be used for the operational expenses of the trial courts (Circuit, District, and Probate) and indigent legal assistance.

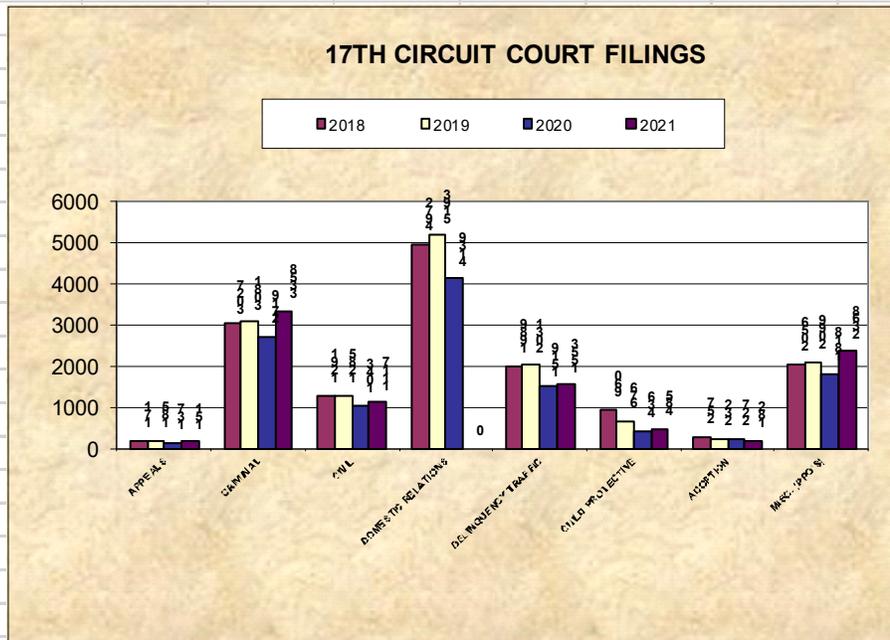
### ADMINISTERING COLLECTION OF PASS-THROUGH PAYMENTS

It should be noted that the 17th Circuit Court collects and accounts for victims' restitution. During the calendar year 2021, the Court collected \$1,472,783 in restitution. In addition to restitution, the Court assesses fines which, by law, are used to support local libraries. During the 2021 calendar year \$190,053 was collected. The Court also assesses Crime Victim Rights fees. These fees are collected for the State to help compensate and support victims of crime. In 2021, the Court collected \$185,254 in CVR Fees. The Court also collects State Minimum Costs which help the State with the costs of operating the Courts in the State of Michigan. During the calendar year the Court collected \$170,408 in State Minimum Costs.

# CIRCUIT COURT

## FILINGS

	2018	2019	2020	2021
APPEALS	171	185	137	151
CRIMINAL	3027	3081	2719	3358
CIVIL	1291	1285	1043	1117
DOMESTIC RELATIO	4972	5193	4139	
DELINQUENCY TRAF	1989	2031	1519	1553
CHILD PROTECTIVE	960	676	436	485
ADOPTION	257	232	227	182
MISC. (PPO'S)	2056	2099	1818	2368

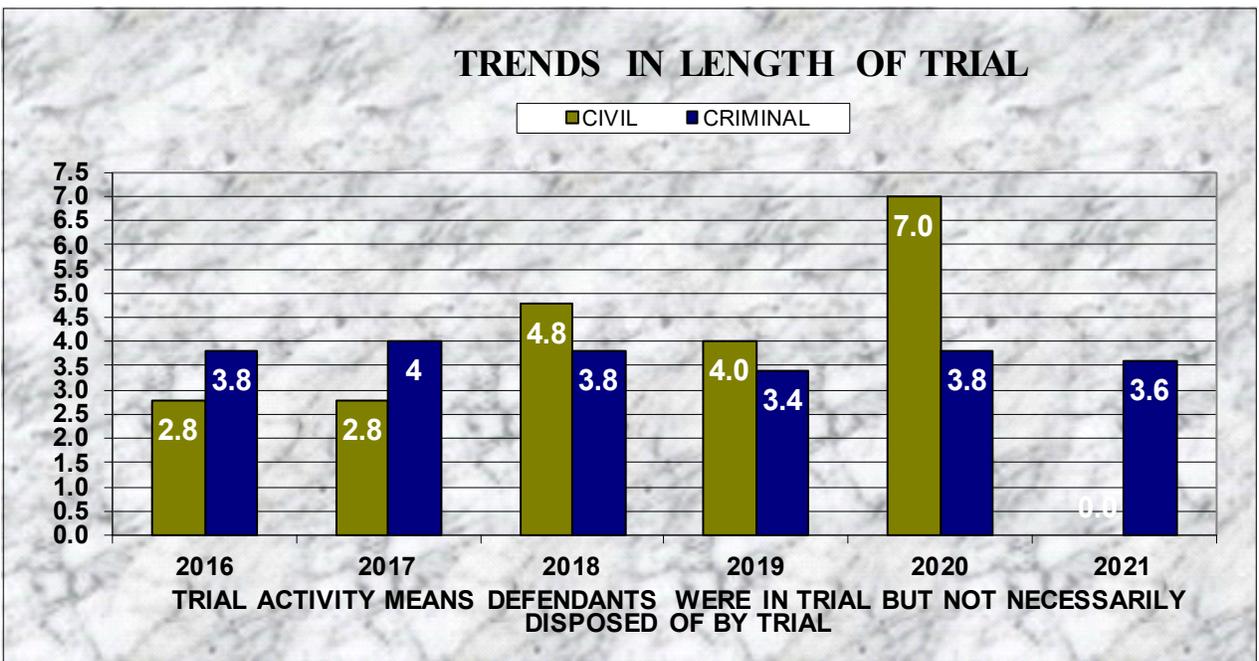
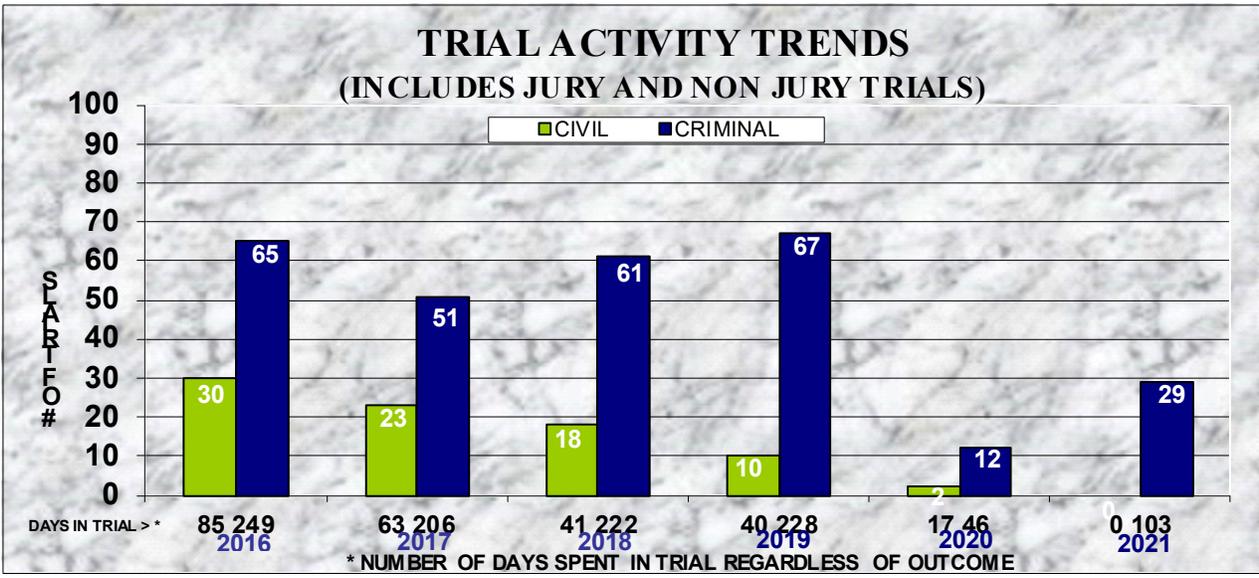


**TOTALS: 2017 (11,270) 2018 (10,234) 2019 (10,231) 2020 (8141)**

**\*Miscellaneous represent: PPO's, emancipations, infectious diseases, safe deliveries, name changes, parental**

# CIRCUIT COURT

## TRENDS



# CIRCUIT COURT

## NEW FILINGS

### CIRCUIT COURT CRIMINAL FILINGS

CASE TYPE	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
NON-CAPITAL OFFENSES	3054	2886	3027	2881	2557	3139
CAPITAL OFFENSES	172	134	162	143	111	163
FELONY JUVENILE	0	0	5	4	10	11
EXTRADITION	53	53	63	53	41	45
<b>TOTAL OFFENSES</b>	<b>3278</b>	<b>3074</b>	<b>3258</b>	<b>3081</b>	<b>2717</b>	<b>3358</b>

### CIRCUIT COURT CIVIL FILINGS

CASE TYPE CATEGORIES	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
CIVIL DAMAGE SUITS	474	469	492	578	452	551
OTHER CIVIL SUITS	598	654	799	707	591	566
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1072</b>	<b>1123</b>	<b>1291</b>	<b>1285</b>	<b>1043</b>	<b>1117</b>

### CIRCUIT COURT APPEALS

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
APPEALS	222	208	171	185	137	151
MINOR GUARDIANSHIPS					239	284

### FAMILY DIVISION FILINGS

Case Type Categories	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Divorce w/o Children	1244	1297	1249	1288	1087	1233
Divorce w/ Children	1276	1258	1211	1198	988	1112
Paternity	739	767	792	814	599	738
Uniform Interstate Family Support Act	66	85	47	39	55	34
Support	832	908	927	1010	791	882
PPOs/Stalking	815	699	556	553	488	735
PPOs/Domestic Relations	1723	1707	1469	1516	1311	1608
Other Domestic*	401	369	304	341	273	353
Adoptions	346	317	257	232	227	182
Miscellaneous Family**	352	388	442	503	348	137
Delinquency	2699	2441	1913	1959	1477	1534
Designated	3	7	5	18	13	7
Traffic	85	73	71	54	29	12
Child Protective	1034	919	960	676	436	485
Personal Protection Order involving minor	23	35	31	30	19	25
<b>Totals</b>	<b>11,634</b>	<b>11,270</b>	<b>10,234</b>	<b>10,231</b>	<b>8141</b>	<b>9077</b>

\* Other domestic includes custody filings

\*\* Miscellaneous family filings consist of name change, safe delivery, emancipation of minor, infectious disease, parental waiver, voluntary foster care, juvenile guardianships and violations of out-of-county PPOs

# CIRCUIT COURT

## SPECIALIZED BUSINESS DOCKET

The Kent County Specialized Business Docket (“SBD”) has been operating for nine years, and it handles cases under the permanent authority of Public Act 333 of 2012, which was amended by Public Act 101 of 2017. Since its inception in 2012, the SBD has been run by Judge Christopher P. Yates. On October 23, 2019, Judge T.J. Ackert began handling one-third of the cases assigned to the SBD, while Judge Yates now presides over two-thirds of the SBD cases.

In 2020, the Kent County SBD accepted 269 new cases and closed 245 cases. Proceedings in the SBD were slowed by the COVID pandemic and the resulting administrative orders that limited court activities for more than nine months in 2020. Nevertheless, the judges assigned to run the SBD conducted numerous bench trials and other court hearings on the Zoom platform, thereby minimizing the backlog of SBD cases. Indeed, the Kent County SBD closed more than 90 percent of its complex cases within the two-year time guideline established by the State Court Administrative Office. Also, the SBD judges published 58 opinions on the SBD website, which can be found at [accesskent.com](http://accesskent.com).

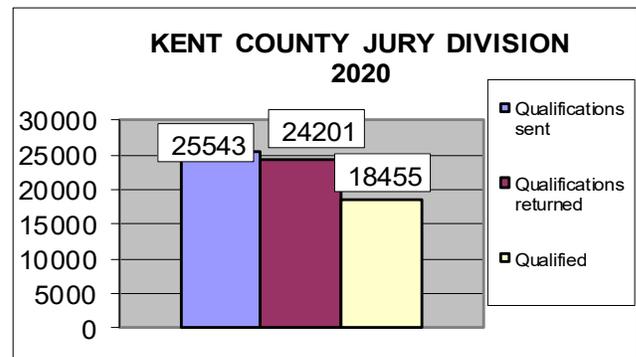
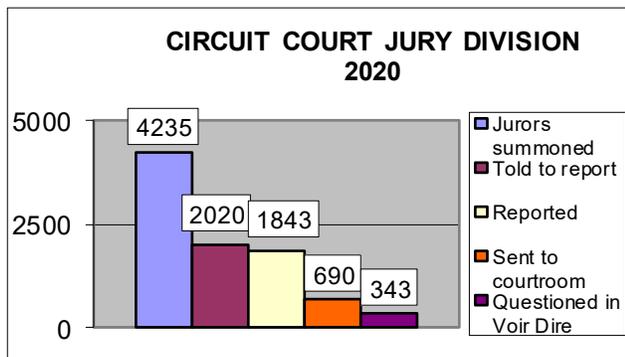
The Kent County SBD routinely seeks input on its performance. Comments and suggestions can be provided to Chief Judge Mark A. Trusock, Judge Ackert, Judge Yates, or the attorneys who serve on the SBD advisory committee for Kent County. By appointment of Chief Judge Trusock, those attorneys are: David Bevins, Esq., of Rhoades McKee; David Gass, Esq., of Miller Johnson; Patrick Geary, Esq., of Smith Haughey Rice & Roegge; and Lee Silver, Esq., of Silver & Van Essen.



# CASE MANAGEMENT DEPARTMENT

## JURY MANAGEMENT

Jury Service is one of the most important duties that members of a free society are called upon to perform. The jury is an expression of the democratic idea that authority can be exercised most equitably only if people participate. The Jury Division of the Circuit Court plays an important role in this process by summoning and qualifying prospective jurors for Kent County. In addition, all other aspects of the Circuit Court's jury system are handled through this division. Jurors summoned and qualified for Circuit Court jury service are on-call for a week, or for one trial. Jurors may go to the County website ([www.accesskent.com](http://www.accesskent.com)) or call the Jury Information Line (866-215-3884) to determine whether or not they must serve on the week they are on call.



## ALTERNATIVE DISPUTE RESOLUTION

Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) offers the parties a timely and affordable alternative to settle disputes and, thereby, avoid costly litigation. Kent County started a formalized ADR program in 1990 with Civil Case Mediation, which later became known as Case Evaluation. Court rules allow for parties to be ordered into facilitative mediation. Kent County implemented its court-ordered domestic relations mediation and civil mediation programs in 2004.

### PERFORMANCE OBJECTIVES:

- 60% of divorce mediations held will settle or settle in part.
- 60% of civil mediations held will settle or settle in part.
- 70% of those completing a mediation evaluation form will indicate satisfaction with the mediation process.

### PERFORMANCE OUTCOMES-2020:

- 268 of divorce mediations settled or settled in part.
- 89 of civil mediations settled or settled in part.
- 81% of those completing the divorce evaluation form indicated satisfaction with the process.
- 90% of those completing the civil evaluation form indicated satisfaction with the process.

### 2020 SUMMARY:

- 341 domestic mediations were held.
- 147 civil mediations were held.
- 180 case evaluation hearings were held. 55 cases had all parties accepting the award for a 30.6% settlement rate.

## CASEFLOW MANAGEMENT

The Case Management Department reviews pending civil and domestic relations cases and sends a no progress dismissal notice to the attorneys and parties when the matter languishes for more than 91 days. If the parties take no action, the judge may enter an Order of Dismissal on the action.

# COURT SERVICES DEPARTMENT

**GOAL: To assist the local Criminal Justice System by providing alternatives to incarceration.**

## PRETRIAL SUPERVISED RELEASE

Pretrial supervised release is the supervision of defendants out on bond pending their court hearing. This also includes Maximum Supervision (electronic monitoring) of selected defendants.

### **PERFORMANCE OBJECTIVES:**

- 80% of all defendants placed on pretrial supervised release will successfully complete program requirements.
- 80% of all defendants placed on Maximum Supervision will successfully complete program requirements.

### **PERFORMANCE OUTCOMES-2021:**

- 75% of the defendants placed on pretrial supervised release successfully completed program requirements.
- 73% of the defendants placed on Maximum Supervision successfully completed program requirements.

### **2021 SUMMARY:**

- 2085 defendants were placed on pretrial supervision.
- Approximately 205,000 jail bed days were saved by the use of pretrial supervision.
- 175 defendants were placed on Maximum Supervision.
- Approximately 18,000 jail bed days were saved by the use of Maximum Supervision.

## COMMUNITY SERVICE—ADULT

Adult Community Service provides a community-based sentencing option in lieu of incarceration for the District and Circuit Courts of Kent County. The Juvenile Community Service Program provides a means for delinquent youth to make a form of reparation to the community for damages or injury inflicted as a result of their delinquency.

### **PERFORMANCE OBJECTIVES:**

- 80% of all offenders placed on adult community service will successfully complete program requirements.

### **PERFORMANCE OUTCOMES-2021:**

- 82% of the offenders placed on adult community service successfully completed program requirements.

### **2021 SUMMARY:**

- 1600 offenders were placed on adult community service.
- 102,500 hours of community service were performed by adult offenders.

# COURT SERVICES DEPARTMENT

## WORK CREW

Work Crew is a structured, labor-intensive form of community service for the more habitual, problematic adult offender, and participants are supervised by Court Services staff and perform group work projects primarily at Comp Renew.

### PERFORMANCE OBJECTIVE:

- 70% of all offenders placed on Work Crew will successfully complete program requirements.

### PERFORMANCE OUTCOME-2021:

- 65% of the offenders placed on Work Crew successfully completed program requirements.

### 2021 SUMMARY:

- 140 offenders were placed on Work Crew.
- Offenders performed 6,000 Work Crew hours.

## DIVERSION

The Diversion Program provides case management and supervision services for offenders who are referred from the Kent County Prosecuting Attorney's Office. Upon successful completion of the Program, an offender will have the original charge dismissed.

### PERFORMANCE OBJECTIVE:

- 85% of all defendants placed on the Diversion Program will successfully complete program requirements.

### PERFORMANCE OUTCOME-2021:

- 80% of the defendants placed on the Diversion Program successfully completed the program requirements.

### 2021 SUMMARY:

- 55 defendants were placed on the Diversion Program.
- \$12,000 was paid by defendants for restitution that was disbursed to victims.

## JUVENILE ELECTRONIC HOME MONITORING

The Electronic Home Monitoring Program allows certain select juvenile offenders to be confined in their own home rather than in an out-of-home placement, by the use of electronic equipment such as a "tether anklet".

### PERFORMANCE OBJECTIVE:

- 60% of juvenile offenders placed on Electronic Home Monitoring will successfully complete the program requirements.

### PERFORMANCE OUTCOME-2021:

- 70% of the juvenile offenders placed on Electronic Home Monitoring successfully completed program requirements.

### 2021 SUMMARY:

- 133 juveniles were placed on Electronic Home Monitoring.

# COURT SERVICES DEPARTMENT

## PRETRIAL SCREENING / INVESTIGATION

In 2021, the Court Services Department continued to provide valuable information to the judiciary relative to release prior to the defendant's first court appearance. This information allows the judges to set a bond based on verified information about the defendant, while addressing important issues regarding risk of flight, safety to the community, prudent use of jail space, and early intervention concerning the problems of the defendant. During 2021, 4,500 bond reports were generated by the Pretrial Intake Investigation Unit.

## DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

In 2021, the Court Services Department generated and distributed approximately 503 jail bed reports to Court Judges, State Probation/Parole, the Office of Community Corrections, the Kent County Correctional Facility, and the Grand Rapids Police Department. The dissemination of accurate information to the criminal justice system is essential, both to prevent cases from becoming "lost" in a very complex system, and to assist in the management of jail beds available to the Courts.

# OFFICE OF COMMUNITY CORRECTIONS

**GOAL:** To support and expand the use of community sanctions in order to provide rehabilitation opportunities for Kent County felony offenders, to promote the efficient use of jail/prison beds while protecting the community, and to examine the causes of repeated criminal behavior while facilitating collaboration among stakeholders and service providers.

Public Act 511, the Community Corrections Act, was passed in 1988 primarily to divert eligible non-violent/low-risk offenders from prison by placing them in community programs which provide the courts with a continuum of sentencing options. A secondary goal is to divert offenders from jail in order to free up jail space for the more serious offenders diverted from prison. Kent County first received P.A. 511 funding in 1990 and administers these funds through the Kent County Community Corrections Advisory Board. Additionally, the Community Corrections Advisory Board, through the Office of Community Corrections, is responsible for the development and implementation of the local community corrections plan.

### **PERFORMANCE OBJECTIVES:**

- Expend 100% of the Community Corrections grant.
- Maintain an overall program enrollment rate of 95% or greater.
- Maintain a 70% successful termination rate for all O.C.C. enrollees.

### **PERFORMANCE OUTCOMES-2021:**

- Program enrollment rate was 108%.
- 73% of enrollees successfully completed their program.
- 100% of the Community Corrections grant was expended.

### **2021 SUMMARY:**

- The OCC secured approximately \$760,000 in revenue through the County Jail Reimbursement Program.
- 154 offenders were served.

# PERMANENCY PLANNING

Children under 18 years of age who are suspected of being abused by their parents are referred to the Family Division of the Circuit Court by the Child Protective Services Unit of the Kent County Department of Human Services (DHS). Protective Services investigates all complaints of abuse and/or neglect in the County and determines which cases require court action.

The Court's role in the child welfare system in Kent County is to provide the judicial authority necessary for legal wardship and treatment, and to provide leadership to ensure that the service delivery system continues to function well. Children found by the Court to be neglected or abused are usually made temporary wards of the Court and placed under the general supervision of the Kent County DHS. Direct casework services for neglected children and their families are provided by the DHS or one of the private agencies under contract with the DHS. The judges assess the progress of each case at regular review hearings, an integral part of the case management system.

## CASA PROGRAM

**GOAL:** CASA of Kent County provides highly-trained volunteers to advocate in the best interest of abused and neglected children in family court proceedings.

The Court Appointed Special Advocate Program (CASA) is a program using carefully screened and specially trained volunteers appointed by the Judge to advocate for the best interests of abused and neglected children in child protective proceedings. The role of the CASA volunteer as an independent voice for the children is to investigate, facilitate, monitor and advocate on behalf of children until they are in a safe, permanent home. The CASA volunteer has only one case at a time and remains with the children throughout the case until it is discharged by the Court. In 2021, 84 CASA Volunteers advocated on behalf of 168 abused and neglected children living in foster care. Of those cases 53 closed: 16 children were adopted. 7 children were placed in guardianship. 25 children were reunified with their parent/s. 5 children aged out of the system.

*Individuals who are interested in becoming a CASA volunteer are encouraged to call  
or visit our website:  
(616) 632-5311  
[www.casakentco.org](http://www.casakentco.org)*

# ADOPTION

## ADOPTION DEPARTMENT

**GOAL:** To facilitate the legal process for children who need a permanent home and to streamline the adoption process for children and families.

The Adoption Department serves a diverse group of families and children who are in the process of an adoption or are seeking support and information concerning a completed adoption. Most of the children involved in these adoptions are either permanent wards of the court or are voluntarily released by their biological parents. Additional services are provided for adult adoptions and for children adopted in another country.

<b>ADOPTIONS FINALIZED</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>2021</b>
<b>Adult Adoptions</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Agency International Adoptions</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Direct Placement Adoptions (voluntary consent to a specific family)</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>Relative Adoptions</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Safe Delivery of Newborn Adoptions</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Permanent Ward Adoptions</b>	<b>144</b>	<b>164</b>	<b>103</b>
<b>Non-Relative Guardian Adoptions</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Agency Other Adoptions (voluntary release to private adoption agency)</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Step-Parent Adoptions</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>Delayed Registration-Foreign Adoptions</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>TOTAL ADOPTIONS</b>	<b>252</b>	<b>239</b>	<b>192</b>

# DELINQUENCY SERVICES AND PROGRAMS

## INTAKE DEPARTMENT

The Intake Department plays a major role in the delinquency division of the Court. Intake decisions are the result of a process of assessment and information gathering. The Intake Department acquires its investigative authority from Section 11 of the Juvenile Code.

The intake process begins with a referral sent by a police agency to the Prosecutor's Office or City Attorney's Office. An assistant prosecuting attorney reviews the complaint for legal sufficiency, determines the precise charge, and then refers it to the Intake Department. The Intake Supervisor screens certain cases with subsequent diversion to other counties and to other agencies and programs that deal with certain types of delinquent activity, such as shoplifting, alcohol abuse, and family problems. Other cases receive a letter of warning from the Court. The majority of cases are assigned to Intake probation officers who contact the youth and parents for a preliminary inquiry and decide what type of response should be made to the referral. Intake probation officers assess the seriousness of the offense and the youth's prior court and/or police record. They review prior or present community agency involvement. A special emphasis is placed on evaluating home behavior, parental control and parent/child relationships. School matters such as performance and behavior are evaluated. On certain offenses, the Prosecutor's Office is contacted for case input. In addition, Intake probation officers evaluate damage and loss, and an appropriate court response to the victim of the law violation.

If formal court involvement is not necessary or required by law, the Intake probation officer has a number of options. A case may be diverted for counseling or special services related to the specific law violation (e.g. shoplifting, alcohol or drug use, or family problems). A case may be held in order to monitor the situation and reassess it at a later date. Certain stipulations may be required such as paying restitution to a victim or successfully completing a certain number of community service hours in the Court Work Program. The Intake probation officer may determine, after the preliminary inquiry, that the presenting problem of the law violation has been handled appropriately and no other services are necessary. These cases are termed "adjusted". A petition is authorized if the Intake probation officer determines that formal court action is necessary, or if specific intake guidelines or Michigan laws require it. The case is then transferred to the Probation Unit for assessment and intervention purposes, in preparation for a formal court hearing.

INTAKE STATISTICS	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Juveniles Referred	1689	1450	1382	979	1087
-Cases assigned to intake staff	936	857	870	762	727
-Cases adjusted	393	410	375	225	180
-Cases to community probation	469	437	364	342	284
-Cases to consent calendar	107	103	92	73	57
-Cases transferred to county of residence	140	99	80	119	144
-Cases dismissed by prosecutor	79	95	39	40	25
-Diverted by Intake Supervisor	512	393	378	265	186
-Petitions received from other counties	75	140	85	126	110
Restitution Collected	\$10,218	\$7,584	\$14,403	\$9,857	\$13,609

# DELINQUENCY SERVICES AND PROGRAMS

## **CRISIS INTERVENTION PROGRAM**

**GOAL:** To prevent status offenders from being held in Detention without a court order, and to reduce the number of status offenders or youth involved in minor law violations from becoming court wards.

The Crisis Intervention Program is a short-term family counseling program for families with youth between the ages of 12-17 who have runaway from home, are truant from school or have other related school problems, are experiencing family conflicts due to adolescent development issues, are beyond parental control, and/or commit minor law violations. The Crisis Intervention Program also provides assistance in the filing of petitions for the emancipation of minors.

### **PERFORMANCE OBJECTIVES:**

- 90% of all status offenders admitted to Detention without a court order will be released within 6 hours of admission.
- 85% of all status offenders or juveniles involved in minor law violations who receive Crisis Intervention services will be diverted from formal court wardship for at least 120 days.

### **PERFORMANCE OUTCOMES-2021:**

- 100% of all status offenders admitted to Detention without a court order were released from Detention within 6 hours of admission.
- 92% of all status offenders or juveniles involved with minor law violations who received Crisis Intervention services were diverted from court wardship for at least 120 days.

### **2021 SUMMARY:**

- 254 juveniles and their families were served by the Crisis Intervention Program.
- 44 juveniles were released from Detention after Crisis Intervention involvement.
- 81 status offenders were diverted from formal court involvement.
- 3 status offender petitions were authorized for formal court involvement.

## **YOUNG DELINQUENT INTERVENTION PROGRAM (YDIP)**

**GOAL:** To prevent further delinquency by intervening early with very young offenders.

The Young Delinquent Intervention Program is a home based service (including counseling, mentoring, and pro-social activities) to children and their parents of young offenders 11 years and younger who have broken the law. This program operates under the reality that the best indicator for future delinquent behavior is the age of onset for delinquency, and that the earlier the intervention in the lives of high-risk youth, then the greater the potential for preventing further acts of delinquency. The court contracts for the provision of these services with D.A. Blodgett for Children.

### **PERFORMANCE OBJECTIVES:**

- 75% of all young offenders in treatment will successfully complete their treatment objectives.
- Less than 10% of all young offenders will have a new law violation while in treatment.
- Less than 5% of all young offenders who successfully complete treatment objectives will have a new law violation within 12 months of discharge from court wardship.

### **PERFORMANCE OUTCOMES-2020:**

- 81% of all the young offenders in treatment successfully completed their treatment objectives.
- 16% of the young offenders in treatment had a new law violation while in treatment.
- 0% of all young offenders who successfully completed treatment objectives had a new law violation within 12 months of discharge from court wardship.

### **2020 SUMMARY:**

- 9 young offenders were served.

# DELINQUENCY SERVICES AND PROGRAMS

## TRAFFIC UNIT

The Traffic Unit processes misdemeanor juvenile traffic offenses that are committed in Kent County, as well as those committed by Kent County residents in other counties. Most juveniles are required to appear in person to respond to the charge(s). A small number are given the option to respond via mail. When the traffic violation is for a juvenile who already is on probation, the Traffic Referee coordinates traffic actions with the juvenile's probation officer. In 2021, the juveniles (and adults responding to their juvenile tickets) paid \$4,089.00 in fines and fees.

## CONSENT CALENDAR

**GOAL:** To reduce recidivism by diverting low risk juvenile offenders from the formal court docket.

The Consent Calendar is a diversion program provided by court rule that allows for the informal processing of appropriate cases. Consent calendar cases are typically placed under informal supervision of the Court for approximately 90 days. No case may be placed on the Consent Calendar unless the juvenile and the parent agrees to this decision. Failure to comply with the requirements of the Consent Calendar or subsequent law violations most often result in the juvenile's transfer to the formal calendar. If the juvenile successfully completes the Consent Calendar, the court may then destroy all records of the proceedings.

### PERFORMANCE OBJECTIVE:

- 80% of all juveniles placed on the Consent Calendar will successfully complete the requirements of the program.

### PERFORMANCE OUTCOME-2021:

- 88% of all the juveniles placed on the Consent Calendar successfully completed the requirements of the program.

### 2021 SUMMARY:

- 57 juveniles and families were served.
- Juveniles were on the Consent Calendar an average of 212 days.
- \$30.00 was collected from juveniles on the Consent Calendar and paid directly to victims.

## ADOLESCENT SEX OFFENDER TREATMENT PROGRAM (ASOTP)

**GOAL:** To prevent further sexual victimization

The Adolescent Sex Offender Treatment Program provides assessment and treatment services to juvenile sex offenders, ages 8-17.

### PERFORMANCE OBJECTIVES:

- 75% of all the juvenile sex offenders in treatment will complete treatment objectives.
- Less than 10% of all the juvenile sex offenders in treatment will re-offend sexually while in treatment.
- Less than 5 juvenile offenders who complete their treatment objectives will re-offend sexually within one year of treatment completion.

### PERFORMANCE OUTCOMES-2021:

- 41 of the juvenile sex offenders accepted into treatment completed their treatment objectives.
- 1 juvenile sex offenders re-offended sexually while in treatment.
- 0 juvenile sex offenders re-offended sexually within 1 year of completion of their treatment objectives.

### 2021 SUMMARY:

- 61 juvenile sex offenders were referred to the program.
- 46 assessments were completed.
- 48 juvenile sex offenders completed treatment.

# DELINQUENCY SERVICES AND PROGRAMS

## COMMUNITY PROBATION

**GOAL:** To reduce further delinquency.

### Description:

Community probation is a unique and non-traditional way of providing decentralized and personalized court supervision to juveniles and their families that reside in a specific sector of the city (or metropolitan area) served by community policing.

### Program Goals:

- Reduce further delinquency and protect the community.
- Develop cooperative and coordinated relationships with area police.

### Program Objectives:

- Less than 10% of the cases assigned to community probation will be involved in a new felony offense this year while on community probation.
- Less than 15% of the cases assigned to community probation will be involved in a new misdemeanor offense this year while on community probation.
- Community probation officers will have at least 18,000 face-to-face contacts this year. Community probation officers will work at least 4,500 non-traditional hours this year.
- Community probation officers will have at least 2,000 contacts working directly with community police this year (including police ride-a-longs).

2020 Indicators	Annual Totals
#/% of youth assigned to community probation who are referred for one or more felony law violations.	72/549 (13.1%)
#/% of youth assigned to community probation who are referred for one or more misdemeanor law violations.	75/549 (13.7%)
# of face-to-face contacts made with youth by community probation officers.	30,842
# of non-traditional hours worked by community probation officers.	1,266.5
# of contacts made with community police officers by community probation officers (includes ride-a-longs).	452

Total # of youth served on Community Probation for 2021: 549  
(Add FCA's for the year to Baseline # to get this total)

\* Of the 72 youths who were referred for a felony law violation, and the 75 youths referred for a misdemeanor law violation, there were 71 who had two or more referrals for felony and/or misdemeanor law violations. The highest number of referrals for a youth being 13 (1 felonies and 12 misdemeanors).

\*\* 115 youth committed 299 new law violations in 2021 (159 felonies and 140 misdemeanors).

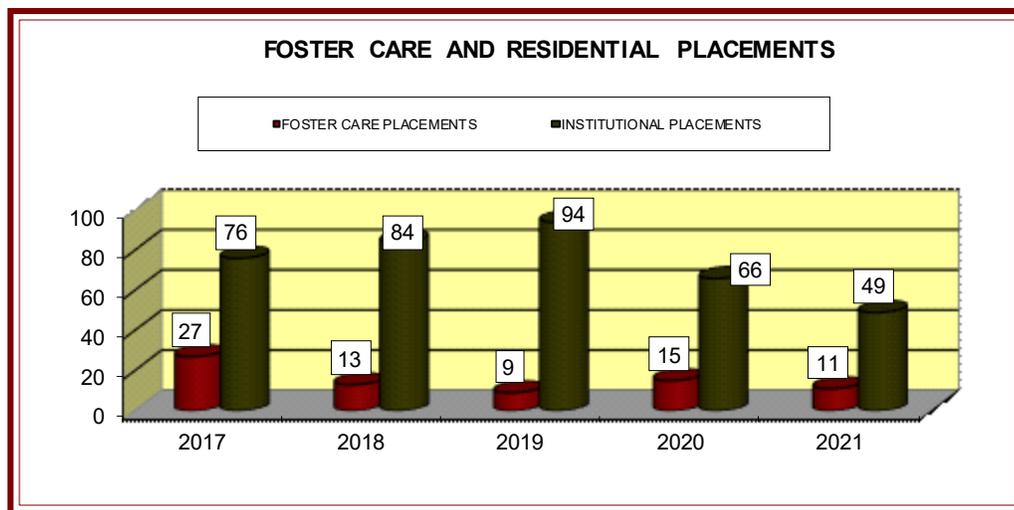
\*\*\* 20.9% of the youth served on community probation committed a new law violation in 2021.

# DELINQUENCY SERVICES AND PROGRAMS

## OUT-OF-HOME PLACEMENT

### FOSTER CARE AND INSTITUTIONAL PLACEMENT

Even though the Court places a high priority on working with juvenile offenders in their own homes, some situations require the Court to order the juvenile placed in either foster care or residential institutional placement. Foster care more closely reflects a family home setting, while institutional placement is more restrictive and provides a specific type of treatment modality. The average per diem cost of foster care is approximately \$110. Institutional placement is much more expensive and depending on the type of institution averages about \$250 per day.



# DELINQUENCY SERVICES AND PROGRAMS

## JUVENILE DETENTION FACILITY

**GOAL:** To provide a safe and secure environment for juveniles admitted to Detention.

The function of Detention is to provide temporary care for youth requiring secure custody pending court evaluation and disposition or pending transfer to another jurisdiction or agency. Detained youth are those whose offenses are so serious that release would endanger public safety or the welfare of the child. The Detention Facility, which has a bed capacity of 98, currently employs 125 staff (including school, medical, mental health personnel, etc.) with the majority of that workforce being Youth Specialists.

The Facility's staff training/orientation program is extensive in its coverage of training issues and, in addition to its own staff, offers training to other court staff and County employees. The State's Division of Child Welfare Licensing mandates training in 9 specific areas and requires at least 24 hours of training annually for each Detention Youth Specialist employee. Kent County Juvenile Detention met these requirements in 2020.

The Detention Center provides a cognitive behavioral training (CBT) concept for its behavioral management for our residents. This cognitive learning model is designed to change adolescent's value and belief systems by getting them to examine their thinking before making choices. The goal is to help reduce recidivism by teaching residents to make rational choices and maintain this thinking ability after they leave Detention.

Although Detention is not a treatment facility, two of the nine units within this facility are utilized as short-term residential programs for Kent County residents who have been ordered to an institutional placement. The Delta and Pride residential programs are currently in operation. Programs are staffed by the Detention Youth Specialists to provide services offered to the Detention residents and include off-site activities with the primary focus of productive reintegration into the community.

The facility continues to offer a year-round school program. The Lighthouse Academy provides classes Monday through Thursday. Community consultants as well as Detention staff provide Friday classes which include topic areas such as Youth Empowerment, Therapeutic Communication, Physical Education, Yoga, Art Therapy, Health Education (Public topics and AIDS, safety, sexual awareness), Life and Social Skills. These Friday classes offer residents a chance to deal with issues that contributed to their coming to the facility, as well as teaching them skills that will help them make better decisions.

# DELINQUENCY SERVICES AND PROGRAMS

## JUVENILE DETENTION FACILITY

### DETENTION FACILITY STATISTICS

	Males			Females			Totals		
	2018	2019	2020	2018	2019	2020	2018	2019	2020
<b>Admissions</b>	637	603	283	362	257	136	911	862	419
<b>Releases</b>	634	607	293	369	259	142	1110	864	435

### DAYS OF CARE PROVIDED

	Days of Care			Average Daily Census		
	2018	2019	2020	2018	2019	2020
<b>Totals</b>	20,052	20,922	14,422	57	57	40

### PER DIEM COST OF CARE

2018	2019	2020
\$333	\$328	\$534

# FRIEND OF THE COURT

FRIEND OF THE COURT— DAN FOJTIK

***MISSION: TO SERVE THE COURT AND THE FAMILIES OF KENT COUNTY TO ENSURE CHILDREN ARE SUPPORTED, BOTH FINANCIALLY AND EMOTIONALLY.***

As set forth in the 1998 Child Support Performance and Incentive Act, state child support enforcement programs are measured in five key areas: Collections on Arrears, Total Collections, \*Paternity Establishment, Cost Effectiveness and \*Order Establishment.

\*Note that performance in these areas are not controlled by the Kent County Friend of the Court office.

The areas that are controlled by the Friend of the Court office are: Collections on Arrears and Collections on Current. The following rankings represent how the Kent County Friend of the Court measured in 2020 against the eleven (11) largest counties in Michigan, excluding Wayne County:

	<u>KENT COUNTY RANKING</u>
• <b>COLECTIONS ON ARREARS</b>	<b>#1</b>
• <b>COLLECTIONS ON CURRENT</b>	<b>#2</b>

## **COLLECTION ON CURRENT SUPPORT (Child, Spousal, Medical and Birthing Expenses):**

The Friend of the Court (FOC) employs a wide range of enforcement remedies and innovative strategies to improve the reliability of child support payments. Emphasis is placed on having realistic child support orders, reducing unpayable child support debt and intervening early when parents begin to struggle to make payments.

### **PERFORMANCE OBJECTIVE:**

- Collect 80% of total court ordered child support that was charged.

### **PERFORMANCE OUTCOME-2020:**

- 75% of court ordered child support charged was collected.

### **2020 SUMMARY:**

- \$76,834,936 (Total current support distributed)
- \$100,805,913 (Total support charged)
- \$111,290,893 (Total collections including current and arrears)

# FRIEND OF THE COURT

## INCOME WITHHOLDING

With income withholding, payments are deducted from the payer's check and sent to the Michigan State Disbursement Unit (MiSDU) in Lansing. When a payer changes jobs and/or fails to advise the FOC of new employment, the computer system checks the state Data Warehouse and automatically sends an Income Withholding Notice (IWN) to the source of income.

### PERFORMANCE OBJECTIVE:

- Collect 75% of child support collections by withholding order.

### PERFORMANCE OUTCOME-2020:

- 66% was collected via income withholding order.

### 2020 SUMMARY:

- \$67,499,862 was collected via income withholding.

## SHOW-CAUSE HEARINGS AND BENCH WARRANTS

When payments are not made regularly and the payer does not work with us to make payments or remedy his or her inability to pay, we may schedule a show cause contempt hearing. At the hearing, case managers attempt to resolve the non-payment or present the case before the Court for a determination of contempt. If a person does not appear for the hearing, a Bench Warrant may issue.

### PERFORMANCE OBJECTIVE:

- 85% of those ordered to jail as a result of a contempt hearing will pay out within two weeks.
- 85% of the bench warrants handled by FOC deputies will be resolved without arrest.

### PERFORMANCE OUTCOME-2020:

- 54% of those who were ordered to jail as a result of a contempt hearing paid and were released within two weeks.
- 98% of the bench warrants handled by FOC deputies were resolved without arrest.

### 2020 SUMMARY:

- 28 payers were found in contempt and ordered to jail.
- 791 warrants were resolved by FOC deputies without arrest.

## TAX OFFSET

A commonly used enforcement remedy is the interception of a payer's state and federal tax refunds.

### PERFORMANCE OBJECTIVE:

- 90% of cases qualifying for a tax offset are submitted.

### PERFORMANCE OUTCOME-2020:

- 100% of cases qualified for a tax intercept were submitted.

### 2020 SUMMARY:

- \$11,895,544 was collected from the Federal tax offset program.
- \$588,930 was collected from the State tax offset program.

# FRIEND OF THE COURT

## LEINS AND GARNISHMENTS

The law allows the FOC to place a lien against property owned by the payer of support when an arrearage has accrued. Garnishments may also be served against a delinquent payer's inheritance.

### PERFORMANCE OBJECTIVE:

- 80% of cases submitted for a lien or garnishment are ordered or perfected.

### PERFORMANCE OUTCOME-2020:

- 100% of cases submitted for a lien or garnishment received one.

### 2020 SUMMARY:

- 6 real estate liens was placed for a potential future collection and \$0 was collected.
- 18 liens/garnishments were placed against inheritances and \$29,161 was collected.
- 0 liens were placed against settlements and \$0 was collected.
- 2 claims were filed against decedent obligor's estate with \$69,793 collected.

## HEALTH CARE

The Health Care Unit has two main objectives. One is to enforce court orders to maintain health care insurance. The other is to enforce court orders related to uninsured health care expenses.

### PERFORMANCE OBJECTIVES:

- 65% of cases have orders with health care provisions.
- 90% of cases with health care reimbursement accounts received payment.

### PERFORMANCE OUTCOMES-2020:

- 88% of cases with orders have health care provisions.
- 97% of cases with health care reimbursement accounts received payment.

### 2020 SUMMARY:

- 24,650 orders have a health care provision included.
- 815 cases with health care reimbursement accounts received payment.

## PARENTING TIME

The primary function and statutory duty of the Parenting Time Unit is to secure compliance with parenting time and physical custody orders. This is accomplished through education, assisting parents with modification of their orders, or helping in other ways to prevent future violations. Also, the FOC continues to manage the Access and Visitation Grant that allows payment for supervised parenting time and for therapeutic reintroduction on specific cases through the contract agencies.

### PERFORMANCE OBJECTIVE:

- 90% of parenting time complaints resolved prior to a contempt hearing.

### PERFORMANCE OUTCOME-2020:

- 80% of parenting time complaints were resolved prior to a contempt hearing.

### 2020 SUMMARY:

- 1,530 formal written parenting time complaints were received.
- 65 hearings were scheduled on parenting time violations.
- 19 families were afforded parenting time through the Access and Visitation Grant.

# FRIEND OF THE COURT

## SUPPORT REVIEW

Support reviews are commenced when a client submits a written request and is eligible for a review (every three years or if there has been a significant change in circumstances), by court order or upon FOC's own initiative. Friend of the Court is statutorily required to complete support reviews within 120 days after notice of the review is sent, but it is Kent County's goal to complete all support reviews within 90 days.

### PERFORMANCE OBJECTIVE:

- 90% of all support reviews will be completed within 90 days.

### PERFORMANCE OUTCOME-2020:

- 87% of all support reviews were completed in 90 days.

### 2020 SUMMARY:

- 2,162 support reviews were completed.

## RESOURCES FOR PARENTS PROGRAM

The Resources for Parents Program (FKA Responsible Parent Program) was established in 2016. Case Managers in this program actively partner with potential employers and placement agencies to assist payers who struggle to comply with their support order. They also conduct outreaches within the community to help payers who are often reluctant to engage with the FOC. Once a payer is referred to the program, the case manager schedules an appointment with the payer to identify any barriers that make it difficult to comply with the child support order. Once identified, the case manager can make appropriate referrals for job placements and searches, determine whether a case qualifies for a support review to ensure that charges are based on ability to pay, and/or provide information about parenting time issues and services.

### PERFORMANCE OBJECTIVE:

- 90% of the eligible payers who are referred to the program will be scheduled for a first appointment within 14 days.

### PERFORMANCE OUTCOME-2020:

- 98% were scheduled for a first appointment within 14 days of the referral.

### 2020 SUMMARY:

- 88 payers were scheduled for a first appointment within 14 days of the referral.

# FRIEND OF THE COURT

## EARLY ENGAGEMENT PROGRAM

The Early Engagement Program was created in June of 2017. The goal of this program is to provide information about the Friend of the Court to clients who have not had contact with the office previously to:

- A. Break down barriers to communication.
- B. Provide accurate information and clarify expectations.
- C. Provide early access to the Responsible Parent Program.
- D. Provide information about the availability of facilitated parenting time when appropriate.
- E. Ensure that all provisions of the support order are understood.

We do this by reaching out to parents with a new case at the Friend of the Court by phone within two weeks of processing the initial order. We review the order prior to contacting them and answer any questions they may have about their order or the information that was included in the new case packet. If we are not able to reach the clients by phone, we send an email or letter providing information on ways to contact the Friend of the Court office to let them know we are available to answer questions they may have.

### PERFORMANCE OBJECTIVE:

- Make contact in 90% of new cases.

### PERFORMANCE OUTCOME-2020:

- Contact was made with one or both parties in 94% of the new cases.

### 2020 SUMMARY:

- Contact was made in 1,477 new cases.

## CLIENT COMMUNICATION

It is important that clients are able to communicate effectively with us. During 2020, we received 43,056 phone calls, of which 96% were resolved at first contact without transferring callers. We also received 101,151 letters, faxes and emails. The State of Michigan maintains a website that is easily accessed 24 hours a day by cell phone, computer or other device to find case information including payments and balances. Case managers are also available for walk-in clients, two days a week, as well as by appointment.

It is also important to provide clients with important case information and to anticipate questions. With this in mind, we email clients reminders about court dates, provide information about updated processes, and inform them of job opportunities and other events in the community.

## EDUCATION

We provide the parties in all new cases basic information about the Friend of the Court. This information includes contact information and general information about child support, parenting time and health care. We continuing to update and enhance a series of entertaining orientation videos to help our clients understand the Friend of the Court processes better. We also maintain forms and other information on our website and in our lobby.

# FRIEND OF THE COURT

## CUSTODY/PARENTING TIME EVALUATIONS

Custody and parenting time evaluations are initiated after a written order is received from the Court. The purpose of an evaluation is to gather information regarding the best interests of the children as defined in the (12) best interest factors of the Michigan Child Custody Act and to complete a written report and recommendation for the Court.

### PERFORMANCE OBJECTIVE:

- 90% of all Court requested custody and parenting time evaluations will be completed within 90 days from the date the Court ordered the referral.

### PERFORMANCE OUTCOME-2020:

- 91% of all Court requested custody and parenting time evaluations were completed within 90 days of the date the Court ordered the referral.

### 2020 SUMMARY:

- 519 total evaluations completed in 2020.

## MEDIATION AND CONCILIATIONS

Mediations are conducted on request of the parties, by court order, or on scheduled walk-in days. The mediator helps the parents reach agreements on the issues of custody and parenting time. If the parties reach an agreement during mediation, they may sign an agreement prepared by the mediator, which is then entered as an order by the Court.

### PERFORMANCE OBJECTIVE:

- 90% of mediations and conciliations will be scheduled within 60 days of being requested.

### PERFORMANCE OUTCOME-2020:

- 100% of mediations and conciliations were scheduled within 60 days.

### 2020 SUMMARY:

- 157 mediations and conciliations scheduled in 2020.

# FRIEND OF THE COURT

## GRIEVANCES

In an effort to assure that the FOC is responsive to the concerns of clients, the FOC Act provides a grievance procedure for complaints about FOC operations or employees. A grievance may not be used to change or object to a FOC recommendation, or to disagree with a referee's recommendation or a judge's decision. Once a grievance has been received, the FOC must investigate and respond within 30 days or issue a statement explaining why a response is not possible within that timeframe. The Kent County FOC has always been receptive of these types of formal complaints. Rather than being considered a negative reflection of office performance, it is a good way to measure customer satisfaction and help improve services where necessary.

### **2020 SUMMARY:**

- 10 grievances were received in 2020.
- 100% were responded to within 30 days of receipt.

## CITIZEN ADVISORY COMMITTEE

The Citizen Advisory Committee (CAC) was created by the legislature to assist citizens and the FOC office with issues concerning office operations and employees. Although having a CAC was initially mandatory, the legislature eliminated this requirement and currently only two counties statewide have one, Macomb and Kent. Minutes from its meetings are submitted to the County Board, while sub-committees review actual grievances. There were no grievances filed directly with the CAC in 2020; however, all 10 grievances received by the FOC were forwarded to the CAC for their review. Of note, the CAC agreed fully with the response of the FOC on 10 grievances.

# CLERK'S OFFICE / CIRCUIT COURT DIVISION



**LISA POSTHUMUS LYONS - COUNTY CLERK, CLERK OF THE COURT**  
**AMY DOERING- CHIEF DEPUTY CIRCUIT COURT CLERK**

The Circuit Court Division of the Kent County Clerk's Office is located on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor of the Courthouse. With a staff of 24.5, the office opens, maintains, tracks, and stores all cases filed in the civil, criminal and family divisions of the Circuit Court. Court files are open to the public and may be viewed in the Clerk's Office between 8:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. Please visit the county's website as office hours may vary due to the COVID-19 Pandemic.

Our office collects and distributes state mandated costs, court-ordered fines, costs, restitution, crime victim rights fee, and other assessments. In 2021, we collected over \$3,300,000.00 for Kent County. In addition, the Clerk's Office handles bonds posted in criminal cases, which often can be applied against court-ordered assessments at the conclusion of the case, thereby increasing the Clerk's collection activities.

Throughout 2021, the Clerk's Office managed the receipt and filing of 11,809 new cases. The Clerk's Office continues to maintain responsibility for all minor guardianship cases including closed, active and new filings. Additionally, all formal juvenile delinquency and neglect/abuse cases are processed through our office. The Clerk's Office continues to provide e-filing in lieu of traditional mail or hand delivery to the Clerk's Office for cases assigned to the Court's Specialized Business Docket. The Community Archive Center (CARC) continues to provide much needed storage space for approximately 40+ years' worth of the Circuit Court's oldest civil, domestic and criminal case files. This offsite storage includes microfilm duplicates, steno notes and docket books from as far back as the 1800's. The most recent files reside within the Kent County Courthouse.

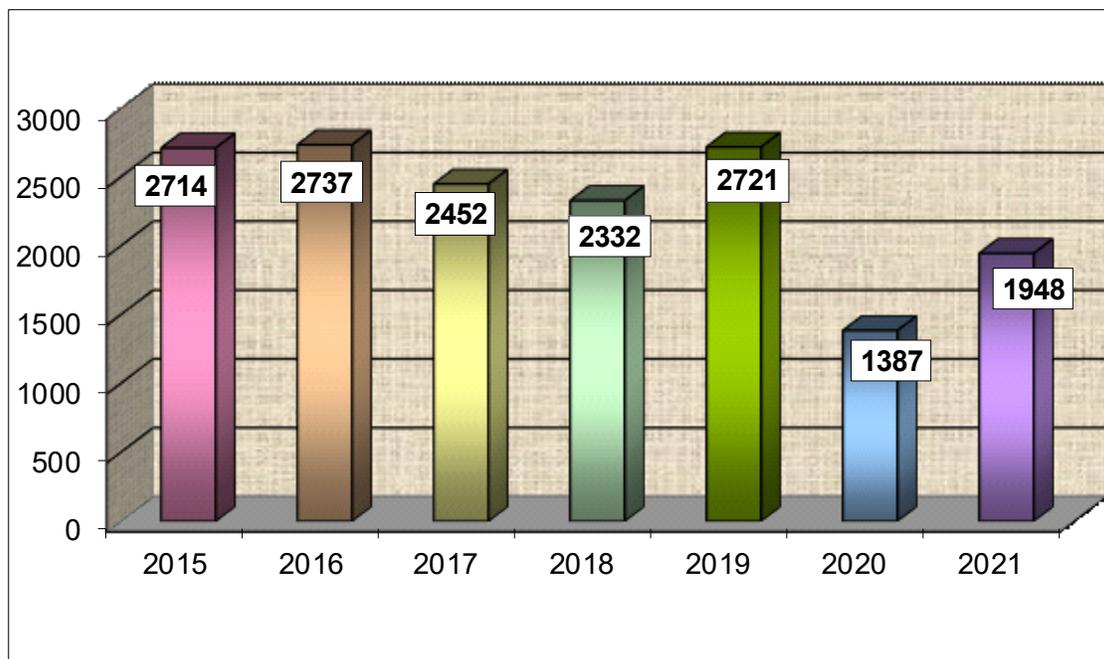
The County Clerk remains committed to providing access for the public and attorneys to these records and services through a technology initiative that began with the Register of Deeds and Vital Records Divisions in 2003. The Clerk's Office Courtside currently offers online services to request certified divorce decrees and motion calendars for scheduling pro confesso hearings with referees and motion hearings with all judges.

Lisa Posthumus Lyons has served the residents of Kent County as the County Clerk/Register of Deeds since January 1, 2017. As the Clerk/Register, she is committed to continually updating office technologies and procedures so that services can be most efficiently and accurately provided.

# CIRCUIT COURT PROBATION

*Jon Timmers, Area Manager*  
*Tom Halsted, Program Manager*

The Michigan Department of Corrections - Kent County Probation Office is the second largest probation office in the State of Michigan. The office is located at 82 Ionia Avenue, Suite 100. There are 34 probation agents who supervised the 1,816 felony probationers in Kent County. In addition to the agents, four supervisors and seven support staff ensure that the needs of the Court are met. Agents are responsible for providing presentence investigations to the Court, and supervising probationers to ensure the orders of the Court are followed and rehabilitative goals are achieved.



## PRESENTENCE REPORTS COMPLETED

The chart shows the number of presentence investigation reports completed each year from 2015 through 2021. The number of probationers and PSI's completed in 2020 and 2021 have been down due to the COVID-19 pandemic, however, numbers are expected to return to historical averages. The office uses specialized caseloads to serve various populations, including: sex offender, electronic monitoring, SAI (boot camp), Veterans Treatment Court, Drug & Sobriety Court, Treatment and Support Court (TASC), telephone reporting, and interstate caseloads. The Michigan Department of Corrections continues to be national leader in corrections and follow evidence based practices with supervision so agents will complete a COMPAS risk assessments to ensure probationers are supervised according to their risks and needs. They utilize community resources such as substance abuse treatment, CBT programming, vocational and educational programs, electronic monitoring, psychological counseling, and community service/work crew to promote the success of their caseloads.



**STATE OF MICHIGAN**  
**KENT COUNTY PROBATE COURT**

DAVID M. MURKOWSKI  
CHIEF JUDGE

SUITE 9500 C  
180 OTTAWA AVENUE NW  
GRAND RAPIDS, MICHIGAN 49503-2751

To the Citizens of Kent County:

On behalf of the administrators and employees of the Kent County Probate Court, I am proud to submit for your review our annual report for 2021. The report contains pertinent information regarding the jurisdiction, responsibilities, performance and achievements of the Probate Court. With this report, we take the opportunity to examine our collective work in the last year and to identify our needs and plan our strategic goals for the next year.

Our successes and accomplishments are rooted in our skilled and dedicated employees who continue to maintain, improve, and deliver quality services to the public in the face of continued docket growth.

The Kent County Probate Court accepted over 7000 new filings and conducted a record high 3722 hearings in 2021. New filings have increased 34% over a 10-year period and 61% since 2008. To address the burgeoning needs of our citizens, the Probate Court worked closely and collaboratively with the Kent County Board of Commissioners and the county administrator. After outside consultants evaluated the work and needs of the court, county approval was given to add two full time court clerk positions and convert two existing part time clerk positions to full time status. To further serve the public, the court provided the Turbo Court I-Filing System for conservatorships through the Access Kent website, offering users guided, interactive electronic filing capability. In addition, the court through Zoom conducted regular instructional meetings for members of the public who are serving as a guardian or conservator. In 2021, 165 citizens utilized this free tutorial service.

Notwithstanding the lingering effects of COVID-19, including persistent personnel shortages and the disruption of in-person hearings, our probate court staff continued to deliver quality service in a timely fashion to you the public, and I remain most proud of every employee of the Probate Court.

It is an honor serving you as the Chief Judge of the Kent County Probate Court. We pledge our best effort to deliver services to you with both integrity and efficiency in a person-centered venue. I thank you, the citizens of Kent County, for your continued trust and confidence.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'David M. Murkowski', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

David M. Murkowski  
Chief Judge, Kent County Probate Court

# PROBATE COURT

## MISSION STATEMENT

*The mission of the Kent County Probate Court is to provide an accessible, efficient, and person-centered venue to secure the peaceful and sound resolution of matters, where every individual is treated with dignity and respect.*

## Operational Goals

- To ensure the compliance of Court-appointed fiduciaries with statutes and court rules in order to safeguard protected individuals and their property;
- To efficiently process and adjudicate all matters before the Court;
- To provide excellent customer service to all those with business before the Court.



## Probate Court Authority

Article VI Section 15 of the Michigan Constitution provides that “the jurisdiction, powers and duties of the probate court and of the judges thereof shall be provided by law.” Through the promulgation of the Estates and Protected Individuals Code (EPIC), the Mental Health Code, and other acts, the legislature has conferred jurisdiction to the Probate Court over:

- Decedent Estate Proceedings
- Civil Actions
- Trust Proceedings
- Guardianships of Incapacitated Individuals
- Protective Orders
- Conservatorships of Adults and Minors
- Guardianships of Individuals with Developmental Disabilities
- Mental Health Treatment for Mentally Ill Individuals
- Drain Appeals

# PROBATE COURT

## Chief Probate Judge David M. Murkowski

Judge David M. Murkowski was born and raised in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Judge Murkowski graduated from Marquette University High School in 1975, where he was elected senior class president. In 1979, he graduated cum laude from Marquette University where he was awarded the University's Outstanding Student Service Award and the Polanki College Achievement Scholarship. In 1979, Judge Murkowski was also inducted into the National Jesuit Honor Society. He attended Western Michigan University's Thomas M. Cooley Law School and was an honor roll graduate in 1983.

Judge Murkowski served as law clerk to the Michigan House of Representatives Civil Rights Committee, and worked as a solo practitioner in Grand Rapids until 1993 when he joined the law firm of Dilley & Dilley. There, he specialized in criminal defense, juvenile neglect and delinquency, and probate law. He served as managing partner of Dilley, Dilley, Murkowski & Goller until 2006, when he was appointed to the Kent County Probate bench to fill the vacancy created by the retirement of the Honorable Janet A. Haynes.



In December 2007, the Michigan Supreme Court appointed Judge Murkowski to serve as the Chief Judge of the Kent County Probate Court, commencing January 1, 2008. Judge Murkowski served as Council Member of the Probate and Estate Planning Section of the State Bar of Michigan and as the President of the Michigan Probate Judges Association (MPJA) in 2017 and is a current member of the Judicial Council of the Judicial Section of the State Bar of Michigan. He has previously served as a member of the Executive Committee of the Kent County Family and Children's Coordinating Council, and currently serves as Adjunct Assistant Professor in the College of Human Medicine at Michigan State University. Judge Murkowski has lectured for the Michigan Judicial Institute (MJI), ICLE's Probate and Estate Planning Institute, the American Geriatric Society (AGS), the Michigan Probate Judges Association (MPJA), the

Western Michigan Estate Planning Council, and the Grand Rapids Bar Association.

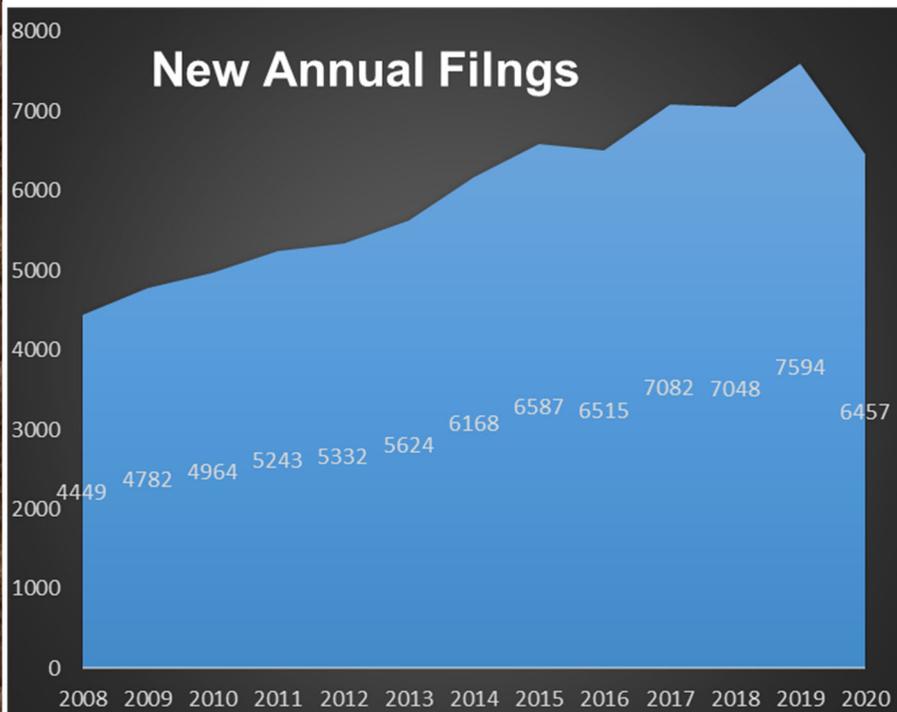
Judge Murkowski is a chapter author of *Michigan Probate Litigation: A Guide to Contested Litigation*, 2nd Ed., a contributor to the *Michigan Probate Benchbook*, associate editor of *Inter-Com*, a journal publication of the Michigan Probate Judges Association, and was a contributor to the drafting of the Michigan Trust Code. He currently serves on the Legislature Drafting Subcommittee of the Governor's Mental Health Task Force.

Judge Murkowski has received the Judicial Contributions in Law and Aging Award by Elder Law of Michigan, has been selected as a Leader in the Law by Michigan Lawyers Weekly, and was elected as a Fellow of the Michigan State Bar Foundation.

# PROBATE COURT

## Probate Court Caseload and Caseflow

In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic had a pronounced effect on the operations of all trial courts in the State of Michigan, including the Kent County Probate Court. The number of new filings in the Probate Court decreased slightly in 2020, and new filings totaled 89% of the Court's three-year average (7241). However, filings in the Kent County Probate Court increased by 40% over a ten-year period through 2019. As of May 1, 2021, the Court's new filing numbers were on track to match its total filings in 2019, which indicates that the overall upward trend of new filings is likely to continue.

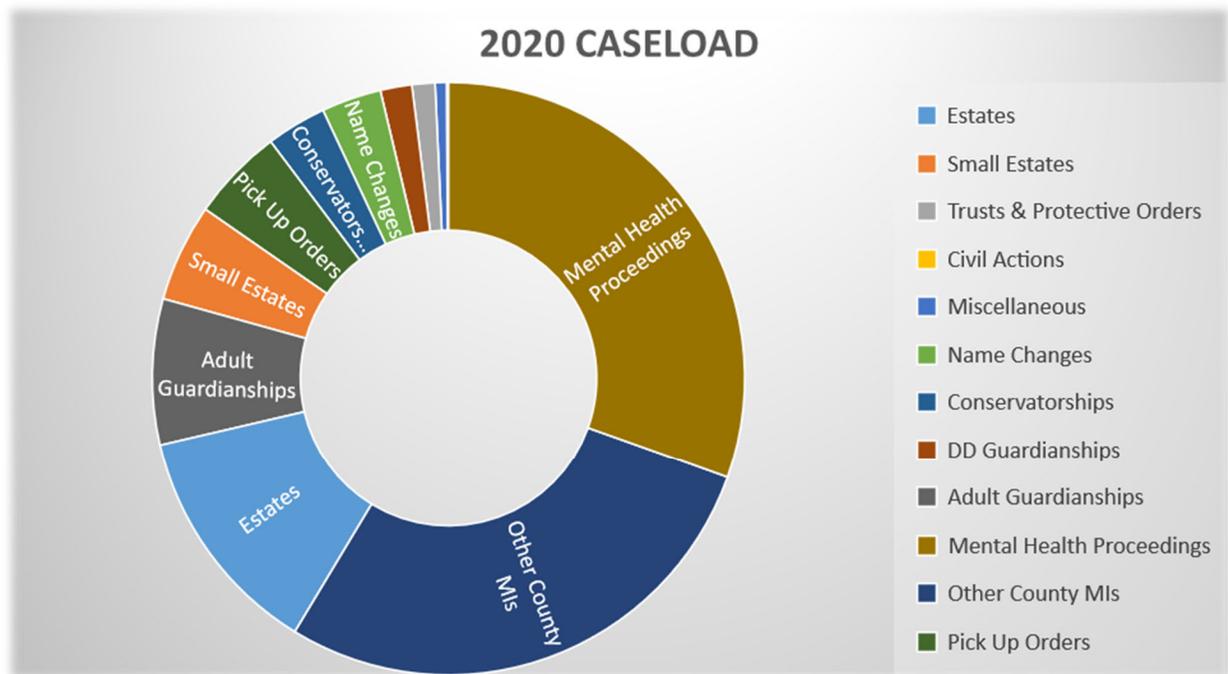


## Caseload Trends

In 2020 there were a total of 6,457 new cases handled by the Probate Court, the majority of which were comprised of mental health proceedings (1,967), out-of-county mental health proceedings heard on assignment (1,822), deceased estates (818), adult guardianships (515), and small estates (345).

Most notably, in ten years, the number of adult guardianship cases handled by the Court increased 24%, and new mental health filings, including in-county and out-of-county proceedings,

# PROBATE COURT



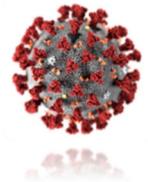
The nature of many probate cases is such that they often continue for many years. While administration of most estates of deceased persons is completed within one year, the vast majority of guardianships and conservatorships for adults continue for the lifetime of the incapacitated or developmentally disabled individual. Thus, a fluctuation in the number of new filings does not necessarily result in a commensurate decline in the number of active matters requiring ongoing Court monitoring and supervision.

Active Cases	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Estates and Trusts	2,580	2,661	2,776	2,924	2,660
Guardianships – Legally Incapacitated	2,357	2,425	2,395	2,557	2,510
Guardianships – Minors	1,233	1,168	1,136	1,156	0
Guardianships – Developmentally Disabled	1,707	1,806	1,872	1,898	1,991
Conservatorships – Adults	863	883	850	851	878
Conservatorships – Minors	345	355	358	364	348
Mental Health Proceedings	2,196	2,277	2,101	2,137	1,987
Mentally Ill Cases for Other Counties	1,484	1,745	2,033	2,037	1,822
Civil and Other	1,529	1,627	1,970	1,617	2,927
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>14,294</b>	<b>14,947</b>	<b>15,491</b>	<b>15,541</b>	<b>15,123</b>

# PROBATE COURT

## Time Guidelines

In 2020 the Probate Court's disposition rate exceeded a majority of the minimum time guidelines for guardianships, conservatorships, deceased estate matters and mental health proceedings.

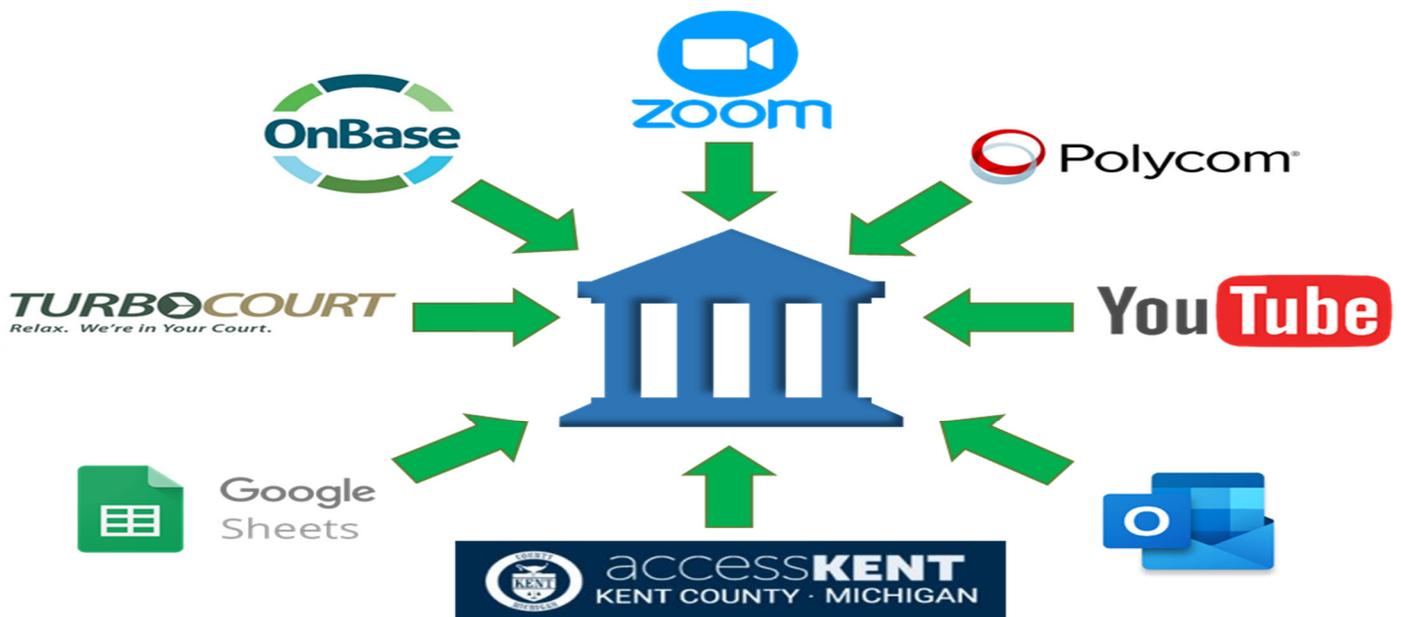


## Protective Measures During the COVID-19 Pandemic

In March of 2020, as emergency orders were issued in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Court closed its front counter and began accepting filings via email ([probatecourt@kentcountymi.gov](mailto:probatecourt@kentcountymi.gov)) and two drop box locations in the courthouse. The Court scaled back operations for a short period of time, handling emergency guardianship, conservatorship, and mental health matters exclusively, while Court staff worked onsite for three days and remotely two days per week. Additionally, the Court began conducting all its hearings using Zoom videoconferencing, and began streaming hearings on YouTube to ensure public access. The Court also updated crucial areas of its website to reach and inform attorneys, litigants and members of the public regarding operational changes, filing and contact information, Zoom instructions, and forms. In the face of many limitations brought on by the pandemic, the Court continued to process and handle large quantities of emergency and routine filings in a timely fashion, thanks to the dedication, hard work, and creativity of Probate Court staff.

## 2020 Accomplishments

Throughout 2020 the Probate Court utilized more technological tools to serve the public and to accomplish its work as well.



# PROBATE COURT

- **Scheduling Hearings** – The Probate Court Clerk’s Office shifted from using a physical availability calendar to using a shared calendar in Microsoft Outlook for scheduling hearing dates.
- **Hearing Date Tool** – The Court added a judicial docket and hearing date search tool on its website (<https://www.accesskent.com/ProbateHearing/>).
- **Online Register of Actions** – The Court offered a register of actions search tool on its website, accessible with the name of a case or the file number (<https://www.accesskent.com/ProbateNameSearch/>).
- **Updated Forms Page** – The Court updated and expanded the forms page on its website, which includes the forms and instructions for filing a variety of matters (<https://www.accesskent.com/Courts/Probate/forms.htm>).
- **Online Informational Meetings** – Bi-monthly informational meetings for the public were shifted to Zoom, with online registration available on the Court’s website ([https://www.accesskent.com/Courts/Probate/informational\\_meetings.htm](https://www.accesskent.com/Courts/Probate/informational_meetings.htm)).
- **GAL Appointment Sheet** - The Court began using Google Docs to house an editable spreadsheet for guardian ad litem (GAL) appointments. The Google Sheet can be edited simultaneously by all of the clerks in the Probate Office and can be accessed by the Court’s GALs at any time.

**Polycom in Courtroom 9C** - On September 4, 2020 a Polycom was installed in Courtroom 9C, with the help of the State Court Administrative Office, Facilities and County Information Technology. The Polycom has enabled Judge Murkowski to conduct hearings virtually and in-person Monday through Friday without the need to utilize County Polycom resources. The Polycom will allow the Court to conduct hearings in a hybrid format, with litigants attending in-person and by Zoom.



**Zoom Hearings** - In 2020, the Chief Probate Judge and Probate Register conducted over 1,000 hours of hearings in Zoom.

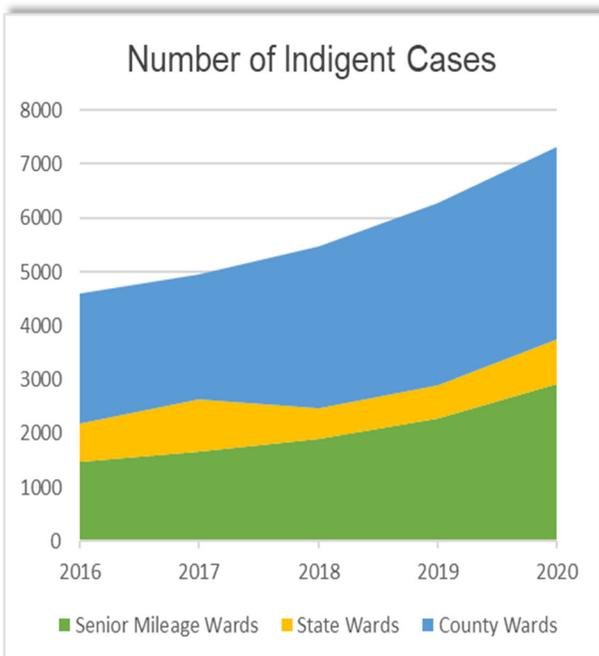
**New Probate Supervisor** - In November of 2020 the Court welcomed a new Deputy Register/ Probate Supervisor, Aimee Cory, who was previously a Judicial Clerk for Judge Murkowski. Ms. Cory began working for the Court under Probate Judge Janet Haynes, and is an incredible asset to the Probate Court Clerk’s Office.

# PROBATE COURT

- **Filings Per Employee** - Probate Court staff handled an outstanding 448.4 new filings per full time employee.
- **TurboCourt for Adult Conservatorships Development** – With limited staff the Court devoted time in December of 2020 to creating TurboCourt for adult conservatorships. The Court relied

## The Kent County Guardianship Program

A large portion of the Court's caseload involves guardianships and conservatorships for legally incapacitated adults and guardianships for developmentally disabled adults. In most of these cases, a family member or friend is appointed to act as guardian or conservator for the ward. However, when there are no family members or friends who are suitable and willing to serve, it is often in the ward's best interest that a professional guardian be appointed. Kent County is extremely fortunate to have the Kent County Guardianship Program, developed by the Kent County Department of Health & Human Services (DHHS) and Probate Court, to provide guardianship and conservatorship services for adult residents of Kent County who have no one else to serve them in a fiduciary capacity.



When a ward is indigent and has no other means to pay his or her guardian, the Program also covers the professional guardian's monthly fee. Funding to pay for the Program came from four sources in 2020: **Kent County** (\$167,000), the **Kent County Senior Millage** (\$230,208), the **State of Michigan** (\$62,831) and **Mercy Health Saint Mary's** and **Spectrum Health** (\$100,000, of which \$83,800 was used to cover the cost of the Guardian Monitor). In October of 2020, the Kent County Senior Millage increased its contribution to the Program to \$233,060.

# PROBATE COURT

Demand for the Program continues to remain strong. In 2020 the Program a total of 236 requests for public guardians. Since the fall of 2015 the Guardianship Program has grown from managing an average of 383 indigent cases per month to managing an all-time high of 562 indigent cases per month in 2020. If the Program continues to expand assistance to indigent individuals at the current rate, it will require the means to provide monthly support for 825 indigent cases by the end of 2024. More broadly, an increased need for guardianship services is being driven by an aging population. This is demonstrated by the Probate Court's caseload numbers, which reflect that new adult guardianship cases in Kent County grew by 58% between 2010 and 2019. It is anticipated that the Program will continue to grow to meet the increasing demand for professional guardians of vulnerable adults in our community.

The Guardianship Program is grateful to Kent County, the Area Agency on Aging of Western Michigan, Mercy Health St. Mary's Hospital, Spectrum Health Hospital, and the State of Michigan for their support. The Program is also thankful to its Guardian Monitor, Kortney Post, and the 38 public guardians who perform outstanding work for the residents of Kent County.

## Moving Forward

Although 2020 was a challenging year, Probate Court staff worked tirelessly to serve the residents of Kent County and to ensure that the Court's services remained accessible to all. The Court is pleased with the progress it made during 2020 in handling a tremendous caseload, adopting changes to achieve greater efficiencies, and in utilizing new technologies to serve and meet the needs of the residents of Kent County. The Court aims to improve on these accomplishments next



# PROBATE COURT

## ORGANIZATIONAL DIRECTORY

### **Kent County Probate Court** Organizational Directory

Kent County Courthouse  
180 Ottawa Ave NW, Suite 2500  
Grand Rapids, MI 49503  
<https://www.accesskent.com/Courts/Probate/default.htm>

#### **Judge's Chambers – Suite 9500C**

*Fax (616) 632-5074*

Hon. David M. Murkowski, Chief Judge (616) 632-5428  
Andrew Oeffner, Judicial Clerk/Recorder (616) 632-5428  
Jeana Stillwagon, Judicial Clerk/Recorder (616) 632-5424

#### **Probate Register's Office – Suite 4400**

*Fax (616) 632-5152*

Avery D. Rose, Probate Register (616) 632-5422

#### **Guardian Monitor's Office – Suite 4501**

*Fax (616) 632-5436*

Kortney Post, Guardian Monitor (616) 632-5438

#### **Probate Court Clerk's Office – Suite 2500**

*Fax (616) 632-5430*

Main Phone Number (616) 632-5440  
Main Email Address [probatecourt@kentcountymi.gov](mailto:probatecourt@kentcountymi.gov)

Aimee J. Cory, Probate Manager (616) 632-5417

Karen Noorman, Mental Health Specialist (616) 632-5425  
Aubree Gross, Guardianship Specialist (616) 632-5426

Austin Fry (616) 632-5421  
Kerri Guyot (616) 632-5432  
Sam Hampshire (616) 632-5434  
Erna Ingram (616) 632-5420  
Jennifer Oldfield (616) 632-5423  
Kristina Page (616) 632-5437  
Dominique Schoenborn (616) 632-5433  
Lorah Stankus (616) 632-5418  
Kyra VanOost (616) 632-5427