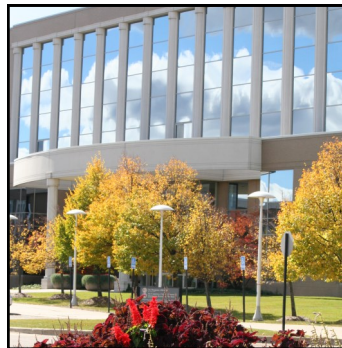


# *Oakland County*

## Sixth Judicial Circuit and Oakland County Probate Court

# *Annual Report*

# 2013





***Oakland County  
Sixth Judicial Circuit Court  
and  
Oakland County Probate Court***

**1200 North Telegraph Road  
Pontiac, MI 48341**

**248-858-1000 Circuit Court  
248-858-0260 Probate Court**

**To learn more about the Sixth Judicial Circuit Court and the  
Oakland County Probate Court, please visit the websites at:**

**[www.oakgov.com/circuit](http://www.oakgov.com/circuit)  
[www.oakgov.com/probate](http://www.oakgov.com/probate)**

#### **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

The Circuit Court and Probate Court would like to thank the following persons and organizations for their collaboration in the preparation of the 2013 Annual Report:

The managers and supervisors of the offices highlighted in this report for their input with regard to office functions and accomplishments.

Phill DeBarr, Data Technology Unit; Beth Sayles, Sayles Studio; John Meiu, Detroit Legal News Publishing LLC; and the Oakland County Bar Association for their pictorial contributions.

Karen Koshen, Court Resource and Program Specialist, for managing the project and pictorial contributions.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<a href="#">Message from the Chief Judges</a> .....	1
<a href="#">Judges of the Circuit Court</a> .....	2
<a href="#">Judges of the Probate Court</a> .....	5
<a href="#">Historical Roster of the Courts</a> .....	6
<a href="#">Letter from the Court Administrators</a> .....	7
<a href="#">Circuit Court – Family Division</a>	
<a href="#">Family Division Overview</a> .....	8
<a href="#">Friend of the Court</a> .....	8
<a href="#">Judicial Support Services</a> .....	9
<a href="#">Court Services</a> .....	13
<a href="#">Casework Services</a> .....	13
<a href="#">Youth Assistance</a> .....	13
<a href="#">Psychological Clinic</a> .....	13
<a href="#">Family-Focused Juvenile Drug Court</a> .....	13
<a href="#">Adult Treatment Court</a> .....	15
<a href="#">Circuit Court – Civil/Criminal Division</a>	
<a href="#">Civil/Criminal Division Overview</a> .....	17
<a href="#">Administrative Support</a> .....	17
<a href="#">Case Management Office</a> .....	18
<a href="#">Criminal Case Support</a> .....	19
<a href="#">Clerk Support</a> .....	19
<a href="#">Jury Office</a> .....	19
<a href="#">Urban Drug Court</a> .....	20
<a href="#">Probate Court – Estates and Mental Health</a>	
<a href="#">Estates and Mental Health Overview</a> .....	22
<a href="#">Mental Health Proceedings</a> .....	22
<a href="#">Guardianship and Conservatorship Proceedings</a> .....	23
<a href="#">Estates and Trusts Proceedings</a> .....	23
<a href="#">Court Records/Vault</a> .....	24
<a href="#">Business Division of the Courts</a>	
<a href="#">Business Division Overview</a> .....	26
<a href="#">Administrative/Financial Unit</a> .....	26
<a href="#">Data Technology Unit</a> .....	26
<a href="#">Court Resource and Program Specialist</a> .....	26
<a href="#">Financial Report</a> .....	29
<a href="#">2013 Year in Review</a> .....	31
<a href="#">Employees Make a Difference</a> .....	33
<a href="#">Investiture</a> .....	35
<a href="#">Dedication</a> .....	35

## MESSAGE FROM THE CHIEF JUDGES



*The Honorable  
Nanci J. Grant  
Circuit Court  
Chief Judge*



*The Honorable  
Linda S. Hallmark  
Probate Court  
Chief Judge*

We are pleased to present the 2013 Annual Report of the Oakland County Circuit and Probate Courts. In it you will find statistics, program descriptions and other information that will help the reader better understand how the Courts operate. While the annual report covers the business and operational aspects of the Courts, space does not permit us to list the many efforts of judges and employees to improve our system of justice and service to the community.

Many of our judges and employees volunteer their time to assist a wide spectrum of organizations that address community issues. Examples include the SAVE Task Force (vulnerable and elderly adults), the Adult Treatment Court, the Family-Focused Juvenile Drug Court, the Urban Drug Court, CARE House (child abuse), Oakland County Coordinating Council Against Domestic Violence, Crossroads for Youth (at-risk children and youth), the Citizens Alliance for the Oakland County Probate & Circuit Courts and the William Booth Legal Aid Clinic.

In addition, members of the judiciary and court staff serve on numerous boards, commissions and committees through the Michigan Supreme Court, the State Court Administrative Office, the State Bar of Michigan, local bar associations and the State of Michigan. Among some of the many areas of service are the Judicial Tenure Commission, the Indigent Defense Advisory Commission, the Governor's Task Force on Child Abuse & Neglect, the Committee on Model Civil Jury Instructions, court form committees, technology committees and the Michigan Judicial Institute. They also actively write and speak on legal issues to better educate the public, the Bar and the Judiciary throughout the State of Michigan.

This is merely the tip of the iceberg. Our judges and staff members are giving back to the Courts, legal profession and community. They are helping to solve problems, connecting to others, transforming lives and outlooks, meeting the needs of others and producing achievements that would otherwise never be realized but for their dedication and commitment to causes bigger than themselves.

It is our pleasure and honor to work with these many individuals. We look forward to continuing our combined efforts on behalf of the citizens of Oakland County. ([return to Table of Contents](#))

## JUDGES OF THE CIRCUIT COURT

**The Honorable  
James Alexander**  
Business Court

[www.oakgov.com/courts/  
circuit/Pages/judges/  
alexander-james.aspx](http://www.oakgov.com/courts/circuit/Pages/judges/alexander-james.aspx)



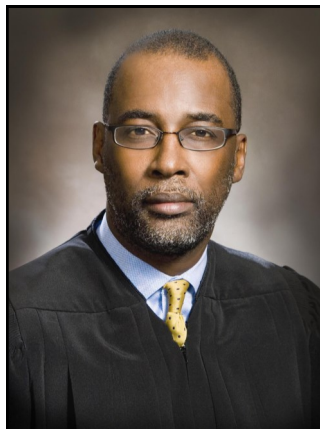
**The Honorable  
Martha D. Anderson**  
Civil/Criminal Division

[www.oakgov.com/courts/  
circuit/Pages/judges/anderson-  
martha.aspx](http://www.oakgov.com/courts/circuit/Pages/judges/anderson-martha.aspx)



**The Honorable  
Leo Bowman**  
Civil/Criminal Division

[www.oakgov.com/courts/  
circuit/Pages/judges/bowman-  
leo.aspx](http://www.oakgov.com/courts/circuit/Pages/judges/bowman-leo.aspx)



**The Honorable  
Mary Ellen Brennan**  
Family Division

[www.oakgov.com/courts/  
circuit/Pages/judges/brennan-  
mary-e.aspx](http://www.oakgov.com/courts/circuit/Pages/judges/brennan-mary-e.aspx)



**The Honorable  
Rae Lee Chabot**  
Civil/Criminal Division

[www.oakgov.com/courts/  
circuit/Pages/judges/chabot-  
rae.aspx](http://www.oakgov.com/courts/circuit/Pages/judges/chabot-rae.aspx)



**The Honorable  
Lisa Gorcyca**  
Family Division

[www.oakgov.com/courts/  
circuit/Pages/judges/gorcyca-  
lisa.aspx](http://www.oakgov.com/courts/circuit/Pages/judges/gorcyca-lisa.aspx)



# JUDGES OF THE CIRCUIT COURT

**The Honorable  
Nanci J. Grant**

Circuit Court Chief Judge  
Civil/Criminal Division

[www.oakgov.com/courts/  
circuit/Pages/judges/grant-  
nanci.aspx](http://www.oakgov.com/courts/circuit/Pages/judges/grant-nanci.aspx)



**The Honorable  
Shalina D. Kumar**  
Circuit Court Chief Judge  
Pro Tempore  
Civil/Criminal Division

[www.oakgov.com/courts/  
circuit/Pages/judges/kumar-  
shalina.aspx](http://www.oakgov.com/courts/circuit/Pages/judges/kumar-shalina.aspx)



**The Honorable  
Denise Langford Morris**  
Civil/Criminal Division

[www.oakgov.com/courts/  
circuit/Pages/judges/langford-  
morris.aspx](http://www.oakgov.com/courts/circuit/Pages/judges/langford-morris.aspx)



**The Honorable  
Cheryl A. Matthews**  
Family Division

[www.oakgov.com/courts/  
circuit/Pages/judges/  
matthews-cheryl.aspx](http://www.oakgov.com/courts/circuit/Pages/judges/matthews-cheryl.aspx)



**The Honorable  
Karen McDonald**  
Family Division

[www.oakgov.com/courts/  
circuit/Pages/judges/  
mcdonald-karen.aspx](http://www.oakgov.com/courts/circuit/Pages/judges/mcdonald-karen.aspx)



**The Honorable  
Phyllis C. McMillen**  
Civil/Criminal Division

[www.oakgov.com/courts/  
circuit/Pages/judges/mcmillen-  
phyllis.aspx](http://www.oakgov.com/courts/circuit/Pages/judges/mcmillen-phyllis.aspx)



## JUDGES OF THE CIRCUIT COURT

**The Honorable  
Rudy Nichols**

Civil/Criminal Division

[www.oakgov.com/courts/circuit/Pages/judges/nichols-rudy.aspx](http://www.oakgov.com/courts/circuit/Pages/judges/nichols-rudy.aspx)



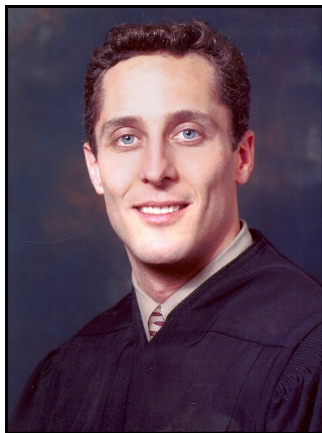
**The Honorable  
Colleen A. O'Brien**  
Civil/Criminal Division

[www.oakgov.com/courts/circuit/Pages/judges/obrien-colleen.aspx](http://www.oakgov.com/courts/circuit/Pages/judges/obrien-colleen.aspx)



**The Honorable  
Daniel Patrick O'Brien**  
Civil/Criminal Division

[www.oakgov.com/courts/circuit/Pages/judges/obrien-daniel.aspx](http://www.oakgov.com/courts/circuit/Pages/judges/obrien-daniel.aspx)



**The Honorable  
Wendy Potts**  
Business Court

[www.oakgov.com/courts/circuit/Pages/judges/potts\\_wendy.aspx](http://www.oakgov.com/courts/circuit/Pages/judges/potts_wendy.aspx)



**The Honorable  
Michael Warren**  
Presiding Judge  
Civil/Criminal Division

[www.oakgov.com/courts/circuit/Pages/judges/warren-michael.aspx](http://www.oakgov.com/courts/circuit/Pages/judges/warren-michael.aspx)



**The Honorable  
Joan E. Young**  
Family Division

[www.oakgov.com/courts/circuit/Pages/judges/young-joan.aspx](http://www.oakgov.com/courts/circuit/Pages/judges/young-joan.aspx)



[\(return to Table of Contents\)](#)

## JUDGES OF THE PROBATE COURT

**The Honorable  
Linda S. Hallmark**  
Probate Court  
Chief Judge

[www.oakgov.com/courts/probate/Pages/judges/hallmark-linda.aspx](http://www.oakgov.com/courts/probate/Pages/judges/hallmark-linda.aspx)



**The Honorable  
Daniel A. O'Brien**  
Probate Court Chief  
Judge Pro Tempore

[www.oakgov.com/courts/probate/Pages/judges/obrien-daniel-a.aspx](http://www.oakgov.com/courts/probate/Pages/judges/obrien-daniel-a.aspx)



**The Honorable  
Elizabeth Pezzetti**  
Probate Court  
Presiding Judge - Family  
Division

[www.oakgov.com/courts/probate/Pages/judges/pezzetti-elizabeth.aspx](http://www.oakgov.com/courts/probate/Pages/judges/pezzetti-elizabeth.aspx)



**The Honorable  
Kathleen A. Ryan**  
Probate Judge

[www.oakgov.com/courts/probate/Pages/judges/ryan-kathleen.aspx](http://www.oakgov.com/courts/probate/Pages/judges/ryan-kathleen.aspx)



[\(return to Table of Contents\)](#)



## CIRCUIT COURT BENCH

Sanford M. Green	1848–1852	James S. Thorburn	1963–1988	Barry L. Howard	1989–2001
Joseph Copeland	1852–1858	William R. Beasley	1966–1976	Deborah G. Tyner	1991–2006
James S. Dewey	1870–1874	Farrell E. Roberts	1967–1982	Rudy J. Nichols	1991–Present
Levi B. Taft	1873–1876	Daniel C. Devine	1966–1966	Denise Langford Morris	1992–Present
Aug C. Baldwin	1876–1880	Robert L. Templin	1967–1996	John J. McDonald	1993–2010
Silas B. Gaskill	1880–1882	William P. Hampton	1970–1976	Nanci J. Grant	1997–Present
William Stickney	1882–1888	Richard D. Kuhn	1973–2004	Joan E. Young	1997–Present
Joseph B. Moore	1888–1896	John N. O'Brien	1973–1993	Wendy L. Potts	1998–Present
George W. Smith	1896–1908	Robert B. Webster	1973–1982	Colleen A. O'Brien	1998–Present
Kleber P. Rockwell	1917–1921	Steven N. Andrews	1976–2008	Patrick J. Brennan	2001–2004
Frank L. Covert	1919–1933	Alice L. Gilbert	1978–1992	Rae Lee Chabot	2001–Present
Glenn C. Gillespie	1923–1934	Alice L. Gilbert	1995–2002	James M. Alexander	2001–Present
Frank L. Doty	1928–1965	Francis X. O'Brien	1977–1997	Michael Warren	2002–Present
Goodloe H. Rogers	1935–1935	Hilda R. Gage	1978–1996	Daniel Patrick O'Brien	2003–Present
George B. Hartrick	1935–1958	Bernard L. Kaufman	1979–1979	Martha D. Anderson	2003–Present
H. Russel Holland	1935–1963	Gene Schnelz	1979–2007	Mark A. Goldsmith	2004–2010
Clark J. Adams	1956–1973	George LaPlata	1979–1985	Cheryl A. Matthews	2005–Present
William J. Beer	1958–1980	Robert C. Anderson	1981–1998	Leo Bowman	2007–Present
Theodore Hughes	1959–1959	David F. Breck	1982–2000	Shalina D. Kumar	2007–Present
Stanton G. Dondero	1959–1965	Fred M. Mester	1982–2008	Lisa Gorcyca	2009–Present
Frederick C. Ziem	1959–1986	Norman L. Lippitt	1985–1989	Mary Ellen Brennan	2009–Present
Arthur E. Moore	1963–1976	Jessica R. Cooper	1987–2000	Phyllis C. McMillen	2010–Present
Philip Pratt	1963–1970	Edward Sosnick	1989–2012	Karen McDonald	2013–Present

## PROBATE COURT BENCH

Dr. William Thompson	1821–1823	Alfred Crawford	1869–1872	Donald E. Adams	1960–1977
Nathaniel Millerd	1823–1826	Junius Ten Eyck	1872–1873	Norman R. Barnard	1963–1988
Smith Weeks	1826–1827	Joseph C. Powell	1873–1876	Eugene A. Moore	1966–2010
Gideon O. Whittemore	1827–1828	James A. Jacokes	1877–1880	John J. O'Brien	1975–1988
Williams F. Mosely	1828	Joseph C. Powell	1881–1884	Barry M. Grant	1977–2008
Ogden Clarke	1828–1832	Thomas L. Patterson	1885–1900	Sandra G. Silver	1988–2000
Stephen Reeves	1832–1844	Joseph S. Stockwell	1901–1909	Joan E. Young	1989–1997
M. LaMont Bagg	1845–1848	Kleber P. Rockwell	1909–1918	Wendy L. Potts	1997–1997
Michael E. Crofoot	1849–1856	Ross Stockwell	1917–1928	Linda S. Hallmark	1998–Present
Oscar F. North	1857–1861	Dan A. McGaffey	1928–1937	Elizabeth Pezzetti	2001–Present
Harry C. Andrews	1861–1863	James H. Lynch	1937–1938	Daniel A. O'Brien	2009–Present
Zephaniah B. Knight	1863–1868	Arthur E. Moore	1938–1963	Kathleen A. Ryan	2011–Present

[\(return to Table of Contents\)](#)

## LETTER FROM THE COURT ADMINISTRATORS



**Kevin M. Oeffner**  
**Circuit Court**  
**Administrator**



**Rebecca A. Schnelz**  
**Probate Court**  
**Administrator**

Elected Officials and Citizens of Oakland County:

The pages that follow will provide you with general information about the Courts' programs, projects and accomplishments, as well as statistical information on caseload volume and trends. We hope you will find the annual report both informative and useful to your understanding of the judicial system. We welcome your comments and invite you to make suggestions regarding other information you would like to see available here.

Both the Circuit Court and Probate Court faced many challenges during 2013. Through the dedication and efforts of the judges and court staff, the Courts met each challenge and succeeded in their goal of maintaining excellence of service to the Oakland County community. We look forward to the new challenges and innovations we will see in 2014.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Kevin M. Oeffner".

Kevin M. Oeffner  
Circuit Court Administrator

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Rebecca A. Schnelz".

Rebecca A. Schnelz  
Probate Court Administrator

[\(return to Table of Contents\)](#)



**Lisa Langton**  
Deputy Court  
Administrator

The Family Division, overseen by Deputy Court Administrator Lisa Langton, includes the Friend of the Court operations, Judicial Support, Court Services, the Family-Focused Juvenile Drug Court and the Adult Treatment Court.

Judge Elizabeth Pezzetti is the presiding judge of the Circuit Court – Family

Division. This division is composed of seven judges who are elected to six-year terms in nonpartisan elections. The judges hear domestic relations cases involving divorce, child support and paternity matters. They also preside over child abuse and neglect cases, juvenile delinquent matters, conservator and guardianship files and handle personal protection orders. Assisting the judges within this division are judicial staff attorneys, judicial secretaries and judicial clerks.



**FOC Referee Supervisor Ron Foon received the 2013 FOC Supervisor of the Year award at the Michigan Family Support Council annual conference in October. Michigan Family Support Council Board Member Lisa Robinson presented the award to Ron Foon.**

## FRIEND OF THE COURT

The Friend of the Court (FOC) is responsible for assisting in domestic relations cases by investigating and enforcing issues involving custody, support and parenting time. The Friend of the Court also assists parties with the registration of their court orders as they are moving in and out of the State of Michigan. Further, the Friend of the Court is responsible for enforcement of medical provisions in court orders. Both unpaid medical bills and requirements that parents insure their children are handled by the FOC.

Friend of the Court referees hold hearings to enforce and modify Family Division orders regarding support, custody and parenting time. Referees conduct early intervention conferences when a divorce is initiated to help divorcing clients understand the FOC and the divorce process.

FOC family counselors provide the SMILE program (Start Making It Livable for Everyone) to help parents understand the impact of divorce on their children. Forms to assist parties in making requests for assistance by the Friend of the Court are available on the website at [www.oakgov.com/courts/foc](http://www.oakgov.com/courts/foc).

## SUMMARY OF DOMESTIC RELATIONS ACTIVITY

### New Filing Activity

	<u>2010</u>	<u>2011</u>	<u>2012</u>	<u>2013</u>
<b>Domestic Relations</b>				
Without Children	2,544	2,425	2,496	2,341
With Children	2,495	2,356	2,411	2,159
Paternity	1,058	986	905	905
Interstate	77	94	73	66
Support	1,387	1,095	1,123	1,171
Other	255	256	294	339
<b>Total New Filings</b>	<b>7,816</b>	<b>7,212</b>	<b>7,302</b>	<b>6,981</b>

[\(return to Table of Contents\)](#)

## **CIRCUIT COURT – FAMILY DIVISION**

### **FRIEND OF THE COURT OFFERS NEW SERVICES**

The Friend of the Court (FOC) accessed new technology which allowed it to offer several new services in 2013. Oakland County was the largest county in Michigan to pilot a new statewide system known as MiCASE, which has for the first time made payment and other case-specific information available online to parties with domestic relations cases that are managed by the Friend of the Court.

MiCASE is a secure database that can be used for families to access and print payment history reports and forms and to review hearing dates and enforcement actions. Oakland County participated in a pilot project to allow parties to ask questions about their case online to an FOC staff person. All inquiries receive a response within two business days. The pilot project began in late January 2013. By the end of the year, Friend of the Court staff had responded to 975 online inquiries. The MiCASE system also allows parties to access copies of forms that have been previously sent to them by the Michigan Child Support Enforcement System. Copies of forms, like the income withholding notice, end-of-year statements and emancipation notification letters, may be reprinted from the MiCASE system.

MiCASE can be accessed by users at any time of the day or night. Friend of the Court customers can go to [www.michigan.gov/micase](http://www.michigan.gov/micase) and sign up today. A link to the MiCASE website is also available on the Friend of the Court home page located at [www.oakgov.com/courts/foc](http://www.oakgov.com/courts/foc).

The Friend of the Court also began accepting credit card payments in 2013. Customers who are in the Friend of the Court office may go to the banking window and make payments with Discover, MasterCard and Visa credit cards. This service is provided by G2G Cloud Solutions and accessed via Access Oakland County.

Customers may still choose to make an online payment directly to the Michigan State Disbursement Unit by utilizing the kiosk found in the Friend of the Court lobby or from their own personal computer. While some customers easily navigate the website to make their credit card payments, others would prefer to simply hand a card to an FOC employee for processing. Further, the Michigan State Disbursement Unit accepts only MasterCard and Discover, but does not accept Visa payments. The processing timeframe for credit card payments made at our banking window is the same as an over-the-counter cash payment. This program began in September 2013. By the end of 2013, the Friend of the Court had processed \$93,751.66 from 158 payers using a credit card. The high volume of receipts processed demonstrates how important this program will continue to be in ensuring timely support payments to Oakland County families.

During 2013, the FOC planned the rollout of a new electronic system for the public to use when communicating with the office. The “eforms” system allows individuals with a case to submit 15 different forms to the office from the comfort of their own home or office.

Eforms can be used at any time of the day or night to do such things as request a review of a support order, change personal information on file at the FOC and even to file a grievance. Of interest to attorneys, the Request to be Excused from Early Intervention Conference (EIC) form is also available. Even better, this service is free!

Whether eforms or just regular forms, all forms found on the FOC website can be accessed and completed online at the following web location: [www.oakgov.com/courts/foc](http://www.oakgov.com/courts/foc) at the tab marked “forms & applications.” Forms identified as eforms can then be submitted electronically simply by clicking a “send to FOC” icon at the bottom of each form.

Friend of the Court staff continue to serve on many statewide committees and workgroups to improve the child support program in Michigan.

### **JUDICIAL SUPPORT SERVICES**

Headed by William Bartlam, Manager of Judicial Support/Judicial Assistant, this area consists of the Juvenile Referees, Juvenile Intake, Juvenile

Adoption and the Personal Protection Order Office. In Mr. Bartlam’s role as Judicial Assistant, he is also the lead legal advisor for the Family Division.

The support staff in Juvenile Intake process all incoming requests for action, perform record checks to identify prior court involvement, forward documents to the Prosecutor’s Office and schedule

## CIRCUIT COURT – FAMILY DIVISION

preliminary hearings, diversion conferences, traffic hearings and other matters for the four referees assigned to Juvenile Intake. They maintain all records for cases that are handled informally and also staff the reception desks on the ground and first floor of the courthouse. They coordinate with the County Clerk's staff when a case is authorized for formal handling.

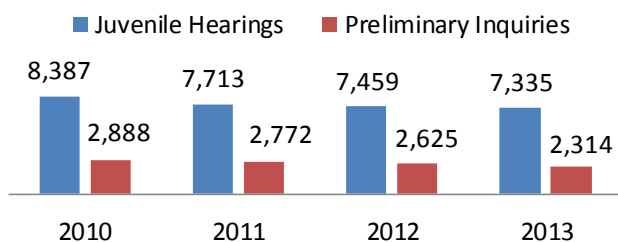
The support staff in the Juvenile Deputy Register and Juvenile File Room area prepare files for hearings as well as create, maintain and update the physical and electronic records for each case, the court schedule, confidential files, transcripts and exhibits and assist the public and parties in cases before the Juvenile Court. They prepare court orders for all hearings heard by referees and distribute all court orders after

they have been processed by the County Clerk's Office. They also coordinate the destruction of records as prescribed by law.

The eight Juvenile Court referees assist Family Division judges by conducting hearings and recommending decisions following the hearings. The referees represent the Court 24 hours per day, 365 days each year. They act on requests for detention of juveniles and placement of children who are at substantial risk of harm. Referees act as the gatekeeper to Juvenile Court by evaluating each complaint or petition filed, then making the decision whether to grant or deny authorization, to divert the matter or use informal resolution methods. Where no judge is demanded for the trial of a matter, referees serve as finders of fact in delinquency or neglect and abuse cases. Referees recommend the appropriate disposition of cases, including the recommendation for termination of parental rights in certain instances.

The Attorney Appointment Specialist maintains a database of attorneys qualified by education and experience to represent indigent parties who request a lawyer. The specialist matches requests for court-appointed lawyers with attorneys on the roster. This is done in thousands of instances for Family Division

### Juvenile Hearings vs Preliminary Inquiries Held



### JUVENILE COMPETENCY

On March 28, 2013, the Juvenile Competency to Stand Trial law (2012 PA 541) took effect. This law introduced new standards and procedures for juvenile proceedings. The Court was quickly presented with cases requiring determinations of competency to stand trial. In implementing this law, judicial support staff:

- Conducted in-service trainings for judges, referees and attorneys;
- Developed a sequenced procedural guide that reflected deadlines, identified the person responsible for a given action and showed the progression of steps;
- In the absence of state-promulgated court order forms, developed six court orders that reflect the legal requirements of the competency laws;
- Worked with the Juvenile Court's contract psychologists to ensure their reports met the various provisions of the law.

The law is still in the process of being fully implemented. The Court is coordinating with qualified juvenile forensic mental health examiners and qualified restoration providers to provide the full spectrum of services demanded by this statute.

## CIRCUIT COURT – FAMILY DIVISION

and Probate cases each year. The specialist then processes all pertinent documents relating to the appointment.

The personal protection order (PPO) coordinator provides legal expertise in both the issuance and enforcement of PPOs. The coordinator oversees the support staff in the PPO office who assist petitioners in completing the application process. In the PPO enforcement process, the coordinator also works with Pre-Trial Services in developing bond recommendations for incarcerated respondents and with petitioners who have requested show cause orders. The coordinator also attends all PPO arraignment proceedings and Show Cause hearings and, as applicable, makes recommendations to judges on the disposition of the matter.

The permanency coordinators work with the two judges and two referees who have a specialized

Adoption Permanency Docket. They monitor the progress toward adoption permanency for each child on this specialized docket and maintain a specialized database to assist them. They monitor both foster care and adoption caseworker performance and work to eliminate barriers to a child's adoption.

The permanency coordinators prepare hearing summaries for the jurists, draft case scheduling orders, attend each child's hearing and serve as a specialist resource for both legal and social work professionals. They lead the agency review meetings where the Court assesses overall agency performance and identify specific areas where improvement is required.

The Adoptions unit staff work with the public and adoption agencies to provide both information on past adoption cases and oversight and supervision of adoption petitions. The professional and support

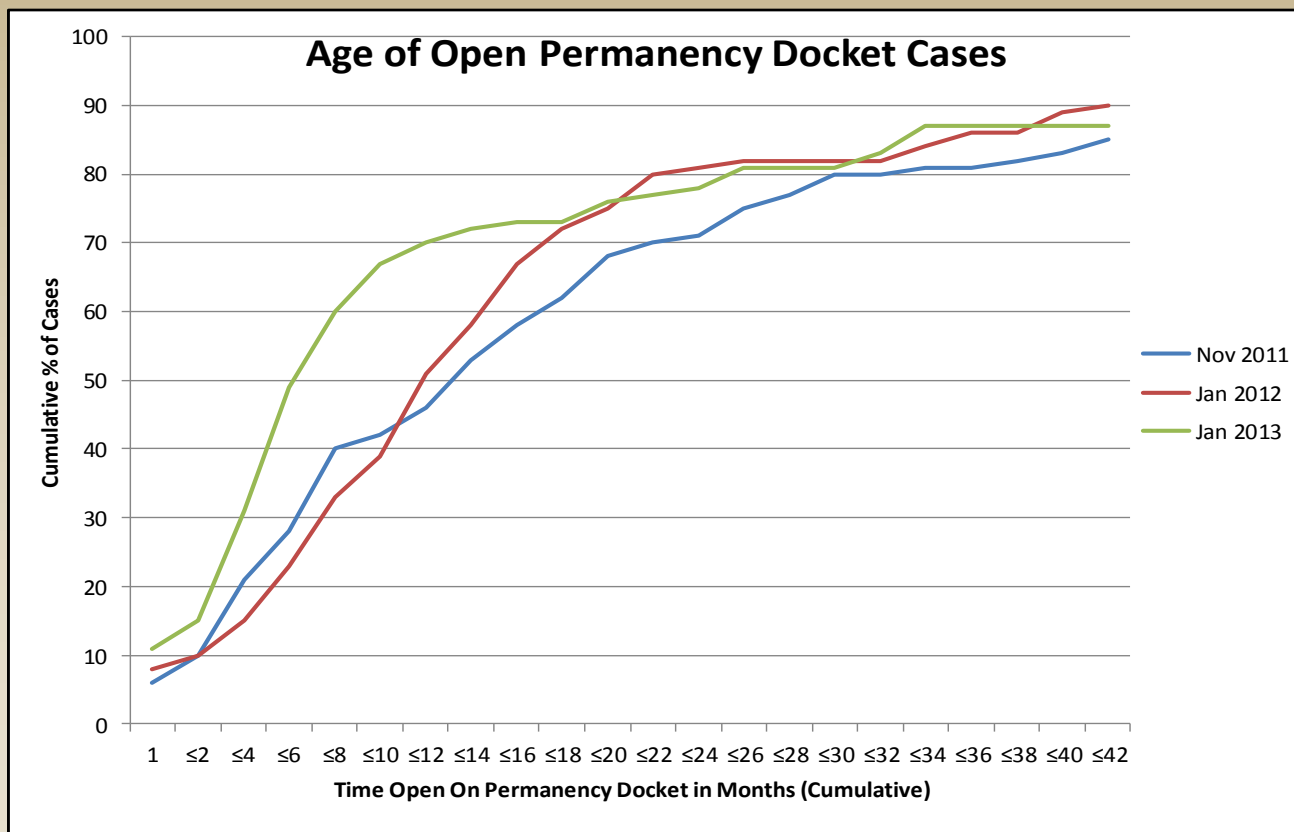
<b>SUMMARY OF JUDICIAL SUPPORT ACTIVITY</b>				
<b>New Filing Activity</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2012</b>	<b>2013</b>
<b>Juvenile/Adoptions</b>				
Delinquency	2,714	2,611	2,443	2,036
Child Protective Proceedings	325	314	335	405
Juvenile Traffic Tickets	112	100	72	73
Adoption Petitions	419	407	340	351
Subtotal	<b>3,570</b>	<b>3,432</b>	<b>3,190</b>	<b>2,865</b>
<b>Personal Protection Orders</b>				
Domestic	1,892	1,692	1,763	1,666
Non-Domestic	830	682	945	746
Juvenile	35	40	55	57
Subtotal	<b>2,757</b>	<b>2,414</b>	<b>2,763</b>	<b>2,469</b>
<b>Miscellaneous Family</b>				
Name Change	478	509	488	462
Other	31	50	30	34
Subtotal	<b>509</b>	<b>559</b>	<b>518</b>	<b>496</b>
<b>Total New Filings</b>	<b>6,836</b>	<b>6,405</b>	<b>6,471</b>	<b>5,830</b>

## BENDING THE TIME CURVE ON THE PERMANENCY DOCKET

A child’s journey through the Child Welfare and Foster Care System may end with reunification, but for some children who can never return to their birth parents’ home, the challenge is finding the “forever family” who ultimately adopts the child. Where parental neglect leads to termination of parental rights, the Adoption Permanency Docket focuses on reducing the time the child will be in foster care post-termination and on eliminating the barriers to the child’s adoption. There are ten milestones on this path and the objective is to attain them promptly while ensuring the child is in the most appropriate adoptive home.

Six years ago, this Court launched a specialized Adoption Permanency Docket. Key to this are the two judges and two referees who hear each child’s case on an accelerated schedule and two permanency coordinators who work with the foster care and adoption agencies responsible for aiding the child and the family through the adoption process. With special attention and clear expectations, the time a child’s case is “open,” i.e., is between termination of parental rights and the final adoption, has been reduced by many months. On this Adoption Permanency Docket, children’s cases are not allowed to drift along from hearing to hearing without progress.

Following a two-year pilot study and a subsequent one-year review, in November 2011 the Court hired the two adoption permanency coordinators. They have helped the court bring about systemic change. The chart below shows how the time has been reduced and the median time a case is open has dropped by 8 months through the efforts of the Permanency Docket team. The time curve has been “bent,” that is, it has been pulled forward by these many months.



This has been beneficial to all – children, their families and to the agencies who serve them. It has also been financially beneficial to the court and county government, who pay for many fewer days of foster care costs. It is truly a “win-win” situation.

## CIRCUIT COURT – FAMILY DIVISION

staff are charged with ensuring that the confidentiality of information is maintained and that the adoption process is handled expeditiously as required by law. ([return to Table of Contents](#))

### COURT SERVICES

This unit provides juvenile probation, casework services, clinical services through the Court Psychological Clinic, community diversion and re-entry services through the Youth Assistance program. It also includes both the Family-Focused Juvenile Drug Court and the Adult Treatment Court programs.

**Casework Services** — The Casework Services Juvenile Probation unit is responsible for all delinquency cases authorized for the Court by the Intake Department and assists cases through the adjudication process when necessary. Upon adjudication, the Casework unit is responsible for making recommendations regarding disposition. During post-disposition, it assists in implementing court orders, including the monitoring of probation, restitution, community service, restorative justice, parent education and counseling.

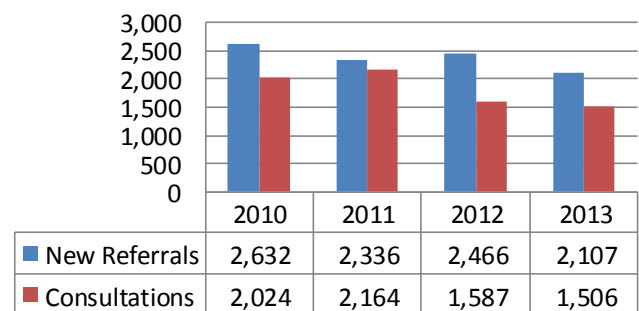
The Casework Department underwent a reorganization in 2013. The department now includes six caseworkers and six interns assigned to the Intensive Probation Docket who are located in the courthouse. There are also 20 caseworkers divided between the courthouse and the Troy satellite office assigned to the Standard Probation Docket.

Through expansion of the utility and use of the Casework database, staff have been able to enter and print their contact/progress notes in the database, which allows supervisory staff to review notes on a real-time basis.

**Youth Assistance** — As the prevention arm of the Court's continuum of service, Youth Assistance uses a two-pronged approach to strengthen youth and

families. Professional staff placed in 26 field offices throughout the county provide family-focused casework to at-risk youth referred by the police, schools and the Intake Department of the Court. Staff also work with a volunteer board of directors in each community that identify needs, raise funds and then plan and implement primary prevention programs. Youth Assistance has a unique tri-sponsorship structure where staff is hired by the Court, but each local program is also sponsored by the school district and municipalities.

### Youth Assistance Casework Referrals by Year



**Psychological Clinic** — The Clinical Services unit, also known as the Psychological Clinic, is responsible for aiding jurists in making informed decisions by providing forensic evaluations of children and families who are involved with the Court. The clinic offers specialized treatment services to clients and clinicians are available for case consultation with Court staff and others. It also conducts and coordinates training and research, including program evaluations and staff development. Clinicians often testify at court hearings in neglect cases. The Court Clinic facilitated new provisions to align its work with the new competency statute.

**Family-Focused Juvenile Drug Court** — Also known as OPTIONS (Owning the Problem - Trusting In Our New Skills), this court integrates drug treatment services with juvenile justice system case



*The Honorable Joan E. Young (front row—third from left) and the Honorable Colleen A. O’Brien (front row—third from right) presided over the 34th graduation ceremony for the Adult Treatment Court in January. This was the second largest class of graduates for the ATC program. As of December 2013, 155 participants have graduated from the Adult Treatment Court.*



processing by including therapeutic intervention to substance-using youth and their families.

The Juvenile Drug Court (JDC) team, comprised of Presiding Judge Mary Ellen Brennan, court staff, defense counsel and substance abuse and mental health professionals, works together using a non-adversarial approach. The mission of the program is to “promote public safety and reduce juvenile drug crime rates by helping substance abusing juvenile offenders and their families achieve drug-free lifestyles and healthy family relationships.”

The OPTIONS program is a joint effort between the justice and public health treatment systems. Various incentives and sanctions (penalties) and frequent random drug screenings are utilized to ensure compliance with program rules.

In November 2013, the Juvenile Drug Court hired Nate Gilling to fill the vacated second JDC probation officer position. He was formerly with Crossroads for Youth, serving as their director of programs. With his addition to the program, the Juvenile Drug Court can serve an additional 15 youth and their families in Oakland County.

### **FAMILY-FOCUSED JUVENILE DRUG COURT**

#### **“SELF-EXPLORATION THROUGH ART”**

Participants of the Oakland County Family-Focused Juvenile Drug Court took part in the second annual “Self-Exploration Through Art” program. This art-therapy program was designed to provide insight into the therapeutic aspects of art as a means of self-exploration.

Family therapist Ellene Corace, LLPC, ATR, led this year’s project wherein students were given various mediums and asked to explore self-expression through visual imagery. The works of art of the participants were unveiled for the first time at the Juvenile Drug Court Art Show which was held in March.

Art therapy is a process used to identify how the participant’s issues — substance use, abuse or addiction — got them into the program, what their triggers are and how they can be addressed going forward.

The poster to the right is a collage of the different pieces of artwork and mediums from the Juvenile Drug Court participants.



## **CIRCUIT COURT – FAMILY DIVISION**

**Adult Treatment Court** — This court offers alternative sentencing for non-violent adult felony offenders who have a history of drug and/or alcohol dependence. Judge Joan Young presides over the male participants in the program and Judge Colleen O'Brien presides over the female participants.

The Adult Treatment Court (ATC) is a positive alternative of intensive probation and substance abuse treatment instead of long terms of incarceration for non-violent felony offenders whose substance abuse leads them to commit crimes. The ATC seeks to break the cycle of recidivism and enhance public safety and the lives of its participants.

In 2009, the Adult Treatment Court incorporated a mental health component into the programming to better serve those who have both an Axis I diagnosis and a Substance Use Disorder.

In March of 2013, Heather Willis, joined the Adult Treatment Court team as the Community Mental Health (CMH) liaison. Ms. Willis worked with Common Ground working with the mental health population at the Psychiatric Screening unit, now known as the Crisis Resource Center. She screens all ATC participants to determine whether they qualify for CMH services and makes recommendations for level of care for both mental health and substance use disorder issues.

Jacqueline Howes-Evanson serves as the supervisor for both the Family-Focused Juvenile Drug Court and the Adult Treatment Court programs. Created in 2008, the RESTORE Foundation was established to help financially support the Oakland County Circuit Court drug court programs. ([return to Table of Contents](#))

## **CIRCUIT COURT – FAMILY DIVISION ACCOMPLISHMENTS**

### **Friend of the Court**

- Held 2,532 Early Intervention Conferences with parties going through the divorce process in 2013. These conferences allowed parties to a divorce access to the Friend of the Court referee early in the divorce process. The conferences allowed FOC staff to assist in the settlement of a divorce and to provide information about services available at the Friend of the Court.
- FOC family counselors addressed 26,112 complaints regarding parenting time.
- FOC referees held 24,245 hearings to enforce custody, parenting time and support.

### **Judicial Support**

In 2013, Judicial Support staff collaborated with other agencies to include the following:

- Co-sponsored the 15th Annual Police Orientation Training to Oakland County's Juvenile Justice System in conjunction with the Oakland County Prosecutor's Office and various service providers, which was attended by more than 50 police officers.
- Developed the "Crossover Youth Practice Model" for 2014 implementation in Oakland County with the Michigan Department of Human Services and other agencies. This project focuses on the identification and coordinated delivery of services to minors who are dually involved in the Child Welfare and Juvenile Justice systems.

## **CIRCUIT COURT – FAMILY DIVISION ACCOMPLISHMENTS (continued)**

### **Judicial Support (continued)**

- Worked with Michigan State University and the State Court Administrative Office in the Indian Child hearing protocol. The monitors from Michigan State were given access to court hearings and records of hearings to ensure conformity with the Indian Child Welfare Act and the Michigan Indian Family Preservation Act.
- Participated with the Adoption Oversight workgroup, which works to continually improve the adoption process. Staff consistently bring insight and experience to this workgroup.
- The permanency coordinators worked with private child placing agencies offering adoption services in reviewing agency performance in facilitating adoptions and met with both Department of Human Services and agency executives and management in data-driven performance reviews.
- Along with the State Court Administrative Office's Judicial Information Services staff, continued preparations for conversion from the county system to the Trial Court Services system which is scheduled to be implemented in 2014.

### **Casework Services**

- Completed a reorganization of the unit structure by bringing all caseworkers assigned to Intensive Probation caseloads to the courthouse under the supervision of one supervisor. Standard Probation casework staff was divided equally between the Troy satellite office and the courthouse. There are currently six caseworkers and six interns assigned to the Intensive Probation group and 10 caseworkers assigned to each of the Standard Probation groups.
- Continued to expand the utility and use of the Casework database by incorporating the ability for staff to enter and print their contact/progress notes in the database which allows supervisory staff to review notes on a real-time basis.

### **Youth Assistance**

- Recipient of a mini-grant from the Great Start Collaborative of Oakland County in order to offer four Parent Cafes. Parent Cafes help families reduce barriers and stigma that may be attached with seeking support and information about parenting and offers another resource to help Youth Assistance families develop tools to use in their day-to-day lives.
- For the third year in a row, a mentor from the Youth Assistance Mentors Plus program was recognized as one of the top five mentors in the state at the Governor's Service Awards Ceremony. Congratulations to Dave Walker.

### **Family-Focused Juvenile Drug Court**

- As of December 31, 2013, 131 youth have graduated from the program and 269 youth and 452 family members have been served.

### **Adult Treatment Court**

- As of December 31, 2013, 155 participants have graduated from the Adult Treatment Court.

[\(return to Table of Contents\)](#)

## CIRCUIT COURT – CIVIL/CRIMINAL DIVISION



**Richard Lynch**  
**Manager-Circuit Court**  
**Civil/Criminal Division**

Judge Michael Warren is the presiding judge of the Civil/Criminal Division of the Sixth Circuit Court. The division is composed of 13 judges who are elected for six-year terms in nonpartisan elections.

Judges hear civil cases with damages in excess of \$25,000 and criminal cases involving felony charges. Civil/Criminal

Division judges also preside over appeals from the district courts and administrative agencies as well as some Probate Court appeals. Assisting the judges within the division are judicial staff attorneys, judicial secretaries and judicial clerks.

Judges also receive support from the employees in the Civil/Criminal Division. Richard Lynch, the manager of this division, directly supervises the legal support and Urban Drug Court units. He works with Gwynne Starkey, Chief of the Circuit Court Civil/Criminal Division, who oversees the Administrative Support staff, Case Management Office, Clerk Support, Criminal Case Support and the Jury Office.

As identified below, the Civil/Criminal Division provides a variety of services to the Court and those who use it to ensure access and that cases proceed smoothly and efficiently. ([return to Table of Contents](#))

### **ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT**

Administrative Support staff offer legal and administrative support to the Court. Addressing issues as diverse as legal support, court interpreters

### **TRANSLATION ENSURED**

The Michigan Supreme Court issued two new court rules, MCR 1.111 and MCR 8.127 ([http://courts.mi.gov/Courts/MichiganSupremeCourt/rules/court-rules-admin-matters/Adopted/2012-03\\_2013-09-11\\_formatted.pdf](http://courts.mi.gov/Courts/MichiganSupremeCourt/rules/court-rules-admin-matters/Adopted/2012-03_2013-09-11_formatted.pdf)), and an administrative order, A.O. 2013-8 ([http://courts.mi.gov/Courts/MichiganSupremeCourt/rules/court-rules-admin-matters/Adopted/2012-03\\_2013-09-11\\_formatted%20AO%202013-8.pdf](http://courts.mi.gov/Courts/MichiganSupremeCourt/rules/court-rules-admin-matters/Adopted/2012-03_2013-09-11_formatted%20AO%202013-8.pdf)), in September 2013. The rules and order address the qualification and use of foreign language interpreters in Michigan courts and complete a move designed to ensure that Limited English Proficient (LEP) individuals enjoyed full access to Michigan courts. Moving on a rapid timetable, the Sixth Circuit Court prepared a Language Access Plan (LAO 2013-04J (<http://www.oakgov.com/courts/circuit/Documents/ao/2013-04J.pdf>) with the Oakland County Probate Court that the Supreme Court authorized in December. The quick action and smooth transition of the Circuit and Probate Courts to the new rules and order reflects their joint efforts throughout the years to ensure access to LEP individuals.

Changes one may notice regarding the use of foreign language interpreters include:

1. Applicants for the Courts' interpreter list must meet the new requirements established by the Michigan Supreme Court;
2. The Courts appoint interpreters for LEP parties and witnesses for all court cases, MCR 1.111(B)(1);
3. Courts may appoint interpreters for LEP interested parties, MCR 1.111(B)(2);
4. Courts shall issue an order when denying a request for a foreign language interpreter;
5. When courts use uncertified foreign language interpreters, they must determine through voir dire that the uncertified interpreter is competent to interpret for the proceeding; and
6. The creation of a Foreign Language Board of Review to develop practices and procedures regarding the qualification and use of interpreters, to review and modify as needed the Foreign Language Interpreter Code of Professional Responsibility and review complaints against foreign language interpreters.

Given the strong history the Circuit and Probate Courts share on providing access to LEP individuals, the Courts anticipate a seamless implementation of the new rules.

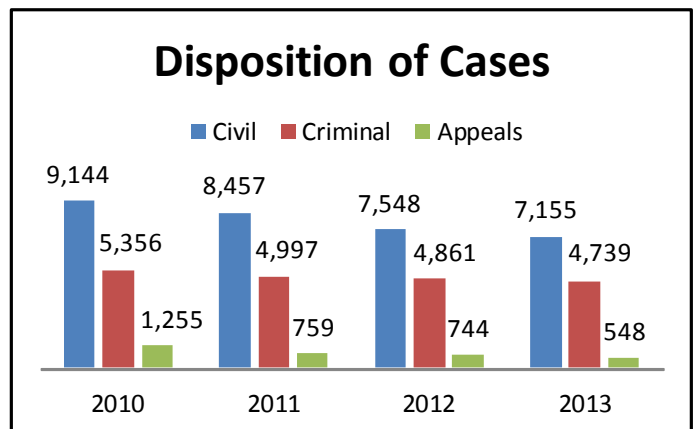
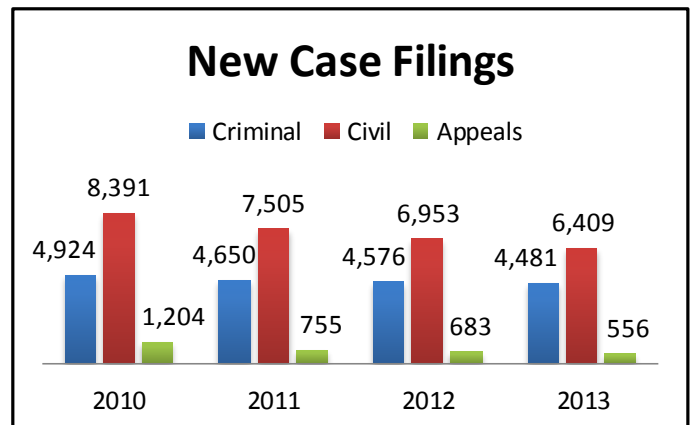
# CIRCUIT COURT – CIVIL/CRIMINAL DIVISION

and bar liaison, staff work to ensure access to the Court and effective and timely resolution of cases. Critically, staff offer direct support to the Court on unique issues that require extensive research or study issues that have court-wide implications. The existence of this resource permits the Court to operate more efficiently for litigants, the bar and internal stakeholders. ([return to Table of Contents](#))

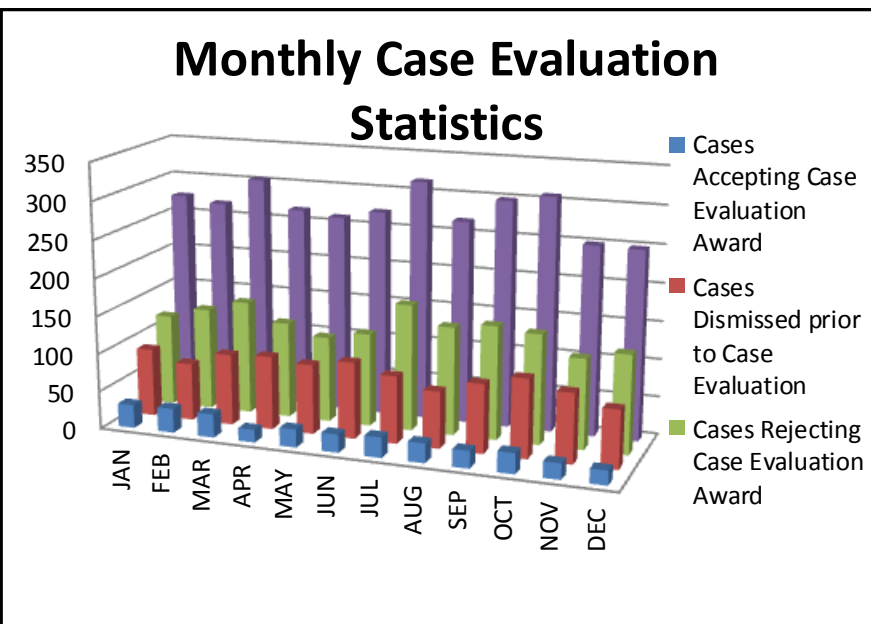
## CASE MANAGEMENT OFFICE

The Case Management Office (CMO) coordinates Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) programs for the Circuit and Probate Courts. The office works closely with the State Court Administrative Office, Oakland County Bar Association and Oakland Mediation Center on program development and implementation. Case evaluation and mediation are two common ADR processes used by the Court to settle cases prior to trial. The CMO provides support by scheduling cases and evaluators at the appropriate time in the life of the case.

Through the efforts of the Case Management Office, judges can spend more time on the matters pending before them to the benefit of the attorneys and parties associated with those cases and the public which benefits from an efficient system of justice.



The CMO also supports the Discovery Facilitator Program. Discovery facilitators are volunteer facilitators who meet with attorneys during the miscellaneous motion call to assist counsel in working through discovery disputes.



CMO personnel perform a number of administrative duties to ensure the efficient processing of cases. Duties include reassignment of cases, receipt and processing praecipes for the weekly miscellaneous motion call and requests for the Judge On-Line program. In addition, staff prepare docket and program reports and assist the Court as needed with special dockets. ([return to Table of Contents](#))

# CIRCUIT COURT – CIVIL/CRIMINAL DIVISION

## WE MEAN BUSINESS

In 2012, the Sixth Circuit Court created a specialized Business Court docket as part of the Michigan Supreme Court’s pilot project for business courts. The Supreme Court discontinued the Business Court pilot when the Michigan Legislature passed 2012 PA 333, which created a statutory business court in qualifying jurisdictions. The Sixth Circuit adopted Local Administrative Order (LAO) 2013-03 to implement the statutory business court.

The Supreme Court named Judge Wendy Potts and Judge James Alexander to preside over the intensive Business Court docket. In addition to the business dockets, both judges also retained their full criminal caseloads. To ensure an orderly transition to the Business Court, the Court began creating dockets for the participating judges from newly filed qualifying cases beginning on June 3, 2013. At the same time, both judges worked to resolve their existing caseloads. This enabled the Court to proceed as efficiently as possible with few disruptions to pending cases. The plans appear to work. By December 31, 2013, the two judges had received a combined total of 613 new business cases. This was in line with the number of case assignments to non-Business Court dockets. While it is too early to draw any conclusions, early data suggests that the intensive case management and early judicial intervention used by the Business Court quickly resolves many cases.

## CRIMINAL CASE SUPPORT

The Criminal Case Support unit assigns judges on all felony criminal cases. Staff also appoint counsel for indigent defendants at case initiation and for post-conviction or appellate matters.

In addition, the unit works with the Oakland County Sheriff’s Office and other county and state agencies on effective management of the Oakland County Jail’s inmate population. The Criminal Case Support unit also works with the Michigan Department of Corrections to ensure the timely processing and receipt of pre-sentence referrals and with the Reimbursement Division regarding the payment of fines, fees and costs. ([return to Table of Contents](#))

## CLERK SUPPORT

The Clerk Support unit oversees the training and development of the judicial full-time clerks and floating clerks. In addition to assisting court staff, the Clerk Support unit works closely with area law schools and paralegal programs to offer internships that provide valuable experience for the students.

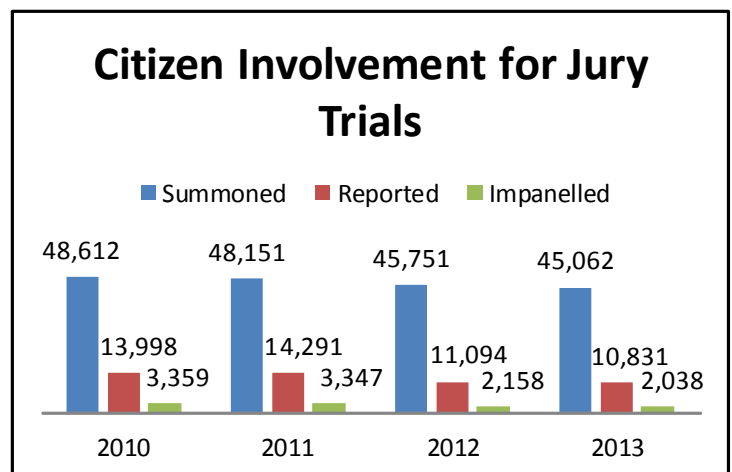
This unit saw changes this year as Katherine Siebenaler accepted a new position within the Court and Brett Dery was promoted into the open coordinator position. ([return to Table of Contents](#))

## JURY OFFICE

The Jury Office coordinates jury operations and obtains jurors for the Circuit and Probate Courts. Deborah Fahr was promoted to the supervisor position following the retirement of Rebecca Young and Debra Brown was promoted to jury office leader.

The Jury Office tracks juror utilization rates to ensure a sufficient number of jurors are available for trials while imposing the least hardship on those summoned for jury duty. All persons not legally excused from jury duty, regardless of status or occupation, are expected to serve when summoned.

Citizens that are exempted from jury service by statute include those who do not reside in Oakland



## CIRCUIT COURT – CIVIL/CRIMINAL DIVISION

County (and must provide a copy of an updated driver's license as verification), have served as a juror within the past twelve months, are not physically able to serve (a doctor's letter as verification is required), have been convicted of a felony or are not conversant in the English language. Persons over the age of 70 are exempt from juror service upon request. Nursing mothers are exempt upon request and must provide a medical letter of verification.

The Court calls new jurors to report for potential service on Mondays, Tuesdays and Thursdays. The day begins with an orientation outlining what jurors can expect during the course of their service. Several of the judges participate in this orientation to welcome the jurors and explain courtroom procedures. ([return to Table of Contents](#))

### **URBAN DRUG COURT**

The Sixth Circuit Court's Urban Drug Court (UDC) is a new treatment court that assists non-violent felony

offenders with a history of drug and/or alcohol abuse or dependence to complete their probation and reintegrate into society.

This drug court was created through a State of Michigan grant that targets individuals committing crimes in the city of Pontiac. The UDC works with the participant to break the cycle of addiction, criminal activity and incarceration. Through a team approach, participants receive comprehensive and integrated drug treatment and rehabilitation services designed for their individual circumstances and supervised by the UDC judge. Each treatment plan consists of three phases which have specific treatment objectives, therapeutic and rehabilitative activities and graduation requirements.

Ebony McCann was hired as Urban Drug Court case manager and oversees the day-to-day functions of the Urban Drug Court. ([return to Table of Contents](#))

### **INITIATION OF URBAN DRUG COURT PROGRAM**

On March 21, 2013, Judge Phyllis McMillen accepted the first participant into the Sixth Circuit Court's Urban Drug Court pilot project. Judge Shalina Kumar, Judge Michael Warren and Judge Daniel Patrick O'Brien joined Judge McMillen in the pilot. Together they have accepted an additional 34 participants to the Urban Drug Court pilot project over the course of 2013.

The Urban Drug Court (UDC) is a joint collaboration between Governor Rick Snyder and the Michigan Supreme Court. The UDC studies the process and costs associated with drug treatment courts while simultaneously addressing escalating criminal conduct in Pontiac, Detroit, Saginaw and Flint. The pilot focuses on high-risk, high-need defendants. UDC courts must comply with MCL 600.1060 et seq., the Ten Key Components of Drug Courts and grant assurances in implementing the pilot. The Supreme Court anticipates that the pilot program will run for three years.

Research shows that treatment courts can successfully break the cycle of addiction, rehabilitate lives and reduce recidivism. The UDC targets defendants with less severe criminal histories than those eligible for the Adult Treatment Court, which allows the UDC to operate in conjunction with the existing Adult Treatment Court. This permits the Sixth Circuit to closely supervise two similar, but distinct, substance-abusing populations. With these goals, both Courts strive to actively rehabilitate substance-abusing offenders and permit them to live healthy, law-abiding lifestyles while protecting society from drug-based criminal conduct.

The data gathered from the participating UDC courts should help the Michigan Supreme Court refine treatment court standards throughout the state. By quantifying costs associated with various treatment methods and identifying best practices, courts can draw upon the collective experience of the state court system rather than re-inventing the wheel. While the pilot has only completed its first year, the active participation of the Bench and associated stakeholders bodes well for the future.

## CIRCUIT COURT – CIVIL/CRIMINAL DIVISION

### CIRCUIT COURT – CIVIL/CRIMINAL DIVISION ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- Processed jury functions and provided jurors to courts for 60 civil trials, with an average duration of 3.74 days. The Jury Office also provided jurors to courts for 120 criminal trials with an average duration of 3.15 days. Of the criminal trials, 49 were capital offenses and 20 of the capital trials were homicide cases.
- The Jury Office summoned 45,062 citizens for jury duty. The number of prospective jurors summoned was then reduced after excusals for legal exemptions. The Jury Office required 10,831 prospective jurors to report for service to meet the daily needs of the trial courts. Ultimately, 2,038 citizens sat as jurors for 2013.
- There were 9 bench trials and 128 jury trials for felony cases.
- The total number of bench and jury civil trials was 70 trials.
- The total juror fees and mileage paid to jurors and prospective jurors required to appear at court was \$463,985.20, which was an increase of \$42,698.60 from 2012.
- The average cost of a jury was \$2,577.70. This was an average increase of \$417.26 per jury.
- The Court scheduled 3,337 cases for case evaluation. Of the scheduled cases, 2,041 cases completed the evaluation process and 302 cases accepted the evaluation award within the 28-day acceptance/rejection period. An additional 416 cases that rejected evaluation awards of \$25,000 or less were ordered to mediation. Of the cases referred to mediation, 215 cases resolved prior to mediation. An additional 51 cases resolved at mediation.
- The Court appointed trial counsel for indigent or partially-indigent defendants in 4,057 cases.
- There were 4,385 felony cases bound over for trial from the district courts.
- There were 4,752 petitions for pre-sentence investigation reports prepared.
- The Court appointed appellate counsel for criminal defendants in 261 cases.
- The Court appointed 357 foreign language interpreters for individuals with limited English proficiency, including 264 Spanish interpreters.
- The Court appointed 51 interpreters for individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing.



*Rebecca Young retired as supervisor of the Jury Office after 38 years of dedicated service with the County, including 26 years in the Jury Office. She was congratulated and wished well at her retirement party by Lisa Langton, Kevin Oeffner and Rich Lynch.*



## PROBATE COURT—ESTATES AND MENTAL HEALTH



**Jill Koney Daly**  
**Probate Register**

The Oakland County Probate Court provides essential services to Oakland County's most vulnerable citizens and is a vital component of Michigan's legal system.

In 2013, the Oakland County Probate Court was comprised of four judges: the Honorable Linda S. Hallmark, Chief Judge; the

Honorable Daniel A. O'Brien, Chief Judge Pro Tempore; the Honorable Elizabeth Pezzetti; and the Honorable Kathleen A. Ryan. Judges Hallmark and Pezzetti are also assigned to the Family Division of the Circuit Court. Each judge is assisted by judicial staff including a judicial staff attorney, judicial secretary and judicial clerks. The Oakland County Probate Court is the second largest probate court in Michigan.

Rebecca Schnelz, Probate Court Administrator, and Jill Koney Daly, Probate Register, oversee support staff in distinct probate areas, including the Mental Health unit, the Guardianship and Conservatorship unit and the Estates and Trusts unit. The Probate Court also works with the Circuit and Probate Courts' Jury Office to manage probate jury trials and the courts' Case Management and Case Evaluation offices regarding judicial assignments and case evaluations.

The administrators have taken an active role in bringing the Probate Court to the community. First, the Probate Court Administrator and Probate Register participate in training sessions for attorneys through the Oakland County Bar Association. Secondly, the Court provides on-line brochures containing basic information regarding guardianships, conservatorships, decedent estates and mental health proceedings. These brochures (as

well as necessary forms) are available at [www.oakgov.com/courts/probate](http://www.oakgov.com/courts/probate).

Additionally, the Court conducts basic training classes for conservators and guardians once a month. These classes are provided at no charge to the participants and were developed in cooperation with the Citizens Alliance for the Oakland County Probate and Circuit Courts. Finally, the Court presents a seminar, "Removing the Mysteries of Probate Court," six to eight times a year at various locations within Oakland County. ([return to Table of Contents](#))

### MENTAL HEALTH PROCEEDINGS

Mental health commitment hearing dockets are held by the Court twice each week. At these hearings, the judge must decide whether the respondent is mentally ill, requires treatment and whether or not hospitalization is the only appropriate treatment.

The mental health respondents participate at the court hearing by physically appearing in court or through video conferencing. Likewise, medical or psychological experts can testify in these proceedings by physically appearing in court or through video conferencing. In 2013, the Probate Court conducted nearly 1,100 hearings regarding involuntary mental health treatment.



**Probate Register Jill Koney Daly presents the "Removing the Mysteries of Probate Court" seminar at a local senior center. This program is designed to enlighten and educate senior citizens regarding estate planning and the probate process. This free seminar has reached thousands of citizens over the past 20 years and was developed in cooperation with the Citizens Alliance for the Oakland County Probate and Circuit Courts.**

## PROBATE COURT—ESTATES AND MENTAL HEALTH

The Mental Health unit of the Probate Register's Office manages proceedings under the Mental Health Code. This includes mental health commitment hearings, requests for assisted outpatient treatment (also known as "Kevin's Law"), substance abuse treatment and rehabilitation for minors, and emergency requests for mental health examination and possible hospitalization. This unit facilitates jury trials, transportation of individuals for judicial hearings and coordinates appointment of counsel and expert medical witnesses. This unit also processes and schedules all motions in mental health cases and prepares the orders after court hearings. ([return to Table of Contents](#))

### GUARDIANSHIP AND CONSERVATORSHIP PROCEEDINGS

The Probate Court hears all petitions to initiate, modify or terminate guardianships and conservatorships for minors and adults, as well as guardianships for developmentally disabled persons. The Court also resolves issues that arise during the pendency of a guardianship or conservatorship and monitors many cases through regular review hearings. Unlike many other cases, conservatorship and guardianship cases usually cannot be closed after a judge makes a ruling on the initial filing. Instead, many of the guardianship and conservatorship cases remain open for years. The oldest adult guardian-



**Attorney Michael Hughes conducts Conservator Basic Training on a monthly basis at the Probate Court. The trainings provide practical and essential information and tools for handling duties as a conservator. Guardianship training is also offered. These trainings are sponsored by the Citizens Alliance for the Oakland County Probate and Circuit Courts.**

ship case that the Court monitored this year was first opened in 1962.

The Guardianship and Conservatorship unit of the Probate Register's Office manages the court filings for the guardianship and conservatorship cases, including processing annual reports of guardians and the annual accounts of conservators. Court staff assigned to this unit also ensures that mandatory reviews of guardianships are performed. Consistent monitoring is required to determine whether fiduciaries have complied with statutory requirements. During 2013, 1,436 reviews were performed by court-appointed reviewers, many of them trained volunteers. ([return to Table of Contents](#))

### ESTATES AND TRUSTS PROCEEDINGS

The Court resolves issues regarding wills and trusts in the event of uncertainty or conflict and determines the heirs in estates where there is no will. If a conflict is present regarding interpretation of a trust or the disposition of property under the terms of a trust, then the Court resolves the issues. The Court may also render decisions involving conflicts between fiduciaries.

Civil cases involving trust and estate assets are also heard in Probate Court. These cases typically involve claims in which a fiduciary is seeking to preserve or recoup assets. Often, these cases involve more litigation and motion hearings than other types of probate cases. In 2013, 48 new civil actions were commenced with or transferred into the Probate Court.

The Estates and Trusts unit of the Probate Register's Office manages the court filings for estates, trusts and civil cases. Members of this unit are responsible for the authorization of small estates and *Letters of Authority* for personal representatives in certain situations. Staff assigned to this unit also monitor all active cases on a daily basis to ensure required documentation is filed and time lines are met. This

## PROBATE COURT—ESTATES AND MENTAL HEALTH

unit issues notices of deficiency, suspensions of fiduciaries when necessary and fields questions on open files. ([return to Table of Contents](#))

### COURT RECORDS/VAULT

The staff in the probate file room is responsible for securing all filings made with the Court. This includes documents filed in cases as well as wills filed for safekeeping. Legal records, or filings made in cases, are a matter of public record and are available for review by the general public. On the other hand, wills that are filed with the Probate Court for safekeeping are not public records.

In 2013, the Probate Court accepted 942 new wills for safekeeping. They join the tens of thousands of

wills already held by the Court. The oldest unclaimed will deposited with the Court dates back to 1852.

Documents that are part of the public record are filed in their specific court file according to a case number and are electronically scanned. The electronic record aids the Probate Court in providing an efficient customer service experience to the general public as well as the attorneys and litigants before the Court.

Scanning and validating the document data has become an integral part of the Court's operations with well over 186,000 documents being processed into the electronic document management system during 2013. ([return to Table of Contents](#))

### PROBATE COURT — ESTATES AND MENTAL HEALTH ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- The Probate Court implemented a Language Access Plan for interpreter services. This Language Access Plan establishes a protocol for providing interpreter services to individuals with limited English proficiency. Interpreter services were previously provided for court hearings; however, those services are now provided to assist individuals outside of the courtroom in an effort to provide meaningful access to court services.
- During 2013, the Probate Court staff issued over 5,700 *Notices of Deficiency* to fiduciaries that had not completed required tasks. Over 1,000 fiduciaries were issued a suspension for failure to correct a deficiency.
- Approximately 48,000 customers were served by staff at the probate service counter and in the file room during 2013. In addition, over 22,300 pieces of incoming mail were processed by staff.
- In 2013, the Probate Court processed 8,284 new filings and reopened estates.
- The Probate Court presented the “Removing the Mysteries of Probate Court” seminar to over 200 citizens at seven senior citizen centers throughout Oakland County.

# PROBATE COURT—ESTATES AND MENTAL HEALTH

<b>SUMMARY OF PROBATE COURT ACTIVITY</b>				
<b>NEW FILES OPENED</b>	<b><u>2010</u></b>	<b><u>2011</u></b>	<b><u>2012</u></b>	<b><u>2013</u></b>
Supervised/Unsupervised/Small Estates	2,417	2,439	2,576	2,528
Trust	206	228	241	238
Adult Guardianships	939	969	972	928
Minor Guardianships	671	612	540	554
Adult Conservatorships	392	396	386	332
Minor Conservatorships	127	100	128	116
Mentally Ill	2,802	3,058	2,793	2,823
Guardianships (Developmentally Disabled)	353	352	287	356
Reopened Estates	217	205	195	239
Protective Orders	39	47	55	70
Civil and Other Matters	86	87	107	100
<b>Total</b>	<b>8,249</b>	<b>8,493</b>	<b>8,280</b>	<b>8,284</b>
<b>ACTIVE CASES AS OF DECEMBER 31</b>				
Estates & Trust Cases	4,124	4,463	4,683	4,926
Adult Guardianships	3,666	3,869	3,981	4,028
Adult Conservatorships	1,669	1,733	1,755	1,706
Minor Guardianships	2,521	2,459	2,335	2,303
Minor Conservatorships	1,266	1,138	1,087	1,038
Guardianships (Developmentally Disabled)	1,728	1,729	1,747	1,861
Civil & Other Matters	61	63	54	29
<b>Total</b>	<b>15,035</b>	<b>15,454</b>	<b>15,642</b>	<b>15,891</b>



John Cooperrider  
Business Division  
Manager

The Business Division, under the supervision of John Cooperrider, is responsible for the development and delivery of business and administrative support services for the Circuit and Probate Courts. This division is divided into three areas of operation in order to effectively manage its diverse and complex responsibilities.

team who assists both staff and litigants with court programs such as eFiling, Judge On-Line and video conferencing initiatives.

The unit manages 23 video courtrooms and eight video referee hearing rooms, overseeing viewing and long-term storage of court records in compliance with state requirements. They also support specialized software, produce statistical reports for the State Court Administrative Office, manage the content of the Courts' websites, produce multimedia presentations, coordinate mobile equipment and create court forms. The unit's goal is to assist departments with initiatives that increase accuracy and efficiency while expanding citizens' access to court programs and information. ([return to Table of Contents](#))

This unit also provides word processing support to various operations throughout the Courts.

### **COURT RESOURCE AND PROGRAM SPECIALIST**

An area of general responsibility in the Business Division is that of the court resource and program specialist. Karen Koshen directs the Circuit and

### **ADMINISTRATIVE/FINANCIAL UNIT**

Under the supervision of Cindy Lingle, the Administrative/Financial Unit is responsible for developing and monitoring the Courts' \$60 million budget. Funds for various drug and sobriety courts, as well as funds for the care of court wards, are included in this budget amount and are tracked on a monthly basis. A large portion of the work done by this unit involves processing payments for services such as court-appointed attorneys, expert witnesses and interpreters.

In addition, this unit processes all personnel transactions, records and reports weekly attendance and any mileage or travel expenses for more than 350 Circuit Court and Probate Court employees. As needs arise in and around the courthouse and satellite office facilities, requests are made to facilitate capital improvements, special projects, supplies and equipment for the Circuit and Probate Courts. ([return to Table of Contents](#))

### **DATA TECHNOLOGY UNIT**

The Data Technology Unit is responsible for all aspects of court technology and automation, acting as the Circuit and Probate Courts' liaison to Oakland County's Department of Information Technology (IT), various vendors, as well as other state and local government agencies. Christina Bujak oversees the



*Angela Garrett (left) and Donna Riley (right) of the Courts' Administrative/Financial Unit, along with Attorney Melinda N. Deel (center), were presenters at an Oakland County Bar Association seminar regarding the financial and business aspects of court appointments in juvenile law.*

## ***BUSINESS DIVISION OF THE COURTS***

Responsibilities include coordinating and assisting with special projects and events, such as investiture ceremonies, new lawyers admission ceremonies, Adoption Day program, Constitution Day, courthouse employee functions, Removing the Mysteries of Probate Court, as well as maintaining the Bail Bondsman List, judicial attendance and preparing the annual report.

This area also assists judges and other court departments with public information management, grant writing and improvement studies on all aspects of court operations to find alternative ways to perform court functions more efficiently and effectively. ([return to Table of Contents](#))

### ***DATA TECHNOLOGY UNIT'S WORD PROCESSING CENTER***

The Data Technology Unit's Word Processing Center prepares various documents for the court, including Casework Reports, Referee Reports and Psychological Reports. In 2013 they created more than 17,000 different reports. The unit is comprised of four full-time office assistants, Debra Chmiel, Jenny Lucas, Maria Ortez and Cindy Romeos, as well as part-time worker Marla Taylor, and is supervised by Shelley Nelson. Together the unit offers the Court nearly 116 years of experience.

The Word Processing unit has been integral in rolling out new time-saving measures to get reports to judges and staff in a more efficient way through the use of technology. The staff utilizes Microsoft SharePoint to store reports, which generates automated email notifications of new or modified reports for staff. Additionally, they assist in testing new dictation methods and are continually looking for ways to provide value and accuracy to the Court. The Word Processing staff often assist co-workers in need by sponsoring breakfast and lunch fundraisers and are always ready to lend a helping hand.

### **BUSINESS DIVISION ACCOMPLISHMENTS**

- Prepared for expanding eFiling pilot program to include all domestic cases during the first three quarters of 2013. However, the Court was informed in the last quarter of 2013 by the Supreme Court there would be no extensions or amendments to any of the eFiling pilot programs. The Michigan Supreme Court has put everything on hold until it can determine a statewide direction for eFiling.
- Chris Bujak, Supervisor of the Data Technology Unit, presented at the National Court Technology Conference (CTC2013) in Baltimore on mobile devices.
- Hired Cindy Lingle for the position of Supervisor of Administrative Services. Cindy replaced Tina Sobocinski who had held this position in Court Administration for the past ten years.
- Began planning efforts to replace the existing Juvenile Mainframe System with the State's Trial Court System (TCS). Much of 2013 has been spent mapping existing data from the Mainframe to TCS. Due to outdated technology and high costs associated with state mandated changes, there could be a new case management system in Juvenile Court as early as September of 2014. This change should help process cases and report relevant data more efficiently and accurately. Both Probate Court and the Adoptions unit successfully made the change to TCS in 2005. There has been a positive outcome in these areas and expect to see equal success with Juvenile Court.
- Began planning phase to create a mobile application for smart phone users to access Court Explorer so that access to court records and imaged documents for attorneys and litigants is improved. Ultimately, would like to expand the mobile application to ePraecipe and judicial schedules on-line to improve public access to court documents and records as well.

### BUSINESS DIVISION ACCOMPLISHMENTS (continued)

- Developed, prepared, submitted and monitored seven different grants including the Adoption Incentive Grant, the Family-Focused Juvenile Drug Court, the Adult Treatment Court, the Adult Mental Health Grant, the Juvenile Accountability Incentive Block Grant, the Justice Assistance Grant and the new Urban Drug Court Initiative grant in the amount of over \$500,000.
- Completed the FY2013 Child Care Fund on-site program and fiscal review. Each program was found to be in compliance with Child Care Fund rules and regulations and no corrections were required.
- New Statewide Child Care Fund program and financial reporting requirements were instituted in July of 2013.
- Participated in the Child Care Fund Task Force which is a collaborative effort to identify and address funding and services for juvenile justice youth and abused and neglected children covered by the Child Care Fund (CCF). The subcommittee workgroup is currently looking for ways to expand CCF eligibility and the current recommendation is for prevention groups such as Youth Assistance.
- The Data Technology Unit participated in two large IT initiatives this year assisting in the rollout of Windows 7 to all court users as well as a Print Management Project aimed at replacing all existing copiers, scanners and faxes with new multi-function devices.
- Coordinated and assisted in various court events including Constitution Day, Adoption Day, State of the Court Address, Investiture Ceremony, New Lawyer Admission Ceremonies, Champion of Children Award Ceremony, Annual Court Picnic, Annual Fall Festival, Cocoa Day/Book Exchange, Annual Holiday Luncheon and many others.
- Reconciled outstanding credit adjustments with the State of Michigan Department of Human Services so that Oakland County received over \$200,000 in State Ward chargeback credit adjustments regarding charges for youth committed to the State of Michigan either as an MCI ward (abuse or neglect) or PA189 ward (delinquent).



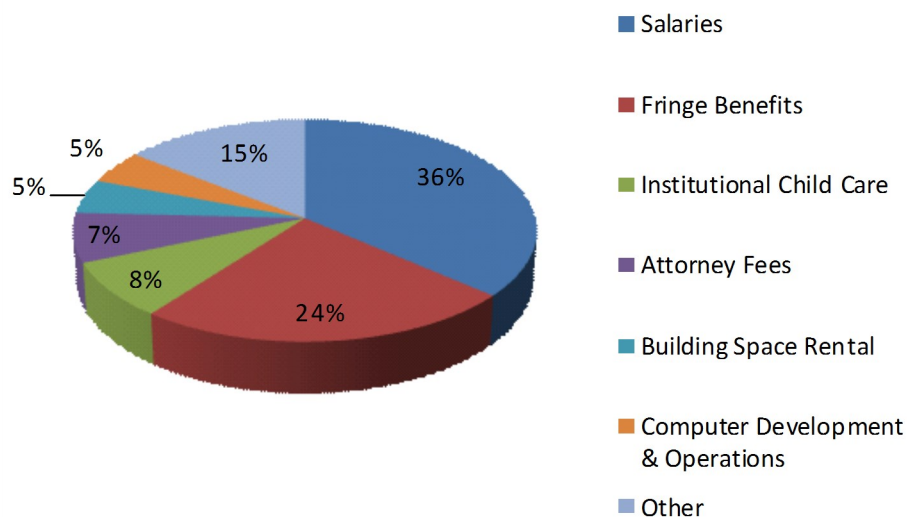
*Tina Sobocinski, Supervisor of the Administrative/ Financial Unit, is congratulated by her supervisor, John Cooperrider, at a farewell party on her behalf. Tina transferred to Fiscal Services in August of 2013 to further her career in the finance field.*

# BUSINESS DIVISION OF THE COURTS

## Circuit Court and Probate Court Financial Report

### 2013 Expenditures

**\$64,240,197**

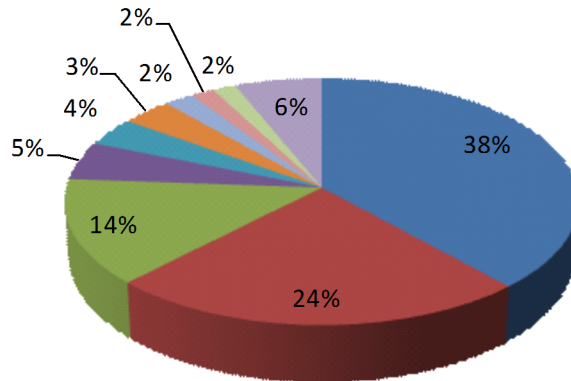


<u>Expenditures</u>	<u>2011</u>	<u>2012</u>	<u>2013</u>	<u>2012-2013</u> <u>% Change</u>
Salaries	\$24,248,356	\$23,460,136	\$23,354,324	-0.45%
Fringe Benefits	\$15,119,562	\$15,539,695	\$15,454,367	-0.55%
Institutional Child Care	\$8,136,513	\$8,250,697	\$5,271,896	-36.10%
Attorney Fees	\$4,682,832	\$5,216,923	\$4,608,358	-11.67%
Transfers Out	\$4,610,691	\$4,606,019	\$4,767,393	3.50%
Building Space Rental	\$3,225,702	\$3,108,056	\$3,183,107	2.41%
Computer Development & Operations	\$2,919,818	\$2,836,122	\$3,105,153	9.49%
Indirect Costs	\$947,680	\$1,033,423	\$919,070	-11.07%
Professional Services	\$694,093	\$583,802	\$507,698	-13.04%
Jury Fees & Mileage	\$638,305	\$434,521	\$461,735	6.26%
Mediator Fees	\$540,912	\$532,475	\$511,411	-3.96%
Telephone Communications	\$313,159	\$305,063	\$300,695	-1.43%
Postage/Mailroom	\$163,300	\$143,198	\$145,785	1.81%
Commodities/Supplies	\$189,439	\$210,454	\$204,262	-2.94%
Transcripts	\$203,242	\$182,143	\$162,633	-10.71%
Printing	\$94,319	\$46,206	\$66,017	42.88%
Visiting Judges	\$89,545	\$28,179	\$12,126	-56.97%
Other	\$193,955	\$155,367	\$164,937	6.16%
Mileage/Leased Vehicles	\$189,483	\$198,667	\$229,889	15.72%
Equipment Rental	\$177,484	\$205,719	\$297,830	44.78%
Library Materials	\$109,780	\$128,074	\$137,453	7.32%
Maintenance Charges	\$80,491	\$48,307	\$71,213	47.42%
Interpreter Services	\$77,497	\$62,017	\$70,616	13.87%
Transfers In	\$50,000	\$0	\$0	0.00%
Furniture/Equipment Purchase	\$45,561	\$45,721	\$15,854	-65.32%
Computer Legal Research	\$29,952	\$32,462	\$27,456	-15.42%
Copiers	\$53,943	\$52,518	\$39,242	-25.28%
Insurance	\$46,815	\$46,815	\$46,815	0.00%
Overtime	\$63,267	\$86,573	\$96,651	11.64%
Capital Outlay	\$0	\$0	\$0	0.00%
Court Reporter Services	\$5,477	\$3,312	\$6,211	87.53%
Operating Transfer/Adjust Prior Years	\$1,290	\$99	\$0	0.00%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$67,942,463</b>	<b>\$67,582,763</b>	<b>\$64,240,197</b>	<b>-4.95%</b>



# BUSINESS DIVISION OF THE COURTS

- Child Care Reimbursement
- CRP Contract
- Grant Match (Transfer In)
- Federal Incentive Payment
- Attorney Fee Reimbursement
- Board & Care Reimbursement
- Costs
- Civil Mediation Payments
- Alimony Service Fees
- Other



## Circuit Court and Probate Court Financial Report

**2013 Revenues**  
**\$34,286,097**

<u>Revenues/Sources of Funds</u>	<u>2011</u>	<u>2012</u>	<u>2013</u>	<u>2012-2013</u> <u>% Change</u>
Child Care Reimbursement	\$13,013,584	\$13,564,818	\$13,141,581	-3.12%
CRP Contract	\$8,350,148	\$7,740,019	\$8,217,207	6.17%
Grant Match (Transfer In)	\$4,400,475	\$4,555,819	\$4,738,849	4.02%
Federal Incentive Payment	\$1,479,384	\$2,361,472	\$1,727,967	-26.83%
Attorney Fee Reimbursement	\$1,309,941	\$1,335,141	\$1,288,899	-3.46%
Board & Care Reimbursement	\$1,151,062	\$1,273,522	\$1,227,789	-3.59%
Costs	\$772,524	\$769,868	\$713,166	-7.37%
Civil Mediation Payments	\$562,912	\$532,475	\$571,411	7.31%
Alimony Service Fees	\$552,951	\$567,635	\$559,910	-1.36%
Jury Fees	\$286,845	\$283,143	\$223,565	-21.04%
FOC Judgment Fees	\$325,360	\$325,840	\$325,800	-0.01%
Probate Estate Fees	\$221,735	\$229,238	\$252,619	10.20%
Reimbursement State County Agent	\$180,533	\$180,533	\$180,533	0.00%
Probation Service Fees	\$187,126	\$171,216	\$140,439	-17.98%
Other	\$195,545	\$226,326	\$164,599	-27.27%
Probate Certified Copies	\$124,683	\$125,339	\$120,899	-3.54%
Family Counseling Fees	\$102,225	\$101,820	\$102,015	0.19%
Mediation Fines	\$118,150	\$111,150	\$142,050	27.80%
Other Probate Filing Fees	\$82,867	\$85,927	\$120,280	39.98%
Psychological Clinical Evaluation Fees	\$66,889	\$54,142	\$45,399	-16.15%
Processing Fees	\$71,360	\$73,261	\$72,815	-0.61%
CRP State Supplement	\$0	\$0	\$0	0.00%
eFiling Fees	\$142,349	\$178,903	\$197,705	10.51%
Probate Will Deposits	\$9,500	\$8,700	\$10,600	21.84%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$33,708,148</b>	<b>\$34,856,307</b>	<b>\$34,286,097</b>	<b>-1.64%</b>

[\(return to Table of Contents\)](#)

# 2013 YEAR IN REVIEW

## Youth Assistance Celebrates 60th Year



## Honorable Barry M. Grant and Honorable Eugene Arthur Moore Library Dedication



## New Lawyer Admission Ceremony



## Arthur Eugene Moore Champion of Children Award and Sandra Silver Advocate for Children Award Recipients



## 11th Annual Celebration of Michigan Adoption Day Program



## Oakland County Domestic Violence Prevention Awards Ceremony



## Juror Orientation



# 2013 YEAR IN REVIEW

**Book Exchange and Cocoa Day**



**Day at the Ballpark Picnic**



**Probate Court Holiday Breakfast**



**MSU / U of M Tailgate Party**



**Holidays Around the World Luncheon**



**Fitness Unleashed**



**Made in Michigan Picnic**



[\(return to Table of Contents\)](#)

## EMPLOYEES MAKE A DIFFERENCE

### CIRCUIT AND PROBATE COURTS' MOST VALUABLE PERSONS (MVPS)

Employees of the Circuit and Probate Courts are nominated and recognized twice a year for their outstanding services and commitment to the Courts and the public they serve. They have performed their jobs at a high level of service and have routinely demonstrated service that far exceeds their written job descriptions. Employees are nominated as MVPs for their hard work, dedication and enthusiasm on the jobs they perform on a daily basis. These employees have been recognized by their supervisors, peers and the citizens they serve for their outstanding service. The Courts salute the following MVPs for 2013:

Amy Skewes, Judicial Secretary — Chambers of the Honorable Linda Hallmark  
Sarah Wickham, Domestic Support Specialist Supervisor — Friend of the Court  
Amy Vinyard, Office Assistant I — Administrative/Financial Unit  
Melissa Hoppe, Personal Protection Order Liaison — Personal Protection Office  
Michael Post, Child Support Accountant Specialist — Friend of the Court  
James Hill, Deputy Probate Register II — Probate Court  
Julie Stitt, Mentors Plus Volunteer Coordinator — Youth Assistance  
Tasha Hanson, Youth and Family Caseworker II — Casework Services  
Brett Dery, Court Clerk Coordinator — Court Administration Office



*Employees were recognized by Circuit Court Chief Judge Nanci Grant (second from left) and Probate Court Chief Judge Linda Hallmark (fourth from right) as MVPs during the Annual Employee Recognition Ceremony held in December. The 2013 MVPs for the Oakland County Circuit and Probate Courts are: (left to right) Brett Dery, Sarah Wickham, Julie Stitt, James Hill, Amy Vinyard, Melissa Hoppe, Amy Skewes, Tasha Hanson and Michael Post.*

Navigating the courthouse and the judicial system can be a daunting task for the general public who may be unfamiliar with the procedures of the Courts. Circuit and Probate Court employees are recognized for their dedication to the Courts and the public they serve through Standing Ovation cards that are submitted by an individual who has received exemplary service while conducting business in the courthouse. The following excerpts are just a sampling of the many Standing Ovation cards received during 2013 for exceptional service given by employees who have gone above and beyond in assisting the public.

### STANDING OVATIONS

**Gary Gasowski, Youth Assistance** — Thank you for this class. I am so glad I attended it. This is a wonderful service that you provide.

**Ryan Horvath, Probate Court** — Ryan was especially patient and helpful through a complex situation. He was very patient with all my concerns.

**Louise Strehl, Casework Services** — Ms. Strehl went above and beyond her duties to ensure that all responsibilities were met on behalf of all that were involved with my niece's case. She was encouraging to my niece and was peace of mind for me. She is truly an asset to all!

**Nancy Minckler, Youth Assistance** — Thank you for ALL that you have done for our family. Words cannot express how grateful I am for your guidance.

**Andrea Bayer, Friend of the Court** — Your support through this process was invaluable. Your words of encouragement kept me strong.

**Sarah Spencer, Probate Court** — Great customer service.

**Carol Gray, Probate Court** — Efficient and cooperative. Goes out of her way to be helpful.

**Yvonne Goryca, Administrative/Financial Unit, and Terry Castiglione Data Technology Unit** — This whole office is always very helpful and cooperative. They are both very kind and make difficult tasks easier.

**Maura Hodits and Olivia Lotz, Probate Court** — Very friendly and helpful. Ms. Hodits was very accurate and friendly. Ms. Lotz was very kind when I went to pay.

**Judge Pezzetti's Chambers** — Thank you all for being so helpful whenever I called asking a ton of questions. I really appreciate how courteous you were.

**Millie James, Case Management** — Thank you for being so helpful whenever I called for assistance.

**Theresa Zoltowski, Friend of the Court** — Very professional and informative. Treated me with respect and courtesy.

**Administrative/Financial Unit** — Staff is consistently helpful, knowledgeable and friendly.

**Probate Counter** — Awesome, polite and helpful.

**Tina Sobocinski, Administrative/Financial Unit** — Kind, thoughtful and effective in communicating.

**Karen Evanson, Casework Services** — Being nice, kind, honest and, most of all, understanding.

**James Hill, Probate Court** — James was extremely helpful with me in getting paperwork together and making sure I had the correct forms. I truly appreciate his help during a time when I was very frustrated and confused.

[\(return to Table of Contents\)](#)

## INVESTITURE



*Honorable Karen McDonald*

Judge Karen McDonald became the 69th Oakland County Circuit Court Judge at her investiture ceremony which took place on January 10. Judge McDonald was surrounded by her family, close friends, former colleagues, members of the judiciary, dignitaries and court staff.

Judges Cheryl A. Matthews and Lisa Gorcyca, former colleagues of Judge McDonald's in the Prosecutor's Office, jointly administered the Oath of Office after a heartfelt Motion for Administration of Oath was made by her husband, Jeffrey M. Weiss.

She began her legal career in the Oakland County Prosecutor's office for five years before going into private practice with Bodman LLP in Detroit. She later joined the law firm of Jaffe, Raitt, Heuer & Weiss, P.C. as an associate and later became an equity partner. Judge McDonald is a graduate of Alma College and earned her Juris Doctor from Wayne State University Law School where she graduated Cum Laude.

[\(return to Table of Contents\)](#)

## DEDICATION



*Honorable Hilda R. Gage  
1939—2010*

On August 28, a bronze plaque honoring the memory of the late Honorable Hilda Gage was dedicated at a ceremony hosted by the Oakland County Bar Association (OCBA). Judge Gage was an Oakland County Circuit Court judge from 1978—1996 and a Michigan Court of Appeals judge from 1997 until she retired from the bench in 2006.

The dedication, attended by numerous friends and former colleagues, recognized Judge Gage as a trailblazer for women and the courts, a teacher of judges, a devoted mother to her family and a dedicated public servant to justice. Judge Gage's brother, Harvey Rosenberg; daughter, Julie Gage Palmer; and grandson, David Palmer; were on hand to accept the plaque on behalf of the family.

*OCBA President, James G. Derian (second from right), presented the plaque to Judge Gage's family and (left to right) Harriet Rotter, Judge Joan Young and OCBA Immediate Past President Judith Cunningham shared their memories and admiration for Judge Gage at the event.*



[\(return to Table of Contents\)](#)

