

ROSS COUNTY COURT OF COMMON PLEAS
PROBATE-JUVENILE DIVISIONS
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J. JEFFREY BENSON, JUDGE

COUNTY COMMON PLEAS COURT, JUVENILE DIVISION
ROSS COUNTY, OHIO

FILED

2025 ANNUAL REPORT

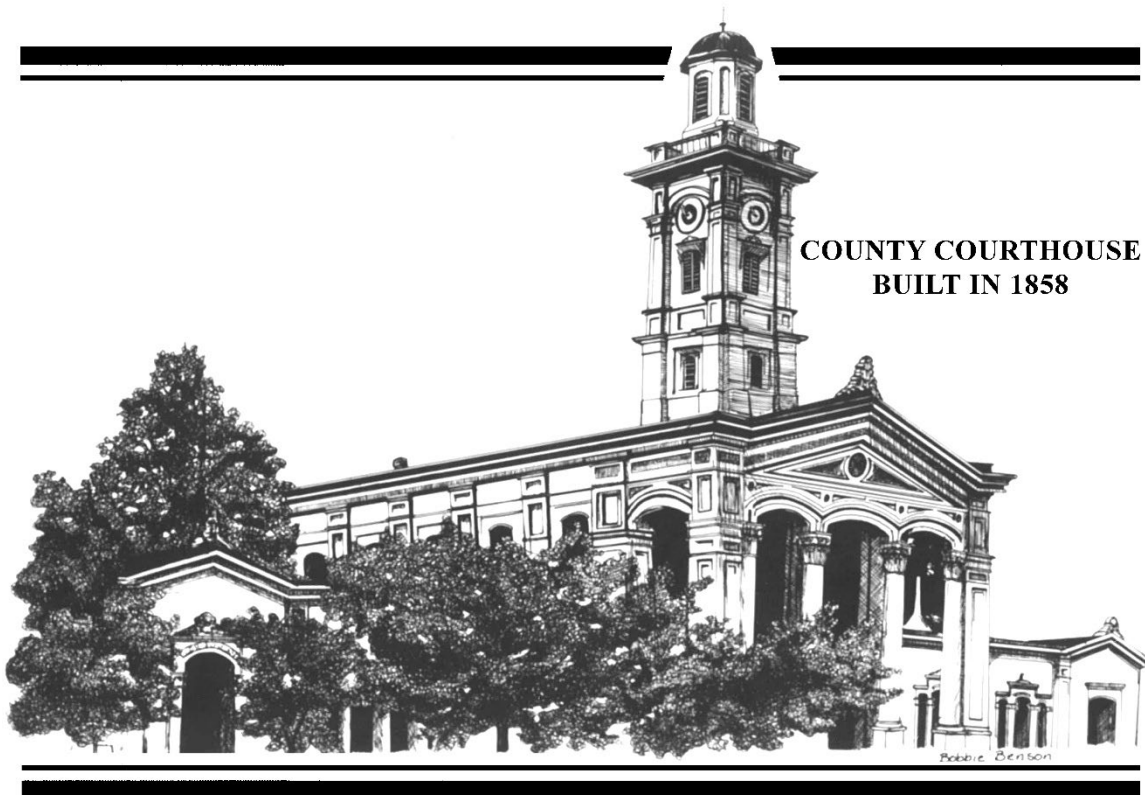
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COUNTY COMMON PLEAS COURT, PROBATE DIVISION
ROSS COUNTY, OHIO

2026INRE0015

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J. Jeffrey Benson, Judge

Ross County Commissioners and Citizens of Ross County:

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

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

J. Jeffrey Benson

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

PROBATE DIVISION

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

INTRODUCTION TO THE PROBATE DIVISION

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

There were 1,050 probate court cases filed in 2025. This is a 1.6% increase from 2024 when there were 1,033 probate court cases filed.

CASE FILINGS

■ Estates

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

- 347 new estate cases were filed and 27 were reopened.
- In 2025, there were 379 terminations or closings, leaving 223 estates pending at the end of 2025.

■ Guardianships

Forty-two (42) new guardianships were filed in 2025.

- 38 were guardianships of an incompetent person.
- 1 was a guardianship of minor.
- 3 were emergency guardianhips.
- At the end of 2025, 339 guardianships were being supervised by the Court.

■ Trusts

No trusts were filed in 2025.

- At the end of 2024, there were 36 trust cases pending.
- 1 cases was terminated
- 35 trust cases were pending at the end of 2025.

■ Civil Actions

Nineteen (19) new civil actions were filed in 2025.

- At the end of 2024, 11 civil actions were pending.
- 14 cases were terminated
- 16 civil actions were pending at the end of 2025.

■ Adoptions

Twenty-one (21) new adoptions were filed in 2025.

- 5 kinship or private adoptions were filed.
- 17 children in the permanent custody of South Central Ohio Job & Family Services were adopted
- 1 child in the permanent custody of Pickaway County Ohio Job & Family Services was adopted
- 3 step-parent adoptions were filed.
- 5 adult adoptions were filed.
- 0 foreign adoptions were filed.
- 0 court ordered placements were filed.
- 14 adoptions were completed in 2025.

■ Mental Illness

Sixty-eight (68) mental illness cases were filed in 2025.

- 6 were from the Veteran's Administration Medical Center
- 34 were from the Adena Regional Hospital
- 14 were from the Scioto Paint Valley Mental Health Center
- 5 were out-patient filings
- 6 were out-of-county filings
- 0 were for an Involuntary Treatment for Alcohol and/or Drug Abuse.
- 0 Municipal Court/Jail cases were filed.
- 3 non-agency/hospital cases were filed.

■ Assisted Outpatient Treatment (AOT)

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

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

With the exception of Connecticut, Maryland, and Massachusetts, every state and the District of Columbia have enacted laws to authorize the use of AOT. The Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs and SAMHSA have deemed AOT to be an evidence-based practice, and its use has been endorsed by the American Psychiatric

Association, American College of Emergency Physicians, International Association of Chiefs of Police, National Sheriffs' Association and National Alliance on Mental Illness.

In 2025, the Ross County AOT program had 18 participants which included 13 males and 5 females. Overall, participants in the Ross County AOT Program saw a decrease in hospitalizations, shorter hospitalizations when needed, a decrease in arrests and jail time and a decrease in mental illness filings compared to participant history before entering the AOT program. Additionally, participants had fewer days of homelessness due to the usage of shelter care or respite until more permanent housing could be obtained. A majority of participants expressed satisfaction with the AOT program and felt it was beneficial to their treatment and general well being.

▪ **Minors Settlements**

Five (5) new applications for approval to settle injuries to minors were filed in the year 2025. One (1) case was terminated in 2025.

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

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

Forty-five (45) change of name applications, birth registrations and birth corrections were filed in 2024.

- 23 were for the change of name of an adult
- 18 were for the change of name of a minor
- 3 were for the name conformity of an adult
- 0 were for the name conformity of a minor
- 1 was for birth registration
- 6 were for birth correction

▪ **Marriage License**

Four hundred eighty-four (484) marriage licenses were issued in 2025.

▪ **Other**

There were nineteen (19) additional probate filings made in 2025.

- 2 were INRE filings
- 12 Wills were placed on deposit with the Court for safekeeping.
- 1 application for Adult Protective Services was filed.
- 2 Health Care Power of Attorney were filed.
- 0 Probate Power of Attorney were filed.
- 0 Disinternment applications were filed.
- 1 Unauthorized money received from inmate was filed.
- 0 Applications for Transfer of Structured Settlement were filed.
- 1 Certificate of Single Status was filed

▪ **Guardianship Services Fund Program**

In 2024, the Ross County Probate Court, Paint Valley ADAMH Board, Ross County Board of Developmental Disabilities, and South Central Ohio Job and Family Services partnered together to establish the Ross County Guardianship Services Fund (RCGSF) program. All partners recognized and agreed that Ross County has experienced an increased need for adult guardianship services. The partners desired to formalize a structure for collaboration between partners to form the Ross County Guardianship Services Fund as allowed under Ohio Revised Code 2111.52. It was agreed that the feasibility and viability of the RCGSF warrants a joint effort from partners by pooling funding and local resources. All partners contribute funds in equal shares and those funds are used to contract with Coleman Health Services to serve as the guardian and provide guardianship services to wards.

Partner agencies agreed that a social services-based program was needed so that participants can receive a better quality of care and improve their quality of life. The program serves Ross County residents only, who are over the age of 18, and are in need of a guardian where no family member or other individual has been identified to serve as their guardian. The program orders guardianships of the person only and does not include guardianships of the estate.

In 2025, the guardianship services program had 16 open guardianships (7 males and 9 females) and 1 pending case. Three guardianships were closed throughout the year due to death of the wards.

▪ **Public Records**

In 2025, Probate/Juvenile Intake Clerks completed 918 records requests:

- 893 requests for marriage records
- 16 requests for probate records
- 9 requests for juvenile records

In 2025, the Data Systems Analyst/webmaster, received 11 inquiries from the public.

▪ **Ross County Archives**

The Ross County Archives houses the inactive records of the Probate and Juvenile Courts. The building was built in 1878 and originally used as the Ross County Jail and Sheriff's residence. The building contained 16 cells for men, 1 cell for women and 1 cell for the mentally ill. Sheriff Fred Heinzelman was the last Sheriff to reside in the building up until 1976. After that time, the living quarters were converted into office space. The Sheriff's Department moved out of the building in 1989 after the completion of the new Law Enforcement Complex. The Ross County Commissioners approved for the building to be used as the Ross County Probate and Juvenile Court archives in 1996.

The Archives holds probate records dating back to 1797, many of which pre-date the establishment of the State of Ohio in 1803. The Archives also holds various probate records of interest in family research and all inactive juvenile records which are held permanently or until they can be disposed per Ohio Supreme Court rules. Records housed in the Archives includes;

- Probate records from 1797 to present
- Birth and Death records from 1867 to 1908
- Marriage records from 1798 to present
- Inactive juvenile records

In 2022, The Ross County Commissioners approved American Recovery Plan Act (ARPA) grant funding to the Ross County Probate / Juvenile Court in the amount of \$330,000 for a large-scale scanning project. The grant funding allowed the Court to contract with Make Paper Digital to scan all probate records from 1797 to 2013 (the Court began scanning records in the court’s case management system in 2014). The scanning project began in March 2022 and is expected to be completed in 2025. As of December 2024, over 30,000 historical probate records have been scanned. All scanned records will be available to the public through the Court’s website or can be accessed from new public terminals housed in the Archives building and the lobby of the Courthouse.

The Archives employs a part-time Archivist who maintains all of the inactive records of the Probate and Juvenile Court, manages the Archives building, completes records requests of inactive records and conducts research for genealogy research requests. In 2025, the Archivist completed 341 records requests.

- 116 requests for marriage records
- 167 requests for probate records
- 20 requests for juvenile records
- 38 requests for genealogy research

▪ **Remote Hearings**

The demand for remote hearings continues to grow. In 2025, the Probate Court conducted fifty-eight (58) remote hearings, representing a measurable increase in virtual proceeding utilization compared to prior years. This upward trend indicates a sustained shift toward remote accessibility and reflects the court’s ongoing adaptation to technological and scheduling efficiencies.

PROBATE FINANCES

\$113,048.34 in court costs was paid in the Probate Division.

\$720,352.56 was expended in the Probate Division.

All pending litigation is current.

PROBATE CASE COMPARISONS

Probate Case Table

Year	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Estates	338	325	459	445	404	324	347
Trusts & Guardianships	62	33	60	39	39	33	42
Civil Actions	15	7	13	11	17	13	19
Adoptions	31	44	35	52	31	33	21

Mental Illness	100	87	161	177	116	100	68
Marriage License	468	460	470	457	434	456	484
Others	105	83	103	82	102	74	69
Total	1119	1039	1356	1313	1143	1033	1050

JUVENILE DIVISION

INTRODUCTION TO THE JUVENILE DIVISION

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

There were 1,107 juvenile court cases filed in 2025. This is a 2.2% increase from 2024 when there were 1,083 cases filed.

CASE FILINGS

■ Delinquent

- A delinquent child is a child who commits a violation that would be a crime if committed by an adult.
 - There were one hundred sixty-five (165) delinquent cases filed in 2024. Of these cases, there were two hundred twenty-two (222) charges filed.
 - Of the two hundred twenty-two (222) charges, forty-seven (47) were felonies.
 - 2 were 1st degree felonies
 - 10 were 2nd degree felonies
 - 10 were 3rd degree felonies
 - 13 were 4th degree felonies
 - 12 were 5th degree felonies

- **BIND OVER** – A bind over is a delinquent case in which the State files a motion to transfer jurisdiction of the case to the General Division of Ross County, Ohio to try the juvenile as an adult. In 2025, there were two (2) motions for bind over/motion for discretionary transfer filed.

■ **Unruly**

There were ninety-six (96) unruly cases filed in 2025.

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

■ **Truancy – H.B. 410**

Definition of Truancy and Excessive Absences –

1. “Chronic Truant” is removed from the law;
2. Definition of “habitual truant” changed from days to hours. The new definition is:
 - a. Absent 30 or more consecutive hours without a legitimate excuse;
 - b. Absent 42 or more hours in one school month without a legitimate excuse;
 - c. Absent 72 or more hours in one school year without a legitimate excuse.
3. Includes “excessive absences”:
 - a. Absent 38 or more hours in one school month with or without a legitimate excuse; or
 - b. Absent 65 or more hours in one school year with or without a legitimate excuse.

Juveniles placed in Alternative to Adjudication	Number who successfully completed Alternatives to Adjudication	Number who failed to complete Alternatives to Adjudication or case was dismissed
49	45	4

■ **Adult**

There were one hundred seventy-three (173) adult cases filed in 2025.

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

■ **Traffic**

One hundred eight-five (185) traffic citations were filed against juveniles in 2025. Of those citations, there were two hundred thirty-six (236) charges filed.

■ **Abuse, Neglect, Dependent**

Two hundred ninety-eight (298) dependent, neglect and abuse cases were filed in 2025.

- Fourteen (14) were for abuse. An abused child is one who is a victim of physical, sexual abuse or born positive for drugs.
- Five cases of neglect were filed in 2025. A neglected child is a child who lacks proper parental care due to the faults or habits of their parents, guardians, or custodians.
- Two hundred seventy-nine (279) were dependent filings. A dependent child is a child who lacks proper care, through no fault of his parents, guardians, or custodians.
 - 226 were generally defined as dependency
 - 43 were for drug abuse
 - 8 involved physical abuse
 - 2 involved sexual abuse

In 2025, the top 5 drugs, noted in the statement of facts, used by parents of dependent, neglect and abused children, at the time the complaint was filed, were methamphetamine, marijuana, cocaine, buprenorphine, and amphetamine.

In 2025, the top 5 drugs in which the babies tested positive, noted in the statement of facts, at the time the complaint was filed, were cocaine, fentanyl, methamphetamine, marijuana, and amphetamine.

▪ **Paternity Child Support, Visitation, Custody**

In 2025, one hundred twenty-two (122) cases were filed regarding paternity, child support, visitation and custody.

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

▪ **Grandparent Power of Attorney/Child Caretaker Authorization Affidavit**

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

- Nine (9) grandparent power of attorney/child caretaker authorization affidavits were filed in 2025.

▪ **Marriage Consent**

No applications for marriage consent were filed in 2025.

▪ **Juvenile Civil Protection Order**

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

- There were twenty-five (25) filings for juvenile protections orders in 2025. All filings were for juvenile civil protection orders.
 - 11 were dismissed
 - 11 were granted
 - 3 are pending

▪ **Miscellaneous Cases**

Fifty-three (53) miscellaneous cases were filed in 2025.

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

▪ **Remote Hearings**

The demand for remote hearings continues to grow. In 2025, the Juvenile Court conducted one hundred twenty-seven (127) remote hearings, representing a measurable increase in virtual proceeding utilization compared to prior years. This upward trend indicates a sustained shift toward remote accessibility and reflects the court’s ongoing adaptation to technological and scheduling efficiencies.

JUVENILE FINANCES

\$46,960.86, in court costs, was paid in the Juvenile Division.

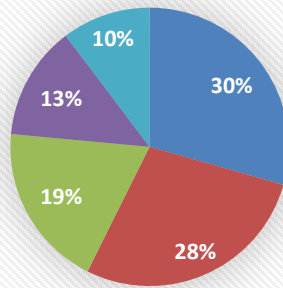
\$1,021,261.87 was expended in the Juvenile Division.

JUVENILE CASE COMPARISONS

Year	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Delinquent (cases not charges)	320	255	176	129	143	211	165	129
Unruly	149	105	59	54	68	102	90	96
Traffic (cases not charges)	268	251	200	216	223	205	222	204
Abuse/Neglect/ Dependent	227	149	163	189	159	187	154	298
Adult	166	235	53	126	204	183	241	166

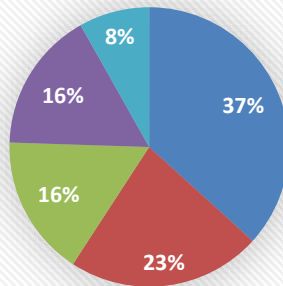
Paternity/Custody/Child Support	205	202	159	154	121	154	136	127
Grandparent Power of Attorney/CA	29	13	18	12	10	16	5	9
Juvenile Civil Protection Order	3	3	2	3	5	7	12	25
Miscellaneous Filings	48	53	53	53	38	59	57	53
Total	1415	1266	883	941	971	1124	1083	1107

Top 5 Male Delinquent Charges



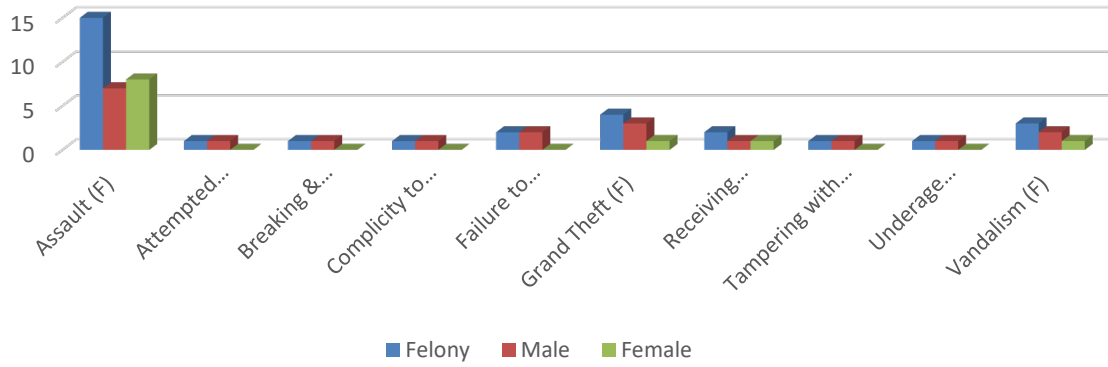
■ Domestic Violence (M)
 ■ Disorderly Conduct
 ■ Assault (M1)
■ Aggravated Menacing (M)
 ■ Assault (F)

Top 5 Female Delinquent Charges

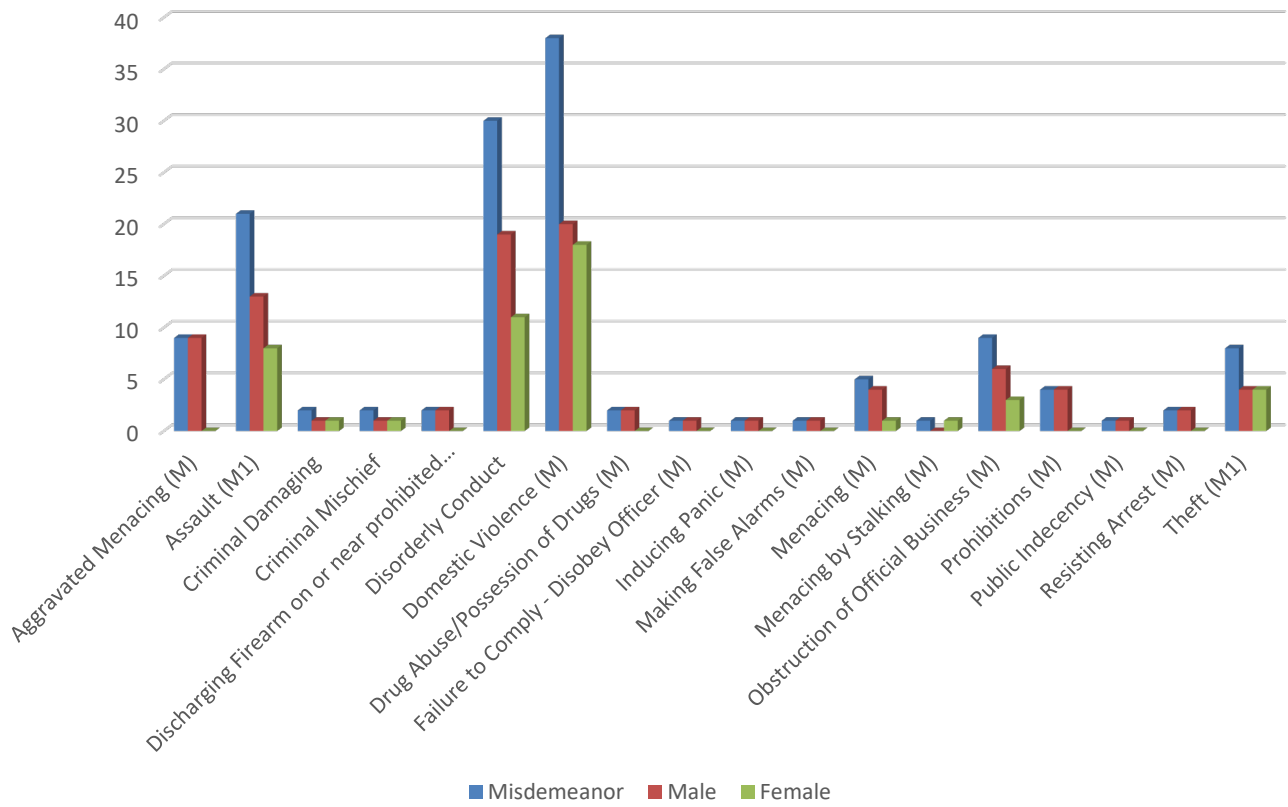


■ Domestic Violence (M)
 ■ Disorderly Conduct
 ■ Assault (F)
 ■ Assault (M1)
 ■ Theft (M1)

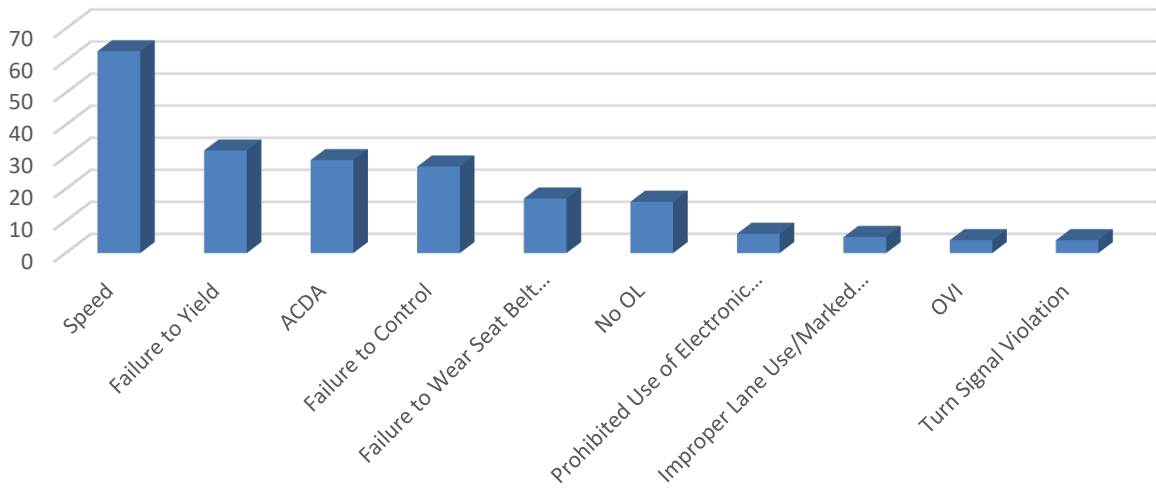
Felony Offenses w/Male-Female Ratios



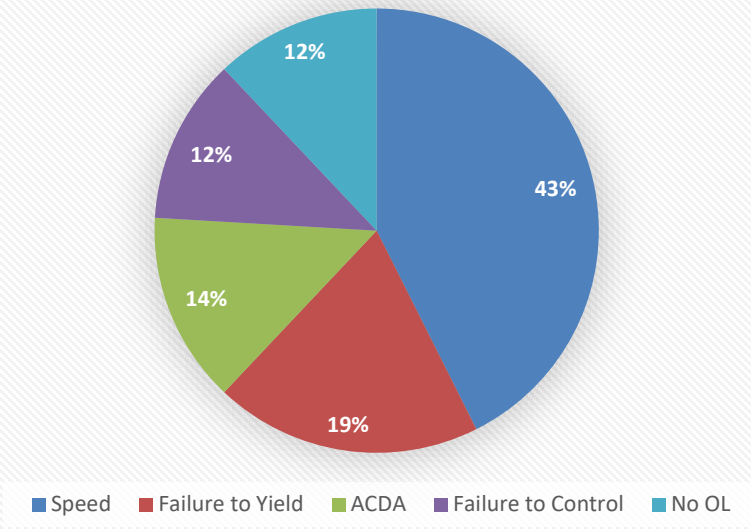
Misdemeanor Offenses w/Male-Female Ratios



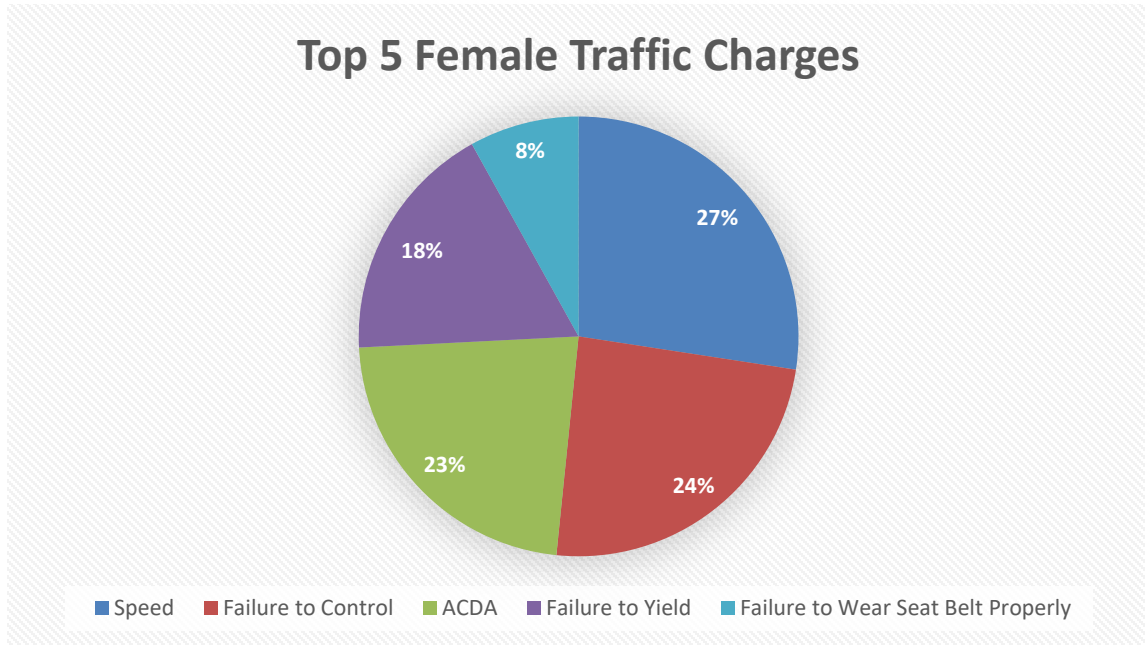
Top 10 Juvenile Traffic Offenses



Top 5 Male Traffic Offenses



Top 5 Female Traffic Charges



NOTE: The average miles per hour over the posted speed limit for juveniles cited in Ross County for the year 2025 was 22.19.

2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2024
18.2	19.5	20.64	21.73	22.64	22.01	22.19

JUVENILE PROBATION DEPARTMENT

INTRODUCTION TO THE JUVENILE PROBATION DEPARTMENT

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

The Juvenile Probation Department also:

- Prepares and files monthly reports for the individuals on probation.
- Prepares and files reports and memos ordered by the Juvenile Court.
- Locates residential placements and non-residential treatment programs for juveniles with substance abuse, sexual behaviors, and mental/behavior health issues.

- Monitors the probationer's school attendance.
- Assigns community service worksites and monitors the juvenile's performance.
- Utilizes various risk assessments to identify the youth's highest risk to have further involvement with the court and/or law enforcement.
- Develops plans in accordance with the risk assessments to address youth and their family's needs to prevent further involvement with juvenile justice.
- Monitors service delivery in accordance with case plan activities.
- Completes Pre-dispositional investigations.
- Recommend and supervise placements of unruly/delinquent youth.
- Facilitates reunification efforts between youth and family
- Facilitates social service development for youth and family.
- Supervises and case manage youth at risk for removal from the home.
- Participates in identifying community service gaps and the development of collaborative relationships that proactively meets the needs of youth and family in the community.
- The Juvenile Probation Department further administers drug tests and monitors children placed on electronic monitoring; and various other duties as directed by the Juvenile Court.

JUVENILE PROBATION DEPARTMENT CASE LOAD

The Juvenile Probation Department began 2025 with 53 youth on probation that remained on probation from 2024. They received 244 new case referrals and ended 2025 with 69 probationers that will carry over to 2026. Not all youth referred to the probation department for supervision were placed on formal probation; they also monitor pre-trial terms and conditions compliance, community service, and some mediation agreements.

Of the 244 new referrals; 156 youth had their probation terminated, referred to pre-dispositional intervention, or had their case dismissed in 2025.

Of the 244 cases referred to probation in 2025:

- 91 were female.
- 153 were male.

Restitution

In an effort to assist youth in providing victims payment for court ordered restitution the court has created a Restitution/Community Service Program that allows court involved youth to earn money by completing community service that will be paid directly to the victim. In 2025, 12 youth participated in the program by completing community service hours for a total of \$7,556.28 being paid to victims as court ordered restitution.

Reunification Outcomes

One youth began 2025 in court custody and the court placed two youth in custody in 2025. Two youth were reunified with their legal guardian and 1 youth remained in care to begin 2026.

Electronic Monitoring

In 2025, the Juvenile Probation Department had a total of 25 youth placed on electronic monitoring. The cost of electronic monitoring was \$11.00 per day.

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

Department of Youth Services

In 2025, the court had four (4) new commitments to the custody of the Ohio Department of Youth Services

ROSS COUNTY JUVENILE COURT DIVERSION PROGRAM

Court Contracted Services

Lighthouse Youth Services started working out of the Juvenile Probation Department in 2015 to provide mental/behavioral health and alcohol and other drug services to court involved youth. A primary focus is providing outpatient sex offender treatment to youth who have been adjudicated or identified as having inappropriate sexual behavior and involved with the Court. The other focus is providing treatment for youth exhibiting alcohol and other drug related problems.

In 2017, Lighthouse developed a program focusing on adolescent girls using the Girls Circle Model. This program has been a positive impact on the teen girls in our community.

In 2018, Lighthouse obtained a grant to develop and maintain a diversionary program in conjunction with the Juvenile Court. This program was successful within the juvenile court; however, Lighthouse was not rewarded with a renewal on this grant. However, it showed such positive outcomes that in July 2019 Judge Benson approved a new diversion program to be operated in conjunction with Lighthouse.

Ross County Juvenile Court Diversion Program

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

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

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

1. A meeting with the Chief Probation Officer and Lighthouse Youth Services, Program Coordinator, shall be arranged with the youth and their families via a letter informing them of the date, time and location of the meeting.
2. They will be given the option to participate in the program to prevent further court action when they arrive at the meeting. If they refuse to participate or fail to appear the case shall be referred back to the Magistrate for further determination.
3. An agreement shall be signed acknowledging the charges against them and that they agree to comply with the terms of the Diversion Program.
4. After a formal assessment is completed by Lighthouse Youth Services the youth and family will have 90-120 days to complete their treatment goals and diversion agreement.

5. These terms can include but are not limited to individual, group and/or family counseling, drug screening, alternative education plans, restitution and community service.
6. Failure to comply with the terms set forth in the diversion agreement and treatment plan could result in further court action.
7. If the youth successfully complete the agreement the case against them shall be dismissed.
8. Weekly case reviews will be held between the Probation Department and Lighthouse Youth Services.
9. Written monthly updates shall be provided to the Judge and Magistrates by the Chief Probation Officer or other designated Officer.

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

Diversion Statistics 2025

Forty-four (44) cases were carried over from 2024.

In 2025, 37 cases were referred to the program making a total of 81 youth involved with diversion for the year.

- 35 positive completions.
- 18 cases returned to court due to failure to comply with the terms of their agreement.

JUVENILE PROBATION DEPARTMENT FINANCES

\$233,777.12 was expended in the Juvenile Probation Department in 2025.

\$714,794.37 was expended by the county for the IVE Department in 2025.

Of that total \$579,588.37 was paid for by the county and \$135,206.00 was paid for by the IVE Department.

\$160,004.06 was expended in the CASA/TANF/VOCA program in 2025. However, \$147,112.00 was carried over to reimburse the General Fund for 2024/2025 CASA salaries/fringes.

\$11,311.83 was expended in the Family Dependency Treatment Court program in 2025.

Introduction to Court Alternative Programs

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

MEDIATION/GUARDIANSHIP INVESTIGATION

In 2025, the Mediator/Guardianship Investigator/Court Advocate was assigned one thirty-three (133) cases. Of these were:

- 26 were for unruly cases
- 1 was for custody cases
- 49 were for juvenile truancy cases
- 51 were for guardianship cases
- 6 were for adult protective services cases

Family Dependency Treatment Court

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

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

- Enrollment:
 - 8 carry over from 2024
 - 12 new participants in 2025
- Program Case Resolution:
 - 6 successfully graduated the program
 - 4 unsuccessful discharges, due to non-compliance with treatment, legal charges, unable to abstain and/or non-compliance with program rules/court orders.
 - 0 neutral resolution

CASA

In 2025, the CASA program had a total of roughly 540 cases. We had approximately 298 new cases that were appointed to our program. We ended our 2025 year with a total of 21 CASA volunteers with 5 awaiting our next training. Those volunteers totaled an average of 652 hours and recorded traveling an average of 3,897 miles. CASA has visited children assigned to their cases approximately 954 times this year.

We are excited about the increase that we have had this year and are planning events to bring awareness to our program in 2026 to bring in more volunteers. This year we held a pool party for children that we serve in our program

both in kinship and foster placements. We had a great turn out for our first year. We had approximately 65 children attend this party! Ms. Hazel Tanner provided music at her cost, we had several people donate chips, popsicles and water. Christy's pizza gave us a deal on pizza. The Chillicothe City Pool allowed us to have an extra hour for a private event before opening to the public. The Junior Civic League granted us \$500.00 to put this event on for the kids we serve and we were so thankful for all that donated privately to this event as well.

We set up at the Ross County Fair to raise awareness of our program and get more volunteers. We had a lot of interest shown and got information about our program into the public.

We did our second annual Kinship Christmas event in 2025 we were able to help provide Christmas to 76 children. We had several companies who adopted children to help make this possible, including: Riffle, Smoker Friendly, Clary trucking, Jerry's pizza, subway (multiple locations), Mees jewelry, Ladies auxiliary, Nourse, Ross County Christian Academy and several independent donors.

The Staff

THE STAFF OF THE PROBATE-JUVENILE DIVISIONS

- ❖ Judge J. Jeffrey Benson became the Ross County Probate/Juvenile Court Judge on February 9, 2015. Prior to his election to the bench, Judge Benson was a self-employed trial lawyer in Ross County for over thirty-three years. He received his Law Degree from Capital University in 1982 after graduating from Otterbein University in 1979. Judge Benson previously served three years as an Assistant Ross County Prosecuting Attorney, seven years as a member of the Chillicothe City Council, and eight years as a member of the Chillicothe City School District Board of Education. He is married to Shawn T. (Stephens) Benson and the proud father of four (4) boys. Judge Benson started the Family Dependency Treatment Court on May 5, 2017, the CASA Program on July 1, 2017 and the AOT Program in 2019.
- ❖ Magistrate James S. Szorady Jr. joined the Probate and Juvenile Court of Ross County in October of 2021. Prior to serving as Magistrate, Mr. Szorady served as the Supervising Attorney for eight years at the Public Defender's Office. Mr. Szorady received his B.A. in Telecommunications from Bowling Green State University in 2005 and his J.D. from Capital University in 2008.
- ❖ Magistrate Jennifer L. Ater joined the Probate and Juvenile Court of Ross County in October 2023. Prior to serving as Magistrate, Ms. Ater was head of the Juvenile Division of the Ross County Prosecutor's Office for four years, having been an assistant prosecuting attorney there for thirteen years. In addition, she operated a local private law firm for twenty-five years. Ms. Ater received her law degree from Case Western Reserve School of Law in 1995 after graduating from Miami University in 1992.
- ❖ Data Systems Analyst, Lisa M. Bair, joined the Probate and Juvenile Court in 1990. Mrs. Bair started with the Probate and Juvenile Court as a court reporter and was formally appointed to the position of Data Systems Analyst in 2000.
- ❖ Administrator of Juvenile Programs, Cheri Smitley, joined the Probate and Juvenile Court in 2005. She holds a Bachelor of Science Degree in Community Health Education, Master Degree in Management and Public Administration and is a Licensed Independent Chemical Dependency Counselor. Mrs. Smitley started with the Court as a Title II grant project director.

- ❖ Director of Probate Services, Brandy McCord, joined the Probate and Juvenile Court in 2000. Mrs. McCord joined the Probate and Juvenile Court as a social worker. In 2011, upon the retirement of Linda Young, Mrs. McCord was the Community Liason Officer. She holds a Bachelor of Arts in Criminology from Ohio University in 1998. She also received a Master of Arts in Sociology with a specialization in Crime and Deviance from Ohio University in 2003.
- ❖ Administrative Clerk/Mediation Secretary, Pam Kangur, joined the Probate and Juvenile Court in 2021. Mrs. Kangur started with the Probate and Juvenile Court as a Deputy Clerk and was appointed to the position of Administrative Clerk/Mediation Secretary in 2022.
- ❖ Deputy Clerk, Billie Lytle, joined the Probate and Juvenile Court in 1993. Mrs. Lytle started with the Probate and Juvenile Court as a deputy clerk and is currently working in the Court's probation department.
- ❖ Chief Juvenile Clerk, Lois Smith, joined the Probate and Juvenile Court in 1993. Mrs. Smith started with the Probate and Juvenile Court as a deputy clerk in the Court's Juvenile Division. In 2005, Mrs. Smith was promoted to Chief Juvenile Clerk.
- ❖ Bailiff, Joseph Glandon, joined the Probate and Juvenile Court in 1996. He has a Bachelors Degree in Elementary Education from Ohio University. Mr. Glandon started with the Probate and Juvenile Court as a Probation Officer. He is now serving as court bailiff.
- ❖ Deputy Clerk, Penny Fannon, joined the Probate and Juvenile Court in 1995. Mrs. Fannon started with the Probate and Juvenile Court as a deputy clerk and is currently working in the Court's Probate Division.
- ❖ Probation Officer, Matt Sutherland, joined the Probate and Juvenile Court in 1998. He has a Bachelors Degree in Criminal Justice and an Associates Degree in Law Enforcement Technology from Ohio University. Mr. Sutherland started with the Probate and Juvenile Court as a probation officer and currently retains that position. He is also a state certified guardianship investigator and was certified as a mediator in dispute resolution and domestic relations through the Supreme Court of Ohio.
- ❖ Deputy Clerk, Tonya Wright, joined the Probate and Juvenile Court in 1998. Mrs. Wright started with the Probate and Juvenile Court as a deputy clerk and is currently working in the Court's Probate Division.
- ❖ Deputy Clerk, Tammy Kellough, joined the Probate and Juvenile Court in 2001. Mrs. Kellough started with the Probate and Juvenile Court as a deputy clerk and continues to maintain her position working in the Court's Juvenile Division.
- ❖ Deputy Clerk, Stephanie Stapleton, joined the Probate and Juvenile Court in 2007. Mrs. Stapleton works with the Probate and Juvenile Court as a deputy clerk and is currently working in the Court's Probate Division.
- ❖ Chief Probation Officer, Shanna Haybron, joined the Probate and Juvenile Court in 2007. Ms. Haybron started with the Probate and Juvenile Court as a reunification probation officer in the Title IV-E Department. In 2016, she was promoted to Chief Probation Officer. She holds a Juvenile Sex Offender Counseling Certification from the University of Louisville.
- ❖ Reunification Probation Officer, Quincey Bailey, joined the Probate and Juvenile Court in 2010. He holds a Bachelor of Science Degree and a Juvenile Sex Offender Counseling Certification from the University of Louisville. Mr. Bailey works as a probation officer in the Juvenile Probation Department.
- ❖ Deputy Clerk, Kristi Riley, joined the Probate and Juvenile Court in 2018. Mrs. Riley started with the Probate and Juvenile Court as a deputy clerk and is currently working as an intake clerk in the Court's front office.

- ❖ Deputy Clerk, Penni J. Woods, joined the Probate and Juvenile Court in 2018. Mrs. Woods started with the Probate and Juvenile Court as a deputy clerk and is currently working as an intake clerk in the Court's front office.
- ❖ Juvenile Probation Assistant, Erika Harris, joined the Probate and Juvenile Court in 2019. Mrs. Harris started with the Probate and Juvenile Court as a Deputy Clerk, was promoted to the position of Court Reporter and now serves as the Juvenile Probation Assistant.
- ❖ Court Advocate/Mediator, Martin D. Dunn, joined the Probate and Juvenile Court in January of 2021. Mr. Dunn was a chemistry teacher and coach in the Chillicothe city School District for 30 years until his retirement in June 2013. Mr. Dunn held the position of Attendance Officer for Chillicothe High/Middle Schools after retirement until his acceptance of the Court Advocate/Mediator role. He is certified as a mediator in dispute resolution in juvenile and domestic relations through the Supreme Court of Ohio. He has also completed the Court Investigators Training through the Ohio Judicial Conference in 2021. He received a Bachelor of Science Degree in Pre-Medicine from Alabama State University in May 1981 and a Masters Degree in Education from The Ohio State University in August 1983.
- ❖ Court Reporter, Deanna Menendez, joined the Probate and Juvenile Court in 2021. Miss Menendez started with the Probate and Juvenile Court as a Deputy Clerk and was subsequently promoted to the position of Court Reporter
- ❖ Court Reporter, Ashley Toops, joined the Probate and Juvenile Court in 2022. Mrs. Toops started with the Probate and Juvenile Court as a Deputy Clerk in the juvenile probation department. She was then promoted to court reporter.
- ❖ CASA Director, Britni Brown, joined the Probate and Juvenile Court in 2023. Mrs. Brown started with the Probate and Juvenile Court as the CASA Director and maintains that position.
- ❖ Deputy Clerk, Toni Detillian, rejoined the Probate and Juvenile Court in 2023. Mrs. Detillian started with the Probate and Juvenile Court as a deputy clerk and works as an intake clerk in the Court's front office.
- ❖ Juvenile Probation Officer, Kimberly Sollars, joined the Probate and Juvenile Court in 2023. She has a Bachelor of Science Degree in Criminal Justice from the University of Cincinnati.
- ❖ CASA Volunteer Coordinator, Allyssa Sandoval, joined the Probate and Juvenile Court in 2024. Ms.Sandoval maintains her position as the CASA Volunteer Coordinator.
- ❖ Deputy Clerk, Haley Schumaker, joined the Probate and Juvenile Court in 2025. Ms. Schumaker started with the Probate and Juvenile Court as a Deputy Clerk and maintains that position.