

Probate Court Internal Reorganization

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After several months of diligent work by Administration, I am happy to be writing this article informing you of the approval by the Oakland County Board of Commissioners for an internal reorganization for our court.

There are several reasons why we have pursued this reorganization. The Probate Court has struggled with staff turnover during the past few years. We have also been approached by the Bar Association with a request for the Court to provide the ability to receive more personal assistance at our counter, particularly with regard to complex filings and delinquency issues. Further, the population of Oakland County continues to grow, and our aging population has created increased demands on our Probate Court. On average, we serve over 1,200 citizens each week. While we have taken steps to shorten our lengthy lines, including: creating a drop-off box for pleadings, opening our court at 8:00 a.m. every day, concentrating new file openings to certain staff, allowing virtually all filing by mail, and constructing a new counter area with 10 stations, we continued to feel that a piece was missing in our puzzle.

Plan Goals:

- Address the needs of the public and attorneys in dealing with complex filings and problem files;
- Divert the most time-consuming and complex filings away from the counter;
- Eliminate some hearing dates, saving judicial time and expense;
- Provide promotional opportunities for our staff;
- Clearly delineate our clerical positions from our deputy register positions; and
- Remove the file management responsibilities from supervisors.

Plan:

Through our operational review, a plan was approved which created a new class for our staff, entitled "Probate

Specialist." In effect, we will be upwardly reclassifying four of our present Deputy Probate Register II positions to this new class. These Probate Specialists will represent the highest level of our Probate Court clerical employees. They will be responsible for the most complicated files and filing issues. They would, on a limited basis, have an ability to take appointments to meet with attorneys and the public to assist with complex matters and delinquency issues. They would, of course, also act as backup for our counter as needed and would review every file at opening and closing stages for approval.

Our plan would also upwardly reclassify five Clerk III positions to Deputy Probate Register I. This will serve to clearly delineate our clerical positions from our deputy positions. With this move, we hope to streamline training and help maintain a consistent level of service for our users. It will also serve as a promotional opportunity for our staff, which again will help us maintain our expertise and consistency. Finally, we created a Clerk I position to assist us in our filing responsibilities and particularly with our new imaging system.

Key elements to our requests were based upon the technical requirements of our staff jobs, the needs of the public and attorneys, our administrative charge of maintaining a level of expertise for our users, and providing promotional opportunities to maintain consistency and longevity with our staff.

We were fortunate that our Personnel Analysts; the Public Services, Finance, and Personnel committees; and our Board of Commissioners worked with us and supported our requests during this process. With final approval of this internal reorganization, we hope to start implementing these changes within the next several weeks. Stay tuned!