



# 1999 Annual Report



**The Circuit Court**  
for the **Sixth Judicial Circuit Court**  
1200 N TELEGRAPH RD DEPT. 404  
PONTIAC MI 48341-0404

KEVIN M. OEFFNER  
COURT ADMINISTRATOR

Elizabeth A. Evans  
Deputy Court Administrator

TELEPHONE: (248) 858-0347

May 1, 2000

Judges of the Sixth Judicial Circuit Court  
Oakland County Board of Commissioners  
Oakland County Executive  
Citizens of Oakland County

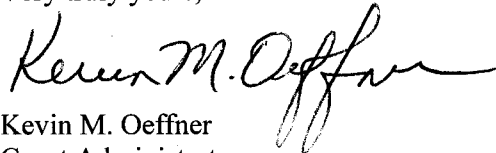
I am pleased to submit the 1999 Annual Report of the Sixth Judicial Circuit Court. The report highlights administrative developments that occurred during the past year within the Court and county offices with whom the Court interacts.

Nineteen ninety-nine may best be characterized as a year of preparation – preparation for major changes expected to occur in 2000. The Circuit and Probate Courts prepared for an administrative merger, a consolidation necessitated by the creation of the family division of Circuit Court. Additionally, the Court launched two important technological advancements. First, an integrated case management system was initiated to enable the electronic exchange of case information between the Courts, Prosecutor's Office, County Clerk's Office, and Reimbursement Division. Planning also began for the retrieval of imaged case records on-line by judges while on the bench.

The year also marked the end of an era. Judge Edward Sosnick's second consecutive two-year term as chief judge ended on December 31. In the midst of many sweeping changes during the past four years, the Court was indeed fortunate to have his steady and sure hand at the helm. At the end of October, Judy Cunningham assumed the position of Corporation Counsel for Oakland County after serving as Court Administrator/Judicial Assistant for 11 years. The Court will do well to maintain the high standard of excellence characterized by Judy's remarkable leadership. Judge Sosnick and Judy Cunningham are deserving of our thanks.

I trust this report will provide you with a sense of our accomplishments. More importantly, I hope it conveys the pride we have in a judiciary and staff that are the driving force behind the accomplishments.

Very truly yours,

  
Kevin M. Oeffner  
Court Administrator

## **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

Introduction - Chief Judge	1
<b>The Sixth Judicial Circuit Court</b>	
Seniority of the Judges	3
Judicial Biographies	4
<b>Divisions and Departments</b>	
General Jurisdiction Division	9
Family Division	10
Court Administrator's Office	11
Friend of the Court	13
Family Counseling Services	13
Assignment Clerk's Office and Mediation Department	14
Jury Office	15
Clerk/Register's Legal Division	16
Reimbursement Division	17
Adams-Pratt Law Library	18
Circuit Court Probation	18
Community Corrections	19
<b>Employees of the Year</b>	20
<b>Special Programs</b>	
Law Day	21
New Lawyers Admission Ceremony	21
A Day in Court	22
Bench/Bar Conference	23
<b>Contributions</b>	23
<b>A Fond Farewell</b>	
Judith Cunningham	24

## INTRODUCTION - CHIEF JUDGE



**The Honorable Edward Sosnick**

This introduction marks my fourth and final contribution to the Annual Report as Chief Judge of the Sixth Judicial Circuit Court. These last four years, which have come and gone all too quickly, were distinguished by events that defined how we will look and conduct business as we move into the new millennium. Although too many to list, some of these events deserve mention as a reminder of where we were and how far we've come.

*“It's been my pleasure and privilege  
to serve as chief judge these last four years . . . .  
I'm confident we will meet the challenges of tomorrow  
thanks to the dedicated men and women of this Court  
who so ably serve the citizens of Oakland County.”*

In January 1996, the Circuit bench established a criminal assignment system. Defense counsel for the indigent are appointed by automated rotation on criminal cases with a maximum penalty of up to and including five years' imprisonment. Eligibility criteria for participating lawyers were established and a 15-hour annual continuing legal education requirement imposed. About 5,000 criminal appointments have been made by rotation each year since the criminal assignment system's inception.

The legislature was busy in 1996 with court reform at the forefront of its agenda. Upon enactment of the family division statute, judges and staff from the Circuit and Probate Courts spent 1997 preparing for family division implementation. Among the multitude of changes necessary to effectuate implementation was the reassignment of 300,000 cases and 190 Probate employees to the family division. On January 2, 1998, the family division opened its doors for business. Two years of smooth operation is a testament to the expertise and determination of those who were involved in the planning effort.



The Circuit Court long ago resolved to develop creative and effective docket control programs. One such example, facilitative mediation, began as a pilot project in October 1996, and was implemented court-wide one year later. Some 134 trained lawyers function as neutral facilitators. They encourage litigants to fashion mutually acceptable resolutions to their disputes to avoid costly trials.

Another legislative enactment resulted in sweeping changes to the laws concerning domestic violence and stalking. Courts may now issue personal protection orders (PPOs) to persons victimized by domestic violence and stalking. A protocol for handling PPOs was developed, comprehensive staff training was instituted, networks with community-based organizations were fostered to deal with this growing problem, and printed materials were procured to provide critical and useful information to victims. About 4,000 PPOs are filed in Circuit Court annually.

Another important achievement was our creation of the first ever divorce education program for divorcing parents with children called SMILE – Start Making It Livable For Everyone. The theme of SMILE’s message is that the greatest gift a parent can give to a child is the right to love both parents. Nearly 12,000 divorcing parents in Oakland County have received this message. Since its inception, 32 Michigan counties and 17 states have replicated our SMILE program.

No organization with the scope and breadth of responsibility such as ours can operate effectively and efficiently without a strong technological orientation. Child support payments are now handled via electronic funds transfer, speeding up the receipt of much needed monies by single parents. Imaging technology was instituted in the Friend of the Court enabling us to move toward a paperless office. A state-of-the-art automated jury system was installed in late 1999 to facilitate the pooling and selection of prospective jurors, and phase one of the Judicial Information Management System (JIMS) project began. The JIMS project involves the installation of an integrated case management system that will provide for the electronic exchange of case information between the courts, Prosecutor’s Office, County Clerk’s Office, and Reimbursement Division.

As I close this letter, I’d like to thank all that have given of their time and energy to make this Court such a fine place in which to serve the citizens of Oakland County. To the employees and judges of this Court, your dedication, work ethic, and talent are the reasons we’re held in such high esteem by our contemporaries around the state and throughout the nation.

And I would be remiss if I didn’t single out two people in particular. The Honorable Barry Howard served as chief judge pro tem during all four years of my tenure as chief judge. His wise counsel and able assistance were resources that I truly appreciated. Judge Howard will skillfully carry the mantle of leadership for our Court into the next century. Judy Cunningham left in October to assume the duties of Corporation Counsel after serving 11 years as Court Administrator/Judicial Assistant. I cannot imagine this Court reaching the pinnacle of respect and esteem it has without her steady influence and unswerving commitment to excellence.

It’s been my pleasure and privilege to serve as chief judge these last four years. With the assistance of my colleagues, court employees, County Executive staff, and the Board of Commissioners, we’ve met the challenges of the past four years, no matter how complex the issue or sweeping the change. And I’m confident we will meet the challenges of tomorrow thanks to the dedicated men and women of this Court who so ably serve the citizens of Oakland County.

**SENIORITY OF THE JUDGES  
OF THE SIXTH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT COURT**

The Honorable Richard D. Kuhn – Circuit Judge since 1973

The Honorable Steven N. Andrews – Circuit Judge since 1976

The Honorable Gene Schnelz – Circuit Judge since 1979

The Honorable David F. Breck – Circuit Judge since 1982

The Honorable Fred M. Mester – Circuit Judge since 1982

The Honorable Jessica R. Cooper – Circuit Judge since 1986

The Honorable Edward Sosnick – Circuit Judge since 1988

The Honorable Barry L. Howard – Circuit Judge since 1989

The Honorable Deborah G. Tyner – Circuit Judge since 1991

The Honorable Rudy J. Nichols – Circuit Judge since 1991

The Honorable Denise Langford Morris – Circuit Judge since 1992

The Honorable John J. McDonald – Circuit Judge since 1993

The Honorable Alice L. Gilbert – Circuit Judge 1976 – 1992 and since 1995

The Honorable Nanci J. Grant – Circuit Judge since 1997

The Honorable Joan E. Young – Circuit Judge since 1997

The Honorable Wendy L. Potts – Circuit Judge since 1997

The Honorable Colleen A. O'Brien – Circuit Judge since 1998

# JUDGES OF THE SIXTH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT COURT

## Biographies



### **The Honorable Steven N. Andrews**

- Circuit Court Judge for over 20 years, with three terms as Chief Judge and three terms as Chief Judge Pro Tempore
- Selected one of the Most Respected Judges of Michigan in lawyers poll in *Michigan Lawyers Weekly* and listed in Oxford's *Who's Who Among American Judges*
- Rated "outstanding" both by the Oakland and South Oakland County Bar Associations
- One Man Grand Juror and Presiding Judge for the Oakland County Citizens' Grand Jury
- Received an Honorary Juris Doctorate from the New England Law School in 1986
- Served on Adrian College's Board of Trustees and Providence Hospital's Advisory Board and currently serving as Trustee, Oakland County Library Board, Pres., American Inn of Court
- Guest Lecturer and Instructor at Detroit College of Law at Michigan State University
- Author of articles and periodicals on the First Amendment and the Public Trial Concept



### **The Honorable David F. Breck**

- Awarded the State Bar's most coveted citation, "Champion of Justice" and Cranbrook School's "Distinguished Alumnus" award; rated "Outstanding" by the OCBA, its highest rating; voted one of the best judges in the tri-county area in a *Detroit Monthly* poll
- Life member of NAACP; recipient of its Presidential Award for Judicial Service; received the Leon Hubbard award by the OCBA for "Fostering Awareness of Cultural Diversity and Enhancing the Quality of Life for all People"; Director, Horizons Upward Bound, a program for underprivileged high school students to attend college
- Past chairperson of Henry Ford Hospice; twice elected as Mayor of Birmingham; Graduate of University of Michigan Law School, Michigan State University; awarded Certificate of Achievement from American Academy of Judicial Education at Harvard
- District Court Judge, 1977 to 1982; Circuit Court Judge since 1982



### **The Honorable Jessica R. Cooper**

- Elected to the Circuit Court in 1986
- Judge of the 46th District Court, Southfield, 1978-1986, two years as Chief Judge
- Founder, National Association of Women Judges - former national publication editor
- Member, National Task Force on Gender Bias in the Courts
- Adjunct Professor of Law, Detroit College of Law at Michigan State University
- Guest Lecturer, Emory Law School
- Instructor, National Institute for Trial Advocacy, National College of Trial Advocacy, and Institute of Continuing Legal Education
- Board member, Child Abuse and Neglect Council of Oakland County
- Board member, Forgotten Harvest



### **The Honorable Alice L. Gilbert**

- Circuit Judge for 22 years and served as Chief Judge Pro Tempore, Court of Appeals by assignment, 48th District Judge for eight years and served as Chief Judge
- Graduate, Northwestern University School of Law, Wellesley College; postgraduate work at Harvard University, University of Michigan, Wayne State University School of Law, University of Detroit School of Law, University of Kansas, and National Judicial College, University of Nevada; Member, State of Michigan Board of Ethics; President, Michigan District Judges Association; Chairman, Oakland County Corrections Advisory Board; Chair, Providence Hospital Advisory Board; American Hospital Association Task Force
- Director: Barbara Ann Karmanos Cancer Institute, Board of Trustees Vice Chair; Director, National Crime Foundation; Lyric Chamber Ensemble; Trustee, United Health Organization
- Recipient of several honors and special recognitions; 3 children; 7 grandchildren



### **The Honorable Nanci J. Grant**

- Elected to the Circuit Court in 1996; Graduated from the University of Michigan, with honors, and Wayne State University Law School, director of honors program
- Presiding Judge, General Jurisdiction, Sixth Circuit Court, appointed January 2000
- Member, Michigan Judges Association Executive Committee
- Board Member: Women's Survival Center and Women Officials Network
- Recipient, Oakland County Probate Court's Citizens Alliance "Merit Award"; selected by Crain's Detroit Business as one of "40 under 40"
- Former member: Michigan State Bar's Representative Assembly
- Formerly a private practice attorney specializing in commercial litigation



### **The Honorable Barry L. Howard**

- Appointed to the Circuit Court, February 1989
- Chief Judge Pro Tempore of the Oakland Circuit Court, 1996 - 1999
- Member, State Bar of Michigan, American Bar Association, Oakland County Bar Association
- Member, Executive Board, Michigan Judges Association, serving as President-Elect in 1999
- Faculty member, Michigan Judicial Institute (the teaching arm of the Michigan Supreme Court), and member of its Advisory Committee
- Private practice attorney for 15 years with emphasis on Labor and Administrative Law, plus litigation before state, and federal agencies and courts; counsel to Police Officers Association of Michigan and Special Assistant Attorney General



### **The Honorable Richard D. Kuhn**

- Oakland County Circuit Judge since 1973
- Chief Judge in 1979 and for two subsequent two-year terms
- Delegate, 1961 Constitutional Convention
- Past President, Detroit College of Law Alumni Association
- Graduate, Michigan State University and Detroit College of Law
- Member, State Bar of Michigan, Oakland County Bar Association, American Judges Association, and the American Judicature Society





### **The Honorable Denise Langford Morris**

- Appointed to the Circuit Court in August 1992
- Private practice attorney with extensive civil and criminal experience
- Former Oakland County Assistant Prosecuting Attorney
- Former Assistant United States Attorney, Eastern District, Michigan
- Founding member, D. Augustus Straker Bar Association
- Director: Michigan Supreme Court Historical Society, Help Against Violent Encounters Now (HAVEN); Oakland Livingston Human Services Agency (OLHSA) governing board
- Chair, Corrections Committee; Director, Michigan Judges Association
- Member, Michigan Supreme Court Civil Jury Instructions Committee
- Member, William Booth Legal Aid Clinic (Salvation Army)



### **The Honorable John J. McDonald**

- Oakland County Circuit Judge since 1993
- Former Oakland County Assistant Prosecuting Attorney
- Former Oakland County Commissioner, 14 years
- Liaison, Circuit Court Mediation Selection Committee
- Member: American Judges Association, Michigan Judges Association, Oakland County Bar Association, National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, and American Judicature Society



### **The Honorable Fred M. Mester**

- Recipient: Earl W. Kintner Award, Federal Bar Association; Michigan Corrections Association Judicial Award; John N. O'Brien Memorial Award for Distinguished Community Activities; Centennial Award; Honorary Doctor of Laws Degree, Central Michigan University; NAACP 1997 Humanitarian Award
- President, Central Michigan University Alumni Association; President of Board of Directors, William Booth Legal Aid Clinic (Salvation Army); Chairman, Oakland County Community Corrections Board; National Council on Alcoholism, Detroit Board; Multiple Sclerosis Board; Founder, Reading to Reduce Recidivism; RARE Foundation
- Adjunct Professor, Oakland University, Madonna University, Oakland Community College; Military service: Captain, United States Army; Former Chief of the Civil Division, United States Attorney's Office; Former Assistant United States Attorney



### **The Honorable Rudy J. Nichols**

- Graduate, Michigan State University and Detroit College of Law
- General and municipal law practice, 1974 - 1982
- Former member: Michigan House of Representatives, Michigan Senate, 1982 - 1990
- Former chair, Michigan Senate Judiciary Committee
- Recipient of Outstanding Legislator of the Year by Michigan Judges Association
- Recognized as Legislator of the Year by the Police Officers Association of Michigan
- Author and co-author of articles published in professional journals, including "Overview of Michigan Rules of Evidence" and Michigan's "Domestic Violence Law" appearing in the *State Bar Journal* and in *Laches*
- Oakland County Circuit Court Judge - 1991 to present



### **The Honorable Colleen A. O'Brien**

- Elected to Oakland Circuit Court in 1998
- Graduated from the University of Michigan (1978) and Detroit College of Law (1981)
- Private practice attorney specializing in civil litigation for 17 years
- Member: State Bar of Michigan, Women Lawyers Association of Michigan, Michigan Judges Association
- Past President, Oakland County Women's Bar Association
- Board of Directors, Crossroads for Youth



### **The Honorable Wendy Potts**

- Appointed to the Oakland County Circuit Court, January 1998; elected November 1998
- Judge, Oakland County Probate Court, March 1997 - January 1998
- Secretary, State Bar of Michigan, 1996-1997; Commissioner, State Bar of Michigan, 1990 through present; ABA House of Delegates - 2000
- President, Oakland County Bar Association, 1994-1995
- Magistrate, 48th District Court, 1984-1995
- Current Board Member, Child Abuse and Neglect Council of Oakland; Co-Chair, State Bar of Michigan's Children's Justice Committee (1995); Governor's Task Force on Domestic Violence (1994); Chair, Natural Resources Trust Fund (1994); Trustee, Michigan Supreme Court Historical Society; Fellow, Michigan Bar Foundation, American Bar Foundation
- Member, Supreme Court Advisory Committee On The Rules of Evidence



### **The Honorable Gene Schnelz**

- Oakland Circuit Judge, 21 years; District Judge, 4 years, also serving as Chief Judge
- Graduate of Alma College, MSU-Detroit College of Law and National Judicial College
- Former attorney for Walled Lake, Wixom, Wolverine Lake, Milford, Milford Township and Walled Lake School District
- Recipient: Michigan State Bar's highest award for service to public and profession; OCBA's Memorial Award for public service; Honored by Michigan Legislature for public service; Jewish Association for Retarded Citizens' Civil Rights Award; NAACP Presidential Award for Judicial Service; Alma College distinguished Alumni Award; Lutheran Attorneys in Witness first Award for positive leadership in the church and community
- Selected one of Michigan's Most Respected Judges by *Michigan Lawyers Weekly* poll



### **The Honorable Edward Sosnick**

- Chief Judge of the Oakland Circuit Court for the 1996-1997 term and the 1998-1999 term
- Recipient of the State Bar of Michigan's Champion of Justice Award
- Recipient of the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges Award for Meritorious Service to the Children of America
- Co-founder, Oakland County Circuit Court's SMILE Program, an educational program for divorcing parents
- Recipient of Eleanor Roosevelt Humanities Award
- Twice voted one of Michigan's Most Respected Judges by *Michigan Lawyers Weekly* poll
- Four-time honoree, Michigan State Police for Professional Excellence



### **The Honorable Deborah G. Tyner**

- Elected to a ten-year term on the Oakland Circuit Bench in 1990; Graduated from the University of Michigan and Wayne State University Law School, with honors
- Former Wayne County Assistant Prosecuting Attorney
- Former Partner, private law firm specializing in commercial litigation
- Graduate, National Judicial College
- Member: Michigan Judges Association Executive and Legislative Committee; State Bar of Michigan; Board of Trustees of MS Society, Advisory Board, Kadima
- Co-Chair, Joint Bench/Bar Committee Re: Criminal Attorney Appointment System
- Co-Chair, 1997 Bench/Bar Conference
- Fellow, Adams Pratt Foundation
- Former Member, State Bar Representative Assembly



### **The Honorable Joan E. Young**

- Appointed Circuit Judge, March 1997; assigned to Family Division, 1998 - present
- Probate Judge, January 1989 - March 1997; Chief Judge 3 years
- Chief Judge, 52nd District Court, 1996-1997
- Recipient: Oakland County Bar Association Distinguished Service Award; Women's Survival Center Wonder Woman Award; John N. O'Brien Leadership Award; Honored by the Oakland County Women's Bar Association
- Member: Oakland County Bar Association; American Bar Association; National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges; Michigan Judges Association
- Michigan Opera Theatre Trustee; Advisory Board of Parents of Murdered Children, Inc., Metro Detroit Chapter; Goodwill Industries of Greater Detroit Advisory Board
- Frequent lecturer on legal issues affecting children and families

## GENERAL JURISDICTION DIVISION

### Function

The general jurisdiction division of Circuit Court was instituted as a result of the family division's implementation on January 1, 1998. All cases under the jurisdiction of circuit courts and not specifically dedicated to the family division under Public Act 388 of 1996 were consolidated in the general jurisdiction division.

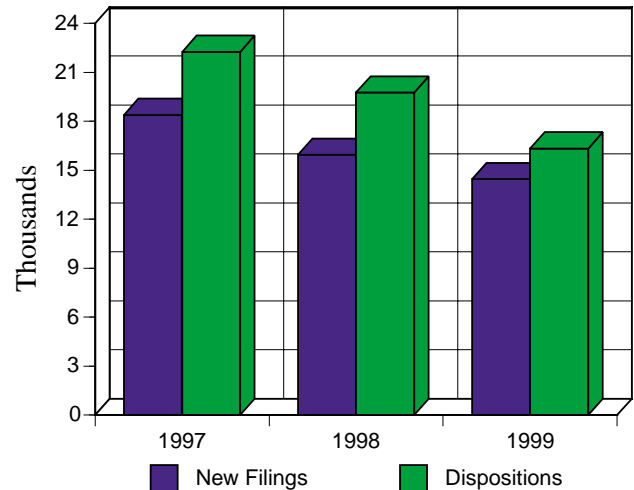
The general jurisdiction division handles civil cases, criminal cases involving felonies and high misdemeanors, and hears appeals from courts of lesser jurisdiction and administrative agencies. The division consists of 13 sitting judges and four visiting judges, one who tries drug cases exclusively and three who hear civil matters.

### Major Accomplishments

- Disposed of 7,008 civil cases, 5,909 criminal cases, and 1,554 appeals.
- Placed 116 cases into facilitative mediation. Of the cases completed, 50% were settled.
- Conducted Settlement Week in an effort to resolve older civil cases. More than 100 attorneys volunteered their time as mediators to assist litigants in achieving resolution of their disputes. Of the 806 cases assigned to Settlement Week, 42% were settled.
- Established a procedure for appointment of second counsel on murder and 650 drug cases involving indigent defendants. These cases involve unusual circumstances such as considerable media interest or highly complex or novel legal issues requiring extensive research or investigation.
- Created a special docket for cases mediated under MCR 2.403 in which the aggregate award is \$15,000 or less. Creating the special docket involved working with the Supreme Court and district court judges to serve the interest of litigants in those cases that would have been removed to district court prior to repeal of the remand statute.

- Required substance abuse testing for all individuals referred to the Probation Department for Presentence Investigation Reports.
- Added a visiting judge to settle general civil cases two years or older.

### Civil, Criminal, and Appeals Cases



## FAMILY DIVISION

### Function

The family division of Circuit Court was created by Public Act 388 of 1996. On January 1, 1998, family litigation handled previously by the Circuit and Probate Courts was consolidated in the family division of Circuit Court. Cases involving a single family are assigned to, and remain with, one judicial team consisting of the judge, referees, case assistants, and family counselors.

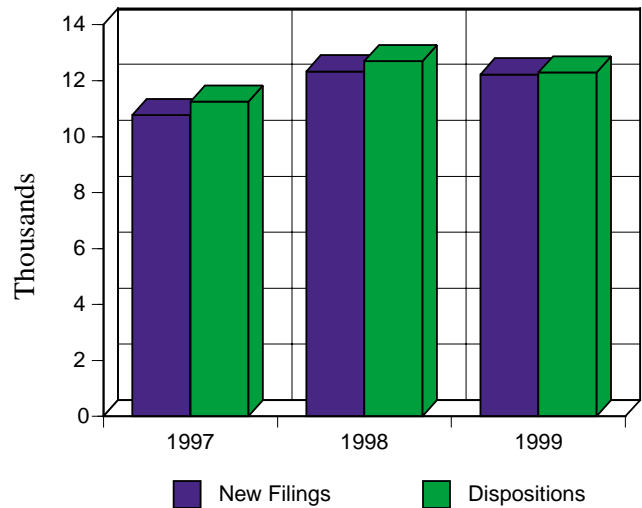
The family division consists of four Circuit judges and two and one-half Probate judges. The division handles all cases involving divorce, adoption, juvenile delinquency, child custody, paternity, child support, abuse and neglect, personal protection orders, conservatorships, guardianships, and other cases involving family matters.

### Major Accomplishments

- Disposed of 12,221 domestic relations cases and personal protection orders.
- Disposed of 5,004 juvenile delinquency petitions, 303 child protective proceeding petitions, 568 minor guardianships, and processed 442 adoptions.
- Provided psychological testing and evaluation through the Psychological Clinic for 191 individuals referred in domestic cases, an increase of 44.7% from 1998.
- Secured \$191,000 in funding through the Family Independence Agency's Juvenile Accountability Incentive Block Grant to design and initiate START and STRIDE programs. START provides intensive aftercare for youth exiting Children's Village. STRIDE provides weekend programs for youth on probation.
- Initiated several new Youth Assistance programs including a group counseling program (CARE) to address curfew violation referrals resulting from community sweeps, a family group counseling program to bring juveniles involved in minor offenses into direct contact with victims for purposes of mediation, and the "Village Visitors" program, which provides volunteer mentors to youth detained in Children's Village.

- Accomplished many initiatives related to personal protection orders (PPOs), including relocating the Women's Survival Center, creating a new PPO Clerk position, and constructing a PPO Intake window. Conducted more than 3,800 PPO petitioner interviews, employed independent contractor attorneys as PPO petitioner interviewers, and implemented a PPO procedure for minor petitioners and respondents to comply with new legislation.

### Domestic Relations Cases and PPOs



## **THE COURT ADMINISTRATOR'S OFFICE**

### **Function**

The Court Administrator's Office handles all business operations of the Circuit Court, including personnel, education and training, caseflow management, finance and budgeting, records management, press and media relations, and information management. The office also advises on legal issues affecting court operations.

The Court Administrator serves as the chief executive officer for the Court and oversees the operations of the Friend of the Court, the Assignment Office, and the Jury Office, and acts as the liaison to county and state government offices and departments, as well as other courts.

### **Major Accomplishments**

- Engaged Systems & Computer Technology Corporation (SCT) for phase one of the Judicial Information Management System (JIMS). Phase one was a collaborative effort between the Circuit, Probate and 52<sup>nd</sup> District Courts, the Prosecutor's Office, Clerk/Register's Office, Reimbursement Division, and Information Technology Department to analyze business practices and the relationship of those practices to the proposed software system's functionality.
- Created the Circuit Court Web site, which may be accessed through the Oakland County home page at <http://www.co.oakland.mi.us> or directly at [http://www.co.oakland.mi.us/c\\_serv/oakcourts/index.html](http://www.co.oakland.mi.us/c_serv/oakcourts/index.html). The Web site provides information about the Court's programs, divisions, operations, and judges.
- Organized a management conference with Circuit, Probate, and District Courts regarding trial court performance standards.
- Processed 1,229 felony notices and 6,248 bindovers from district courts.
- Appointed 4,864 attorneys to represent indigent defendants in criminal cases.
- Instituted an employee appraisal system to review each employee's performance and

productivity, offer each employee a self-evaluation, and allow employee feedback on the supervisor's performance.

- Initiated preparations for the administrative merger of the Probate and Circuit Courts. The merger is expected to become effective at the outset of the county's 2001 fiscal year (October 2000).
- Contracted with a vendor to receive on-line legal research information for judges, judicial staff attorneys, judicial law clerks, and court administrative staff.



## COURT FINANCES

### Revenue Summary

**Circuit Court General Fund** – Court costs and fees, reimbursement for court-appointed attorneys, and mediation fines.

**Judicial Salaries** – State share of circuit judges' salaries.

**Friend of the Court Fund** – Federal/state share of fees and 3% incentive payment on child support collections.

**Grants** – Federal and state funding for operation of the Drug Court and enforcement of medical insurance provisions and payments through Friend of the Court.

**CRP Contract** – Federal funding to offset costs borne by Friend of the Court for child support enforcement and the enforcement of parenting and custody time.

### Expenditure Summary

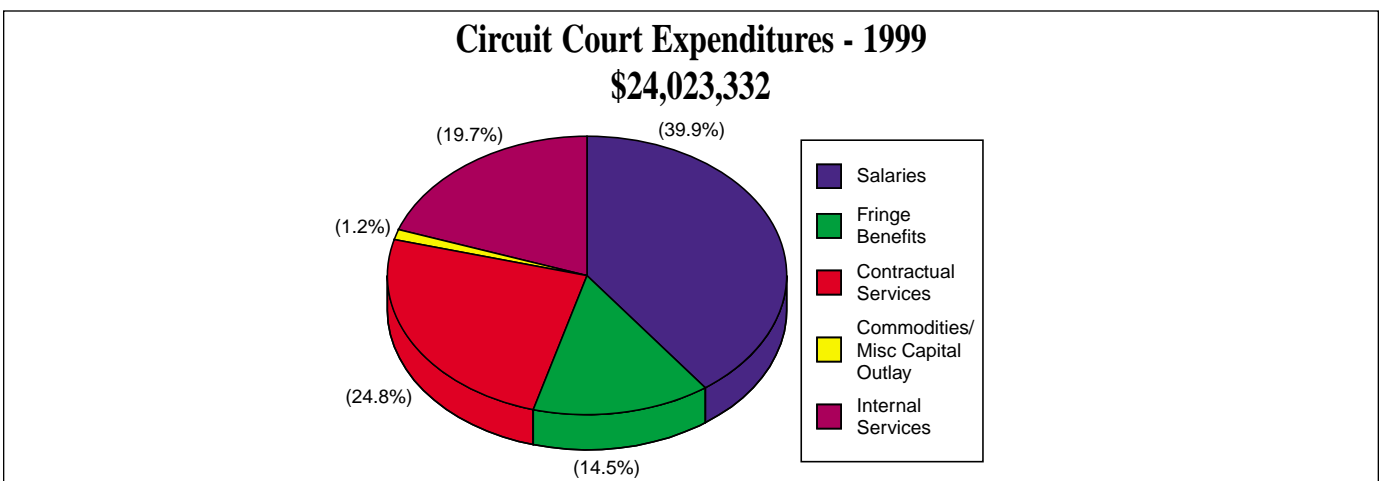
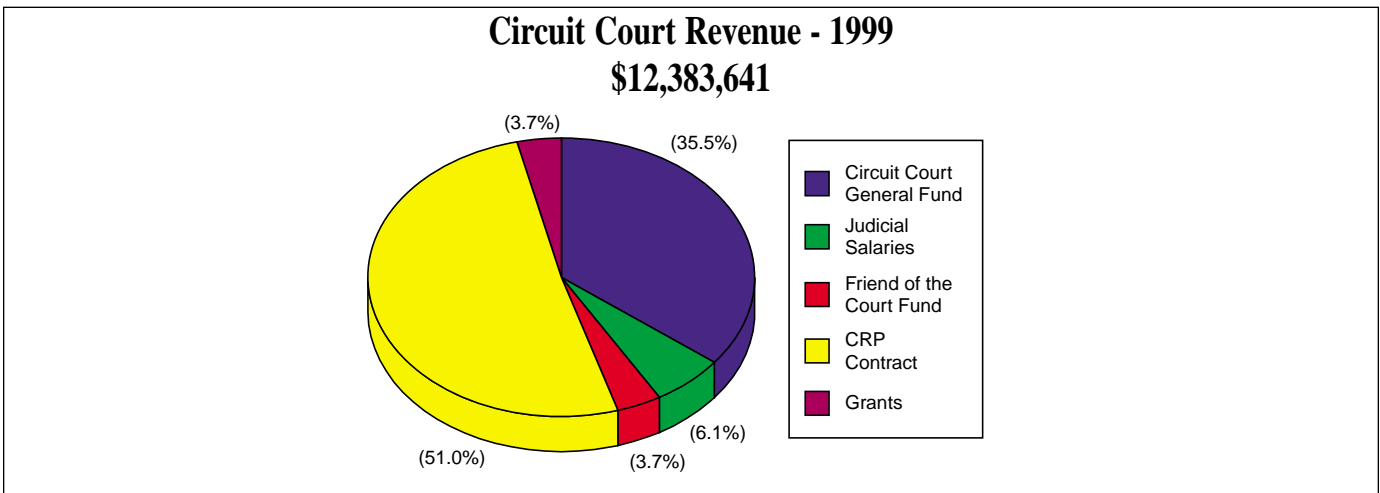
**Salaries** – Cost of salaries for judicial, administrative, and Friend of the Court staff.

**Fringe Benefits** – Cost of fringe benefits for judicial, administrative, and Friend of the Court staff.

**Contractual Services** – Payments for defense attorneys and mediators, juror payments and mileage, equipment, furniture, travel, conferences, professional services, case-related payments, and other items central to administration and operation of the court.

**Commodities/Miscellaneous Capital Outlay** – Primarily postage and office supplies used by the court in the disposition of its responsibilities.

**Internal Services** – Non-controllable costs borne by the court for such items as office space rent, computer services, equipment rent, printing, utilities, and liability insurance.



## **FRIEND OF THE COURT**

### **Function**

The Friend of the Court is an office of the Circuit Court responsible for assisting in domestic relations cases. The office investigates matters involving custody, support, and parenting time in contested cases. Once the court orders specific obligations, the Friend of the Court ensures the orders are upheld.

The Friend of the Court offers free programs to persons involved in family law cases such as SMILE, an educational workshop designed for divorcing parents, and family counseling programs aimed at reducing the stress of divorce. The office also provides speakers to local groups.

### **Major Accomplishments**

- Participated in the ongoing development of a statewide computer system for child support enforcement.
- Replaced the voice response phone system and planned upgrades to enhance service for client calls numbering more than 3,000 per day.
- Networked the Job Placement Program with the Work First Program to assist parents in obtaining employment.
- Obtained medical insurance information and coverage for minor children in domestic cases through the Medical Support Enforcement System.
- Collected nearly \$161 million in support payments, \$987,551 in statutory fees, and \$43,006 in court costs.

## **FAMILY COUNSELING SERVICES**

### **Function**

The office assists families in domestic relations matters through mediation, counseling, and investigation of issues pertaining to custody and parenting time.

Family Counseling Services sponsors educational programs to promote understanding of the effects of separation and divorce on families. The goal is to help everyone make positive adjustments to dramatic changes in the family unit.

### **Major Accomplishments**

- Developed and implemented the COPE (Co-Parenting Effectively) Program to provide a voluntary dispute resolution alternative for parents in divorce and paternity actions having difficulty resolving custody and parenting time disputes. Thirty-nine community mental health professionals were trained to provide this service.
- Provided information and materials to counties in Michigan and other states to assist court personnel in developing paternity programs based on the Oakland County FORGET ME NOT model.
- Expanded the availability of the self-reporting assessment tool through dissemination at the SMILE Program and Early Intervention Conferences. The assessment helps parents identify needs that may require specialized counseling services and the means to access services.
- Provided mediation in 2,697 domestic relations cases and assisted parents in voluntarily resolving custody and parenting time disputes in 2,017 of those cases.
- Presented information to over 3,500 individuals at the SMILE Program to help them understand the effects of divorce and ways to promote their children's adjustment.



**ASSIGNMENT CLERK'S OFFICE AND  
MEDIATION DEPARTMENT**

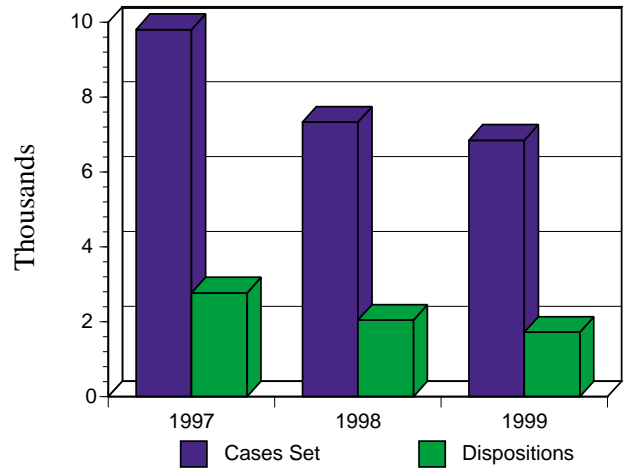
**Function**

The Assignment Clerk's Office tracks both civil and criminal cases from start to finish and sets dates for court appearances. The office also oversees the Court's mediation program, used as an alternative to trial. A twenty-five percent docket reduction was attributable to mediation in 1999.

**Major Accomplishments**

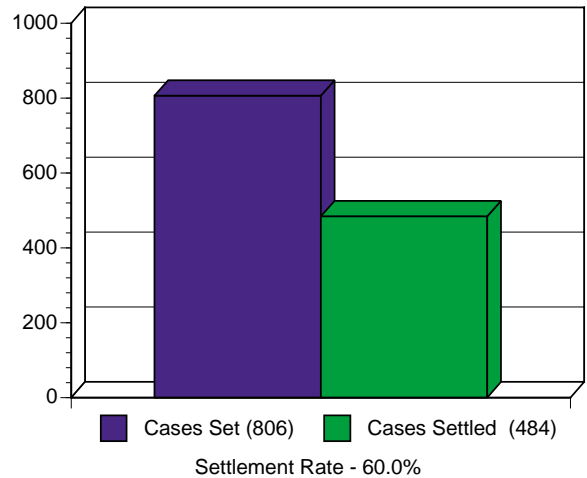
- Implemented a miscellaneous civil docket for cases mediated under \$15,000.
- Designed technology for and implemented Settlement Week.
- Prepared business rules and processes for a random/rotation mediator selection process.
- Participated in the process to merge the Circuit and Probate Courts.
- Began preparation for the 2000 Michigan Association of Circuit Court Professionals statewide meeting.
- Distributed \$160,010 to the Law Library from late fees assessed to mediation.

**Docket Reduction Due to Mediation**



Docket Reduction: 1997 - 28.3%; 1998 - 27.9%; 1999 - 25.2%

**Settlement Week**



## JURY OFFICE

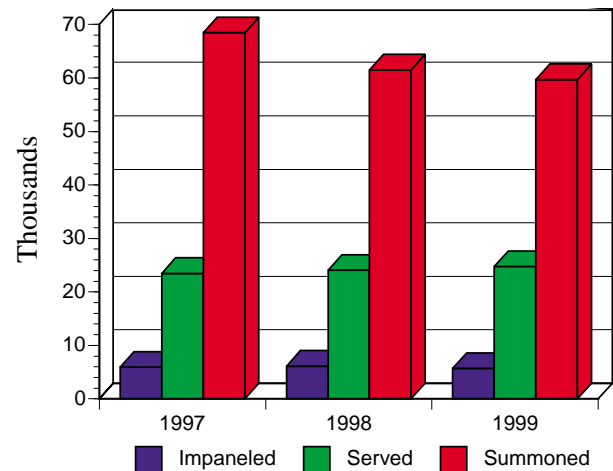
### Function

The Jury Office summons potential jurors for the Circuit and Probate Courts. Of the 59,715 citizens summoned during 1999, more than 24,752 served.

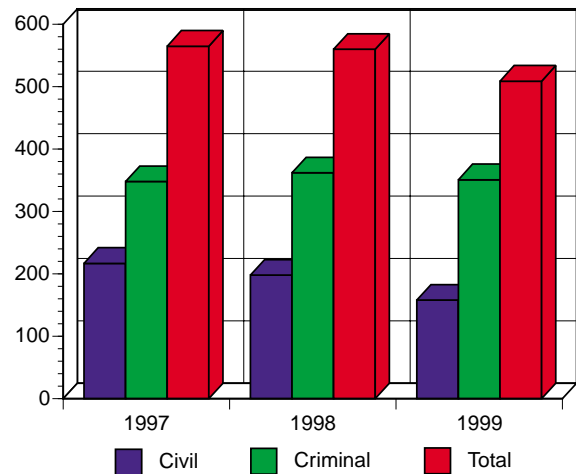
### Major Accomplishments

- Implemented a new Jury System with software designed to ensure year 2000 compatibility, which included:
  - 1) newly designed laser printed summons and questionnaires processed through a Scantron optical mark reader;
  - 2) bar coding and scanning technology requiring less manual entry of juror information;
  - 3) bar coded juror badges for efficiency in scanning jurors' attendance; and
  - 4) full automation of juror correspondence.
- Processed all jury functions and provided jurors to courts for 158 civil trials, with an average trial duration of 5.5 days.
- Processed all jury functions and provided jurors to courts for 351 criminal trials, with an average trial duration of 3.5 days. Of those trials, 113 were capital offenses.
- Assisted in the coordination of four highly publicized cases.
- Implemented a new procedure to supply jurors for Special Docket cases.

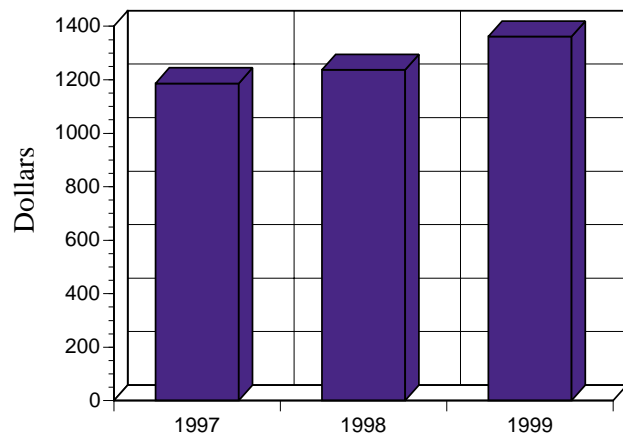
### Citizen Involvement



### Juries Selected



### Average Cost Per Jury



## CLERK/REGISTER'S LEGAL DIVISION

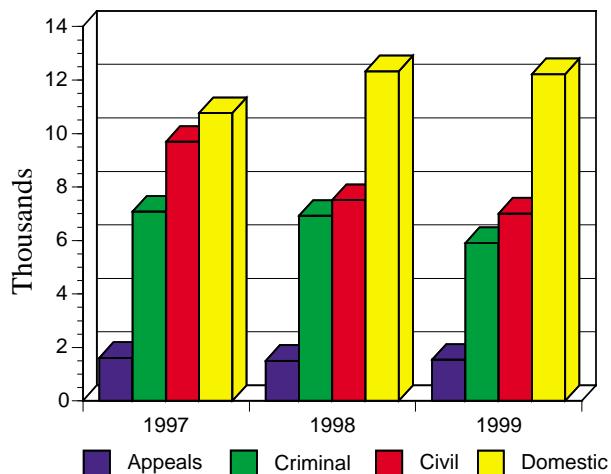
### Function

The Legal Division of the Oakland County Clerk/Register's Office maintains the records of all civil and felony criminal cases, as well as district court appeals and transcripts. The records for the family division of the Circuit Court are also maintained by the Clerk's Office.

### Major Accomplishments

- Upgraded the optical image system, which is currently scanning 100% of the documents filed with the Clerk.
- Processed nearly 4,000 personal protection files; 3,301 personal protection orders were granted and put into the Law Enforcement Information Network (LEIN) – a task previously handled by individual police departments.
- Instituted a new procedure whereby probation orders are entered into LEIN when a protected party is named.
- Successfully tracked immobilization of vehicle orders for all alcohol and “driving while impaired” offenses.
- Focused on the deployment of a file tracking system for Circuit Court files.

### New Case Filings



## REIMBURSEMENT DIVISION

### Function

This division, under the County Executive, is responsible for collecting all costs and fees ordered by the court and mandated by law.

### Major Accomplishments

- Increased unit collections by 8%, from \$4,552,338 in 1998 to \$4,933,912 in 1999.
- Collected and disbursed \$2,139,404 in restitution payments to crime victims.
- Expanded the automated program for writs of garnishment against state tax refunds.
- Increased the number of accounts filed electronically with the state by 7%.
- Focused staff efforts on identifying and attaching defendant assets to satisfy court ordered fees.

## REVENUE COLLECTIONS

### Summary

**Restitution** – Court-ordered monetary judgments against defendants to compensate for injuries suffered by crime victims.

**Court Costs** – Court-ordered fines and fees assessed against litigants for court costs.

**Attorney Fees** – Fees collected from defendants for court-appointed attorneys.

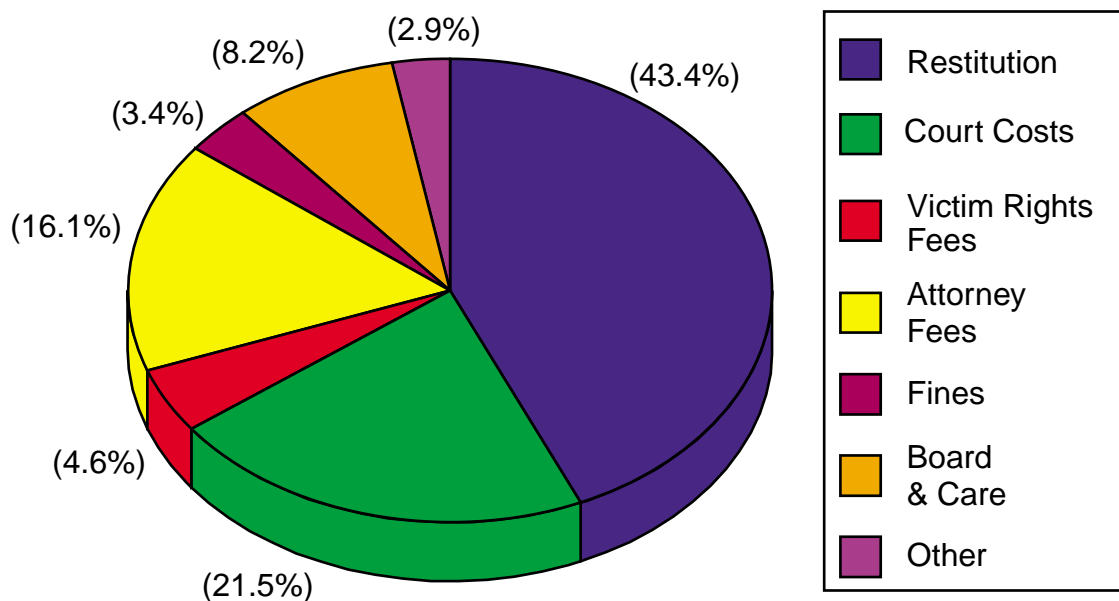
**Fines** – Statutory fines assessed against litigants.

**Victim Rights Fees** – Statutory fees assessed against defendants in criminal matters.

**Board and Care** – Fees assessed to inmates for board and care while held at the Oakland County Jail.

**Other** – Forensic lab expenses, extradition expenses, paternity blood tests, and psychological testing.

Statement of Receipts - 1999  
\$4,933,912



## ADAMS-PRATT LAW LIBRARY

### Function

Under the auspices of the Oakland County Library Board, the Law Library serves the law-related information needs of county and court personnel, attorneys, students, and the general public. Professionally trained library staff help patrons find and use legal reference materials.

The Law Library is the largest and most complete publicly accessible county law library in Michigan. In addition to maintaining its own comprehensive collection of federal and state legal materials in various formats, the Library orders and processes legal materials for the Circuit, Probate, and some district courts, as well as the Prosecuting Attorney's Office and Corporation Counsel.

The Library's Jail Inmate Program maintains small legal libraries in seven jail facilities. Inmates may request copies of case law and statutes to supplement these libraries as mandated by federal and state courts.

### Major Accomplishments

- Welcomed over 46,600 visitors in 1999.
- Linked to current and reliable law-related Web sites from its own home page at <http://oakland.lib.mi.us/oakllaw.htm>.
- Transferred to a new Web based online catalog, which provides people from anywhere in the world access to the Law Library's catalog, metro Detroit public libraries, and Michigan law libraries.
- Collected and made available to the public the local and zoning ordinances of participating Oakland County municipalities.
- Installed Windows NT computers throughout the Law Library to ensure faster and more reliable access to the Internet, CD-ROM products, and word processing for legal research purposes.

## CIRCUIT COURT PROBATION

### Function

This office is part of the Michigan Department of Corrections, Field Operations. The law requires probation agents to prepare a presentence investigation on each felon awaiting sentence. When the court grants probation, probation agents also supervise these felony offenders.

In cooperation with other criminal justice agencies, this unit ensures there is a range of sentence options available to the Court, which involve both economical and safe supervision.

### Major Accomplishments

- Supervised more than 650 low-risk offenders in residential inpatient programs or on electronic monitoring. The majority of these offenders would have otherwise been confined to more costly jail facilities.
- Upheld high standards for monitoring offenders as indicated by an independent caseload compliance audit completed in October 1999 of 4,173 cases under supervision. The audit revealed a 99.9% compliance rate in meeting our strict supervision standards.
- Assisted in the arrest and arraignment of more than 1,000 probationers who had absconded.
- Monitored the completion of more than 80,000 hours of community service by probationers for non-profit agencies in Oakland County as a condition of probation.
- Participated in an ongoing pilot and facilitation of the "Reading to Reduce Recidivism" program.
- Prepared more than 6,000 Presentence Investigation Reports for the Circuit Court.
- Enforced as a special condition of probation the collection of costs, attorney fees, fines, restitution, and victim rights fund monies.
- Established Operation Nighthawk in partnership with 14 local police agencies, pairing probation officers with police officers initiating home calls outside of regular business hours.

## COMMUNITY CORRECTIONS DIVISION

### Function

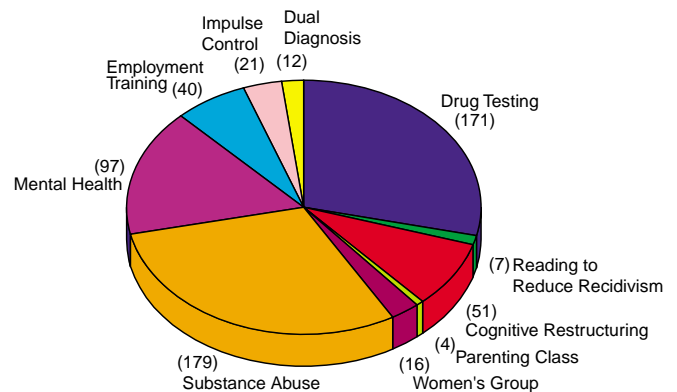
This division funds community-based programs that provide alternatives to incarceration which meet the needs of offenders. These efficient and effective programs protect the public and are considerate of victim impact.

### Major Accomplishments

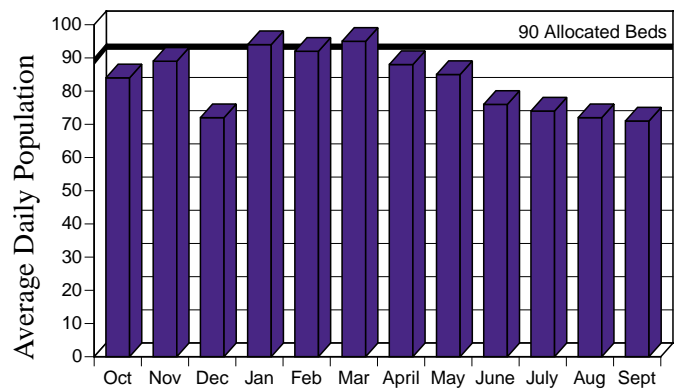
- Increased the range of service availability by opening a *Step Forward* satellite office in Troy. Step Forward is a day reporting program which offers substance abuse counseling, drug testing, employment training, and mental health services, as well as cognitive restructuring, impulse control, and women's groups. Step Forward began utilizing the "NEEDS" evaluation, an assessment tool which provides a standardized, objective, and consistent method of gathering information on all clients. Referral sources increased to 18 courts in Oakland County and referrals rose from an average of 8 per week to 15, an 87.5% increase.
- Supervised over 750 felony offenders in the Court Community Service Unit (CCSU). These offenders completed 36,625 hours, saving non-profit agencies almost \$300,000 in paid labor. In addition, the CCSU generated \$20,760 in reimbursement funds.
- Launched as a joint effort between Oakland County Prosecutor's Office and the Community Corrections Division, the First Offender Program. This program seeks to divert low-risk, first-time, nonviolent offenders from full prosecution by promoting personal responsibility, restitution to the victims, and accountability to the public. Services are available to misdemeanor offenders who have reached their twenty-first birthday by the offense date and who do not qualify for any other diversion statute. Currently, 58 participants are being supervised by Diversion staff and 27 are awaiting acceptance; 26 defendants have successfully completed the program.

- Offered Alternative Incarceration Centers (AICs), community-based, residential sentencing alternatives for use by Circuit Court judges. Individuals sentenced for non-violent felony offenses to an AIC must adhere to strict supervision and behavior standards, participate in various therapeutic interventions (e.g., substance abuse and/or mental health counseling), as well as contribute financially to their care once employed. AICs are encouraged to establish partnerships with community agencies to further assist offenders in meeting multiple needs. There were 90 beds allotted to contracted AICs with an average of 84 beds utilized per month by the end of the year.

**Step Forward  
1998-1999 Client Participation**



**Alternative Incarceration Centers**



**FY 1998-99**

## Employees of the Year

The Oakland County Circuit Court has recognized outstanding service by its employees annually since 1984. Nominations of persons who have made a distinctive contribution to the Court's work are sought from employees throughout the Court. Nominees have characteristically performed their jobs faultlessly and have demonstrated service that far exceeds their written job descriptions.

In 1999 two employees were recognized by their peers as having attained the stature of distinguished public service to the Court and the citizens of Oakland County.

### Laila Azzouz, Judicial Secretary

- Employed as a judicial secretary for 11 years.
- Known for her hard work and willingness to help others.
- Appreciated for her leadership role in pursuit of the judicial secretary salary raise.
- Valued for tracking legislation impacting the court.

### Jeff Allsteadt, Court Clerk

- Employed with Court for 10 years, five years as a clerk.
- Recognized as a reliable resource to all employees on court procedures.
- Instrumental in the reorganization of the drug court to a trial-ready docket.
- Active in the Oakland County Youth Assistance Mentors Plus Program.



*At its annual award ceremony in December, the Circuit Court recognized its employees of the year, Judicial Secretary Laila Azzouz and Court Clerk Jeff Allsteadt. Pictured with Laila and Jeff are Acting Court Administrator Kevin Oeffner (back row, left) and Chief Judge Edward Sosnick.*

## Special Programs

### **Law Day 1999: *Celebrate Your Freedom***

Law Day provides us with the opportunity to celebrate our freedom and understand the laws and justice system that protect our civil rights and liberties. It is a time to reflect on our legal heritage, the role of law in our society, and the rights we enjoy under the Constitution. Incumbent with this year's theme is our continuing obligation to advance the liberties bestowed upon us through the Constitution of this great land. On May 1, 1999, Oakland County's Annual Law Day was held at Meadowbrook Mall in Rochester Hills. Staff from Oakland County Circuit Court were present along with representatives from the Oakland County Bar Association (OCBA), Rochester District Court, and the Sheriff's Department.

### **New Lawyers Admission Ceremony**

Twice each year, in May and November, the Circuit Court, in conjunction with the OCBA, conducts a formal New Lawyers Admission Ceremony. These sessions of Court were held in the Commissioners' Auditorium and are presided over by the Chief Judge. In 1999 Chief Judge Edward Sosnick presided over the admission of 111 new lawyers to the practice of law.



*New lawyers in Oakland County sign in before taking their oaths in the Commissioners' Auditorium.*



## A Day In Court

On September 23, 1999, 50 deaf and hearing-impaired students and adults, along with a group of officials from various courts in southeastern Michigan, gathered for “A Day in Court” program sponsored by the Michigan State Supreme Court and the State Court Administrative Office.

The goals of the program were to identify services available to make courthouse appearances understandable for deaf and hearing-impaired people and give court workers a sense of how best to accommodate their special needs.

Participants were given an overview of the civil and criminal processes of the courts, the day-to-day workings of the courthouse, and the functions of the Prosecutor’s Office and Sheriff’s Department. Accompanying the group were a “real time” court reporter (technology immediately displaying on a screen the verbatim translation of a court stenographer) and two sign language interpreters.



*Participants in “A Day in Court” hosted by the Oakland County Circuit Court on September 23, 1999.*

## Oakland County Bench/Bar Conference

On October 1, 1999, the Circuit Court bench and OCBA sponsored the 5<sup>th</sup> Annual Oakland County Bench/Bar Conference with more than 110 judges, attorneys, and court personnel in attendance. Participants identified ways to improve operations in the county's justice system and addressed significant issues concerning criminal law, civil law, family law, and probate.



*Court Administrator Judy Cunningham, Judge Wendy Potts, and OCBA President Elect Betty Lowenthal, co-chairs of the 1999 Bench/Bar Conference.*

## Contributions

The Bench approved contributions to two non-profit organizations that have worked for years to improve the lives of victims of domestic violence. These funds, available through the Circuit Court's Family Counseling Services Fund, are designated monies generated by marriage license fees. These Pontiac-based groups were recognized at the Court's Employees Award Ceremony:

- **HAVEN**, Oakland County's only shelter for battered women and children. Executive Director Hedy Nuriel accepted the contribution on behalf of HAVEN.
- **Women's Survival Center**, dedicated to providing counseling for abused women. The contribution was accepted by Gloria Danna, Executive Director of the Women's Survival Center.

## A FOND FAREWELL

### JUDITH CUNNINGHAM

In October 1999, Judy Cunningham resigned as Circuit Court Administrator/Judicial Assistant to become Corporation Counsel for Oakland County. During Ms. Cunningham's tenure with the Court, she served 6 years as Deputy Court Administrator and 11 years as Court Administrator.



As newly appointed Court Administrator Kevin Oeffner eloquently stated in a recent *Laches* article, "Judy's quick ascension to the highest administrative position in the court was no accident. She is exceedingly capable, determined and bright, and she possesses a work ethic that we should all strive to emulate."

Judy Cunningham has served with distinction on committees established by the State Bar of Michigan, Oakland County Bar Association, State Court Administrative Office, and Oakland County. She recently completed a term as president of the board of directors of the Alumni Association of the Detroit College of Law at Michigan State University.

The Court extends its thanks to Judy Cunningham for her years of dedicated service and wishes her a successful and distinguished career as Corporation Counsel.



## **Special Thanks**

The Court recognizes that people from other county offices make valuable contributions to the Court. Their efforts have earned them special respect and admiration. These people have spent many hours assisting the Court in matters related to facilities, budget and collections, personnel, information technology, courthouse security, case management and record keeping, legal assistance, and others. Their expertise, knowledge, and cooperation is greatly appreciated by the judges, administration, and staff of the Circuit Court.

## **Acknowledgments**

The Circuit Court thanks the following persons and organizations for their role in the preparation of this Annual Report:

The Oakland County Bar Association, The Oakland County Legal News, and photographer John Meiu for providing the special events photographs used throughout the Annual Report.

Sanders Printing of Pontiac, Michigan, for its expertise in combining text, photographs, and charts into the final product for printing and for its production services.

Anne Riopelle and Marcia Travis for developing text and charts used throughout the report.