**2016 ANNUAL REPORT**

**HIGHLAND COUNTY COMMON PLEAS COURT**

**GENERAL AND DOMESTIC RELATIONS DIVISIONS**

This is the ninth annual report prepared for the purpose of informing the public of the activities of the Court during the past year and comparing the case filings for the Court for the past several years.

1. **CASE MANAGEMENT**

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

**ANNUAL CASE FILINGS**

The caseload of the General Division of the Court was markedly reduced compared to 2015 while the Domestic Relations caseload was comparable to that of the past three years. There were 500 new and reopened cases in the General Division in 2016 compared to 639 in 2015. The total of new and reopened cases in Domestic Relations was 337 compared to 341 cases in 2015. The total number of cases in both divisions for 2016 was 837 compared to 980 in 2015.

As of December 31, 2016, there were 171 total cases pending in the General Division, compared to 189 pending as of December 31, 2015. In the Domestic Relations Division, there were 75 cases pending at the end of 2016 compared to 99 at the end of 2015.

**CRIMINAL CASES**

Criminal filings were down 81 cases from 2015, a 29% decrease. In 2016 there were 197 new and reopened criminal cases compared to 278 in 2015. These statistics are based on the requirements for filing reports with the Ohio Supreme Court. A new case represents arraignment in a new case or a case reopened which had been closed prior to adjudication. This does not include indictments that were filed with the Clerk but not served or cases bound over to the grand jury in which indictments were not returned. Therefore, there is a variance between the Clerk of Courts’ numbers and this report.

From 2008 through 2011, the number of new and reopened criminal cases decreased each year. From 2012 through 2015, the number of criminal cases increased each year by approximately 15%. It should be noted that these statistics do not include any post-sentencing proceedings in criminal cases such as probation violations, restitution hearings, modification of probation conditions, judicial release hearings, sealing of records and other proceedings that occur in many criminal cases after they are closed for Ohio Supreme Court reporting purposes.

**CRIMINAL CASE COMPLETION TIME**

The time that it takes for a criminal case to be completed from the date of indictment until final disposition remained relatively even. The average time to complete a criminal case for 2015 increased to 69.16 days compared to 2014 which was 64.69 days. In 2013 the average completion time was 66.02 days. For the year 2007, the average number of days from arraignment to completion was 201.87 days. This represents a reduction of approximately 65%. 2016 cases are not included in this report since many are still open.

**FORECLOSURE CASES**

For the seventh consecutive year, there was a decrease in the number of foreclosure cases. There were 116 new foreclosure cases and 4 reopened cases in 2016 for a total of 120. This compares to 129 new cases and 5 reopened cases for a total of 134 in 2015. The largest number of foreclosure cases filed in one year since 2003 was in 2009 when there were 381 new cases filed and 12 cases reopened for a total of 393. The 2016 total represents a 69 % reduction.

**OTHER CIVIL CASES**

There were 193 other types of new and reopened civil cases filed in 2016 compared to

237 filed in 2015. The average number of days to complete civil cases filed in 2015 was 116.38 compared to 2014 which was 137.85. The average for 2013 civil cases was 154.65. In 2007, the average time to complete a civil case was 167.89 days. This represents an 18% reduction. The data for 2016 cases is not yet available as there are many civil cases still pending.

**JURY TRIALS**

Judge Coss presided over jury trials in six criminal cases while a visiting judge presided over one in 2016. Five of the jury trials conducted by Judge Coss were completed in one day. . Since Judge Coss took the bench in August of 2008, the Court has been averaging between eight and nine jury trials per year.

**DOMESTIC RELATIONS CASES**

The domestic relations caseload remained stable in 2016 with a total of 228 new cases filed and 109 cases reopened. Reopened cases usually are motions for modification of child custody/visitation decrees, modification of child support, motions to enforce property issues in a prior decree or motions to cite for contempt of orders in prior decrees. The total filings for 2015 were 341, for 2014, 334 and for 2013, 348.

1. **COURT TECHNOLOGY**

**VIDEO ARRAIGNMENTS AND HEARINGS**

Since the implementation of the video arraignment system in March of 2009, the Court has conducted 3,219 video hearings including 490 for prisoners in state prisons or other out of county facilities. This is an average of approximately 23 hearings per month. In 2016, the Court conducted 319 video hearings, 118 of which were for prisoners in state prisons or other out of county facilities. This is an average of 26.58 hearings per month.

These video hearings save The Sheriff’s Department thousands of dollars in costs of transporting prisoners to court from the local jail or from the out of county locations and supervising them in custody during their time in the courthouse. It also allows the Court to conduct the hearings more quickly since it is much easier to get the prisoner to the video room at the Justice Center as opposed to arranging for transport to the courthouse.

**COURT WEBSITE**

The Court’s website which became operational in February of 2011 continues to be a very valuable asset to both the county and the public. The website contains the calendars for the general and domestic relations divisions as well as court indexes and dockets. The usage reports for the website for 2016 show that there were approximately 9,500 visits to the site each month which is an average of 316 visits per day.

Persons summoned for jury duty can check the announcements box to learn if the jury trial scheduled will proceed. The dockets for each criminal and civil case can be checked to determine what events have occurred and what is scheduled in the future for that particular case.

Judge Coss and Clerk of Courts Ike Hodson had been in discussions and negotiations with the case management vendor over the past two years regarding adding the capability to file documents with the Clerk’s Office electronically (“e-filing”) and to add all documents filed in civil and criminal cases to be viewed on line. However after consulting with the Highland County Bar Association and other county clerks of court, they have determined that the cost of adding these features to the court’s case management system at this time significantly outweighs the benefits to the public. Therefore, those features will not be added in the near future although other possible options will be evaluated as technology and the market evolve.

1. **LOCAL RULES OF COURT**

During 2016 Judge Coss after consultation with the Court Magistrate, the Clerk of Courts

and members of the Highland County Bar Association revised the local rules of court effective January 17th. The revised rules can be viewed on the court website by clicking on the Local Rules tab.

1. **FISCAL MANAGEMENT**

The Court’s original general fund budget for 2016 was $217,672.00 which was less than

the Court’s actual expenditures in 1998 of $218, 296.88. The actual general fund expenditures for 2016 were $207,045.24 which was 4% less than the amount originally appropriated by the county commissioners. Since 2008, with the exception of 2010 when a capital murder case required large expenditures of unbudgeted expenses, the Court has spent less than the amount appropriated for general fund expenses each year.

1. **SMART OHIO PROGRAM GRANT TO END**

In March of 2014, the Highland County Common Pleas Court received a $375,000.00

Smart Ohio Program Grant from the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections to be used for intensive treatment of felony offenders who were abusing or addicted to opiates and/or methamphetamine. In August of 2015, the Court was awarded a renewal grant of $435,000.00 for fiscal years 2016-2017. This grant funds an intensive treatment program beginning with sessions five days per week for three hours a day tapering down over an eight month period as determined by the progress of the offender. It also provides medication assisted therapy to offenders.

The Court is also utilizing this treatment option in conjunction with residential treatment services provided through the STAR Community Justice Center and other residential treatment providers in other counties. Offenders sentenced to complete the STAR program or another residential treatment program are must report to FRS after successful completion as part of their aftercare.

All of the grant funds are being paid to FRS Counseling for treatment services for the offenders. The Court is not using any of the funds for administrative costs as court employees are providing those services within the course of their normal work hours.

The current budget proposal submitted by the Governor’s Office will eliminate Smart Ohio Grants and if passed, means that the current grant will end in September of 2017. This will not affect the court’s budget but could have a significant impact on the ability of FRS to provide drug addiction treatment services to felony offenders under community control supervision. There is a possibility that the other grants may be available to replace Smart Ohio in the biennial budget.

Judge Rocky A. Coss

Highland County Common Pleas Court