



Franklin County Municipal Court 2025 Annual Report

Impartiality
Fairness
Transparency
Restorative Justice





2025 ANNUAL REPORT

Administrative and Presiding Judge
Hon. Jessica D’Varga

Judges - top row

**Hon. Stephanie Mingo,
Hon. Mark Hummer,
Hon. Jarrod Skinner,
Hon. Jodi L. Thomas,
Hon. James Green,
Hon. Mike McAllister,
Hon. Zach Gwin, and
Hon. Andrea Peeples.**

Judges - bottom row

**Hon. Jim O’Grady,
Hon. Bill Hedrick,
Hon. Mary Fenlon,
Hon. Jessica D’Varga,
Hon. Cynthia Ebner,
Hon. Gina Russo and
Hon. Eileen Paley.**

Court Administrator
Emily Shaw
Deputy County Administrator
John Davenport



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CHAMBERS OF
JUDGE JESSICA G. D’VARGA
PHONE: 614/645-8204
FAX: 614/ 645-7803

Ladies and Gentlemen:

In accordance with section 1901.14 of the Ohio Revised Code, it is my pleasure to provide you with the 2025 Annual Report of the Franklin County Municipal Court.

The Franklin County Municipal Court remains the largest and busiest municipal court in Ohio. We continually strive to improve our services for every citizen who appears before us and to be efficient stewards of taxpayer resources. We value the financial support that we receive and strive to uphold your trust in our operations.

The ever changing legal landscape and continued diverse needs of the citizens of Franklin County present daily challenges for our judiciary and staff. However, as detailed in this report, we are committed to overcoming these challenges and meeting the needs of all the citizens in our community. Our goal is always to improve on what we have built and to fairly and equitably interpret and apply Ohio laws.

Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions or would like any additional information.

Sincerely,

Judge Jessica G. D’Varga
Administrative and Presiding Judge

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ABOUT THE COURT

The Franklin County Municipal Court stands apart from the 120-plus municipal courts in Ohio. For years, it has been the busiest and largest Municipal Court in the state and has a growing caseload.

According to preliminary calculations, the Court handled 153,662 cases in 2025, an 8.3% increase from 2024. The Court hears a wide variety of cases, including:

- misdemeanor crimes,
- small claims lawsuits,
- traffic cases,
- evictions,
- civil cases where the damages are less than \$15,000,
- environmental criminal and civil matters,
- case sealings and expungements,
- initial arraignments for felonies and preliminary hearings if the defendant has not been indicted yet.

Judges interpret the law, manage case proceedings through the Court, and have juries determine facts in a trial, among their many responsibilities.

The Municipal Court is different from all other municipal courts in the state, with a unique blend of programs, dockets, and tools that further ensure the court’s dedication to fair, impartial, and restorative justice, as well as transparency. Many programs have been studied by other courts in the state and nation as they look to replicate them, including:

- The Environmental Court, which is the only environmental court in the state handling cases involving environmental issues, code violations, animal abuse, illegal dumping, and more.
- The Department of Pretrial and Probation Services focuses on individualized treatment programs that have been proven to lower recidivism.
- A nationally recognized Self Help Center that provides free assistance to civil litigants representing themselves.
- Five Specialized Dockets with some of the state’s lowest recidivism rates for participants who meet these criteria.

The Municipal Court has 15 judges serving six-year terms, assigned to the General or Environmental Divisions.

The General Division has 14 judges and seven magistrates, while the Environmental Court has one judge and two magistrates. One of those 15 judges also voted to serve as the Court’s Administrative and Presiding Judge as Judge Jessica D’Varga was in 2025.

She served alongside Judges Cynthia L. Ebner, Mary Kay Fenlon, James Green, Zach Gwin, Bill Hedrick, Mark Hummer, Mike McAllister, James P. O’Grady, Eileen Paley, Andrea C. Peebles, Gina R. Russo, Jarrod Skinner, Jodi Thomas, and Environmental Court Judge Stephanie Mingo.

The Court has 27 courtrooms.





THE COURT'S JURISDICTION

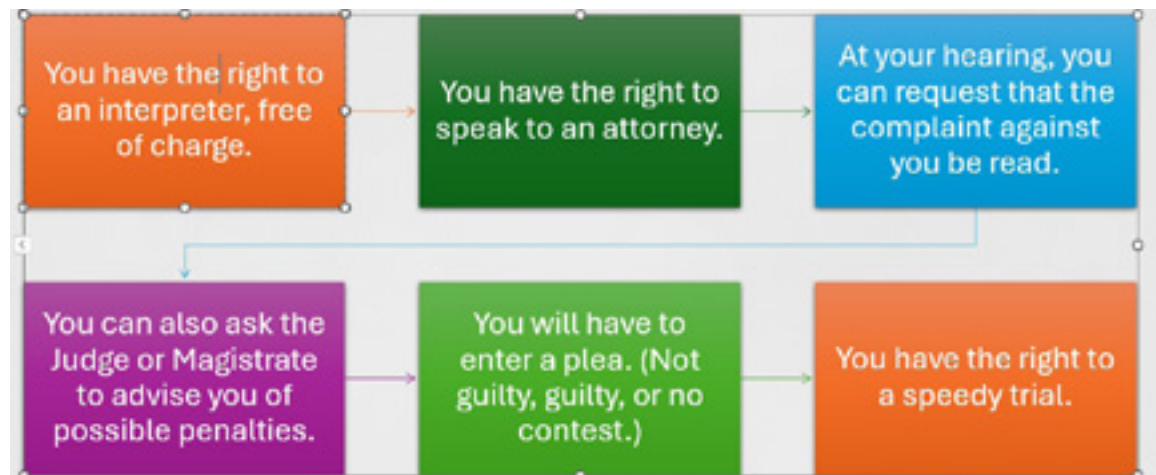
The Court's jurisdiction includes all areas of Franklin County and all areas of the city of Columbus that extend outside the county's boundaries. In addition to hearing and adjudicating civil and criminal misdemeanor cases.

Civil cases heard by the Court's General Division include cases where the amount of possible damages does not exceed \$15,000, small claims cases where damages do not exceed \$6,000, proceedings to collect judgments, and rent escrow proceedings, to name a few responsibilities.

Franklin County Municipal Court Judges also have a wide range of authority, including:

- Approving law enforcement's search warrants.
- Setting bonds at arraignments for criminal misdemeanor charges and initial felony appearances, if the defendant has not yet been indicted.
- Performing marriages.
- Hearing civil cases, where damages do not exceed \$6,000, and proceedings to collect judgments.
- Ruling on criminal case sealings and expungements, and
- Evictions, which are heard and determined by magistrates, before being signed off by a judge.

Know Your Rights in Court



2025 ANNUAL REPORT SUMMARY

The Franklin County Municipal Court has a growing number of cases and visitors each year. This has resulted in a greater demand on the Municipal Court in 2025 - which was already the busiest in municipal court in the state for years. Here are a few areas the Court experienced dramatic increases:

General Division

- Overall, the Court handled 153,662 cases in 2025, **an 8.3% increase** from 2024.
- The General Division civil case assignments saw the most significant increase, **up 17.75%** from 2024, followed by **traffic case assignments, up 7.38%**, and **small claims, up 6.63%**.
- Judicial Clearance rates for 2025 were 96.2% for the General Division.
- Magistrates handled 2,941 new small claims cases, **which was a 6.1% increase over 2024**. They also handled an additional 975 cases that were reactivated or carried over from years past.
- The Court had more than half a million visitors in 2025, **a 4.35% increase over 2024**.
- Service Bailiffs served 59,122 legal documents, **a 6% increase over 2024 totals**.
- Speed Enforcement Cases (CSV), transitioned in 2025 from hearings by the judiciary to hearings on a weekly docket with an assigned magistrate beginning September 17, 2025.



Judge Mike McAllister works in the Court's Duty Room, where the court's judges rotate on a weekly basis. Judges assigned to the Duty Room approve law enforcement's search warrants, approve all magistrate's rulings, hold hearings on show of cause, and handle other responsibilities.

Environmental Division

- Judicial Clearance rates for 2025 were 96.2% for the Environmental Division.
- The Division was assigned 2,639 new criminal cases in 2025, and 720 new civil cases were filed.
- The Environmental Division experienced **a 66% increase in criminal and traffic cases**.

Pretrial and Probation Services Department

- In 2025, Supervised pretrial defendant investigations reached 2,726, which was **an increase of 12% over 2024**.
- The Pretrial and Probation Services Department experienced a significant increase in its workload as well. For example, the number of bail investigations **climbed to 4,990 for the year - a 42% increase over 2024**.
- The Court's Batterer Intervention Program had 48 defendants graduate in 2025, which was the program's first full year to be operated by the Municipal Court.
- In 2025, 416 offenders were placed on GPS, which monitors them 24 hours a day, seven days a week. **This was a 49.1% increase over 2024**.
- Victims of crime assisted by the Court reached 6,927 victims, **a 42% increase over 2024**.

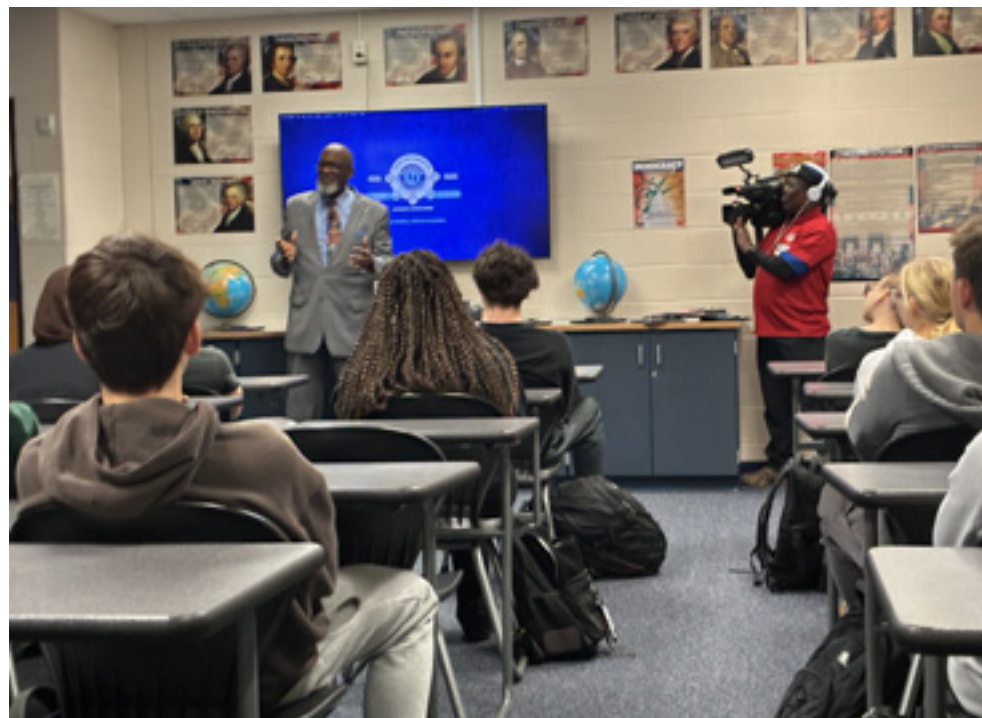
- The Intake Unit streamlined assessments with a **50% reduction in the** process time.

Specialized Dockets

- In 2025, the CATCH Court was certified by the Supreme Court of Ohio, including its collaborative program with the Franklin County Court of Common Pleas involving human trafficking cases. Eligible participants are transferred to a certified specialized docket judge with the Court of Common Pleas, while the participant engages in all aspects of CATCH Court.
- Recidivism rates for the Specialized Dockets **dropped to 30.32 percent on average**, down from 32 percent in 2024. That rate is often half the average of defendants who don't participate in treatment programs.



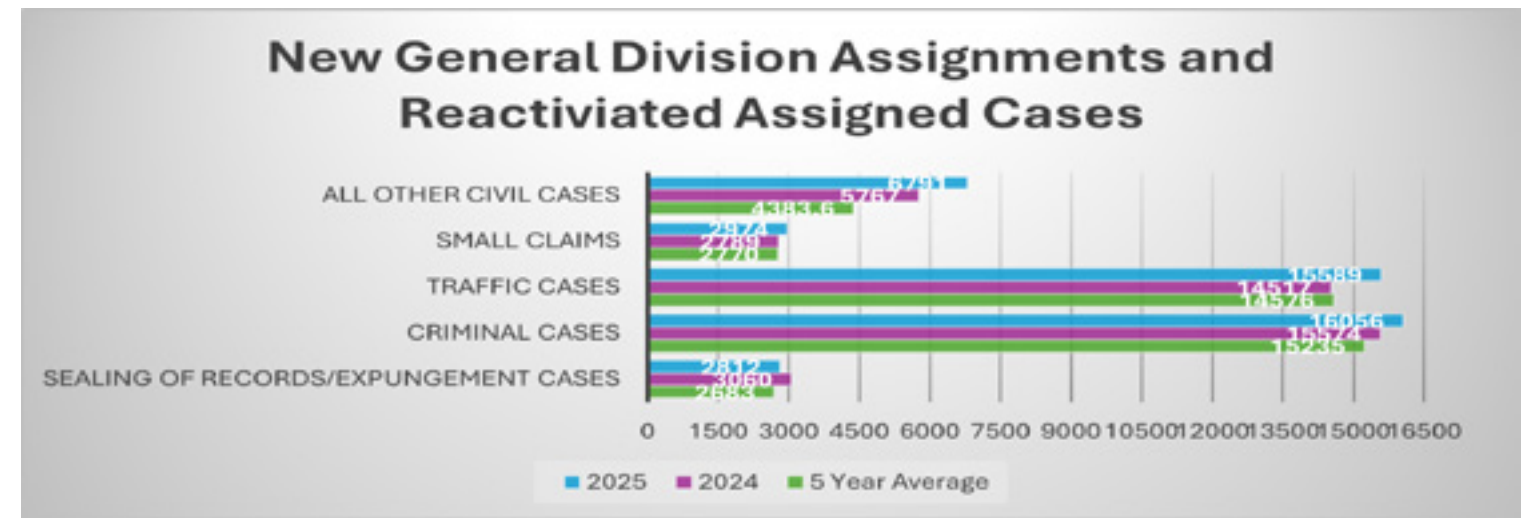
Judge Jodi Thomas hugs a CATCH Court participant as she graduates from the program. Photo: Courtesy of Freedom a la Carte.



Judge James Green speaks to a Hilliard High School class about the courts, while WSYX films it

Other

- Improvements were in place for the first full year, with jurors serving one week or for the duration of one trial, instead of two; and jurors received an increased per diem of \$25 for the entire year of 2025. This was a significant increase over the \$15 reimbursement jurors received in 2024.
- Court reporters experienced a marked increase in the number of transcriptions requested, reaching 622 requests, **up 20 percent over 2024**.
- General and Environmental Divisions Court staff and judges attended several dozen events in 2025 to educate and assist the public.



ASSIGNMENT OFFICE

The Assignment Office is an engine that works behind the scenes to keep cases progressing, though its work is largely unseen by the general public.

In fact, few people likely that know the office exists.

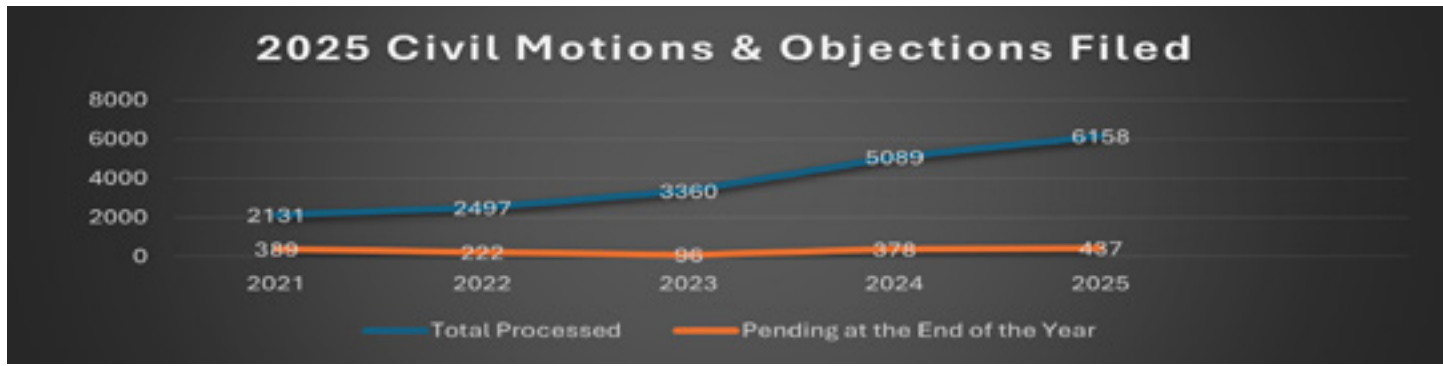
The Assignment Office's work begins when the case is filed with the Court and can continue even after a judge rules the case is terminated. That is because the office's case support includes assistance with case and party issues, motions, probation, expungement, sealing of records, and post-judgment motions.

It's a significant workload for a team of 16 people: Assignment Commissioner Dawn Wilson, a Chief Deputy, nine Deputies, an Assignment Support Specialist, and four Case Specialists.

A review of the Assignment Office's workflow offers a window into how much the Court's caseload is increasing. Several of the office duties experienced dramatic increases:

- **Rising case load** - The General Division civil case assignments saw the most significant increase, **up 17.75% from 2024**, followed by traffic case assignments, **up 7.38%**, and small claims, **up 6.63%**, with a **5.52% increase in total case assignments** over 2024.
- **A high volume of hearings** - The Office scheduled approximately 92,000 hearings and issued approximately 275,000 hearing notices.
- **Traffic camera speed enforcement** - Speed Enforcement Cases (CSV), transitioned in 2025 from hearings by the judiciary to hearings on a weekly docket with an assigned magistrate beginning September 17, 2025. There were 8,537 such cases filed in 2025, and 519 hearings were scheduled for 321 cases.
- **Increase in criminal environmental cases** - The Environmental Division saw an increase in criminal and traffic categories in 2025, while civil cases decreased. The most significant change was in **traffic cases, which increased by 66%**.



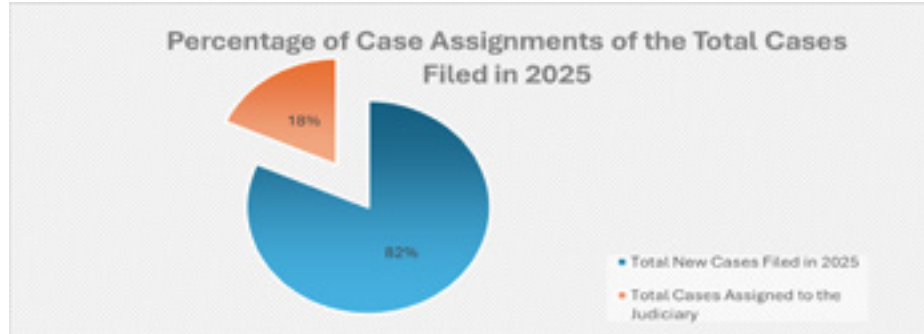


To keep up with all the demands that this caseload size brings, the Assignment Office must also handle many additional responsibilities, including:

- Assignment of cases to the Court’s 15 judges and nine magistrates, or any visiting judge.
- Scheduling traffic, specialty docket, small claims, Judicial Order of Reference, and environmental cases, in addition to the General Division’s caseload.
- Monthly reporting to the Supreme Court of Ohio's Case Management System.
- Helping to ensure hearings for all types of cases are scheduled and are within the speedy-trial requirements and Supreme Court guidelines.
- Case reassignments and transfers to other judges when necessary.
- Managing case flow on cases referred to Mediation and diversion programs.
- Providing daily court documents for each courtroom, including dockets. Preparing other case reports for the judiciary and others upon request.
- Managing all cases reassigned to the Municipal Court by the Supreme Court due to recusal, block recusal, or specific time request assignments.

Other milestones in 2025 were:

- Judicial Clearance rates were 96.2% for the General and 92.4% for the Environmental Division.
- The Court had 15 Judicial Assignments by the Supreme Court of Ohio in 2025 with 145 hearings.
- 2,526 civil cases and 130 Small Claims cases were referred to Mediation from the Court’s General Division.
- The judiciary was assigned 2,481 cases with Applications and Affidavits for Online Removal on F.E.D. cases for assignment.
- Of the hearing notices issued by the Assignment Office, only 3.1% were returned to the Court, a slight increase from 2024, when returns were 2.8%.



The Ohio Rules of Superintendence set guidelines for much of what the Assignment Office does for the Court, along with Ohio law and the Municipal Court's local rules. For example, all courts in the state are required to report monthly.

And the Ohio Revised Code includes deadlines for when hearings must be held to be considered on time, ensuring speedy-trial requirements are met. Additional information for this Court and all courts in the State of Ohio can be found on the [Supreme Court of Ohio's website, under Data Dashboards.](#)

Despite working behind the scenes, the public can interact with the Assignment Office on the 9th floor, where prosecutors, attorneys, and the public can go for case information.

ADMINISTRATION

The Franklin County Municipal Court Administration oversees managing the busiest Municipal Court in Ohio, including administrative and day-to-day functions, implementing non-judicial policies, and providing support and direction to the Court’s roughly 280 employees.

It is led by Administrator Emily Shaw and Deputy Administrator John Davenport, who oversee personnel management, budgeting, fiscal management, purchasing, liaison with other courts and agencies, public information, the appointment of counsel, Court services, Court security, interpreter services, and technology management. The Court Administrator serves as the chief non-judicial officer.

The Franklin County Municipal Court managed an increased caseload with minimal budget growth. The Court’s General Fund Operating Budget for 2025 amounted to \$29,542,138. This was a \$1 million increase over 2024, mainly due to anticipated increases in operating costs and routine cost-of-living increases for its staff.

About \$1 million of the Court’s funds were allocated to the Secure Facilities Fund, which is used to maintain the security of the courthouse, and the Court’s 15 judges and nine magistrates.

There was also a \$395,848 budget for the Computer Fund.

The Court’s operating budget demonstrates a conservative fiscal mindset and judicious use of its funds.



Court Administrator Emily Shaw and Deputy Court Administrator John Davenport at the Municipal Court staff’s 2025 holiday luncheon.

BAILIFFS

A bailiff is assigned to work with each judge and reports directly to them while running the courtroom efficiently. Among their many duties, bailiffs:

- Assist with day-to-day courtroom operations, such as monitoring the arrival of defense, prosecutor, and defendants so they can signal the judge when all parties are present.
- Manage the flow of case files for the judge .
- Serve as a liaison between attorneys, court personnel, the public, and the judge.
- Scheduling future court hearings and trials.

The judicial bailiffs now also assist members of the public with resolving various matters if applicable, including:

- Extending time to pay fines and court costs.
- Delaying the start of court-ordered incarceration.
- Issuing or modifying limited driving privileges.
- Withdrawing warrants or orders-in.
- Assisting with impounded vehicles.
- Helping with Bureau of Motor Vehicles (B.M.V.) issues.
- Continuing court dates.

The Court also has a bailiff for the duty room and two arraignment bailiffs.

COURT REPORTERS



Court reporters experienced a dramatic increase in the requests for transcripts despite losing one staff member in 2025.

Court Reporters provide transcripts and A/V proceedings upon request. In 2025, transcripts were requested 622 times, a 20 percent increase over 2024.

Court reporters also have other responsibilities, including maintaining all exhibits introduced at court proceedings and providing a court record of all pleas and waivers.

The Department is led by Chief Court Reporter Carolyn Scales.

At the start of 2025, the Department had eight full-time and three part-time court reporters.

Left: Court Reporter Lauren Sorrell takes dictation during a hearing in Franklin County Municipal Court.

COURT SUPPORT SERVICES

At the center of the Court's day-to-day operations is the Court Support Services Department, led by Department Manager Christopher Boyd. He and his staff of five people ensure the Court's critical functions operate seamlessly and efficiently.

The department supports the Court in five primary areas, though, like all other court departments, the unit assists much more. Those roles are:

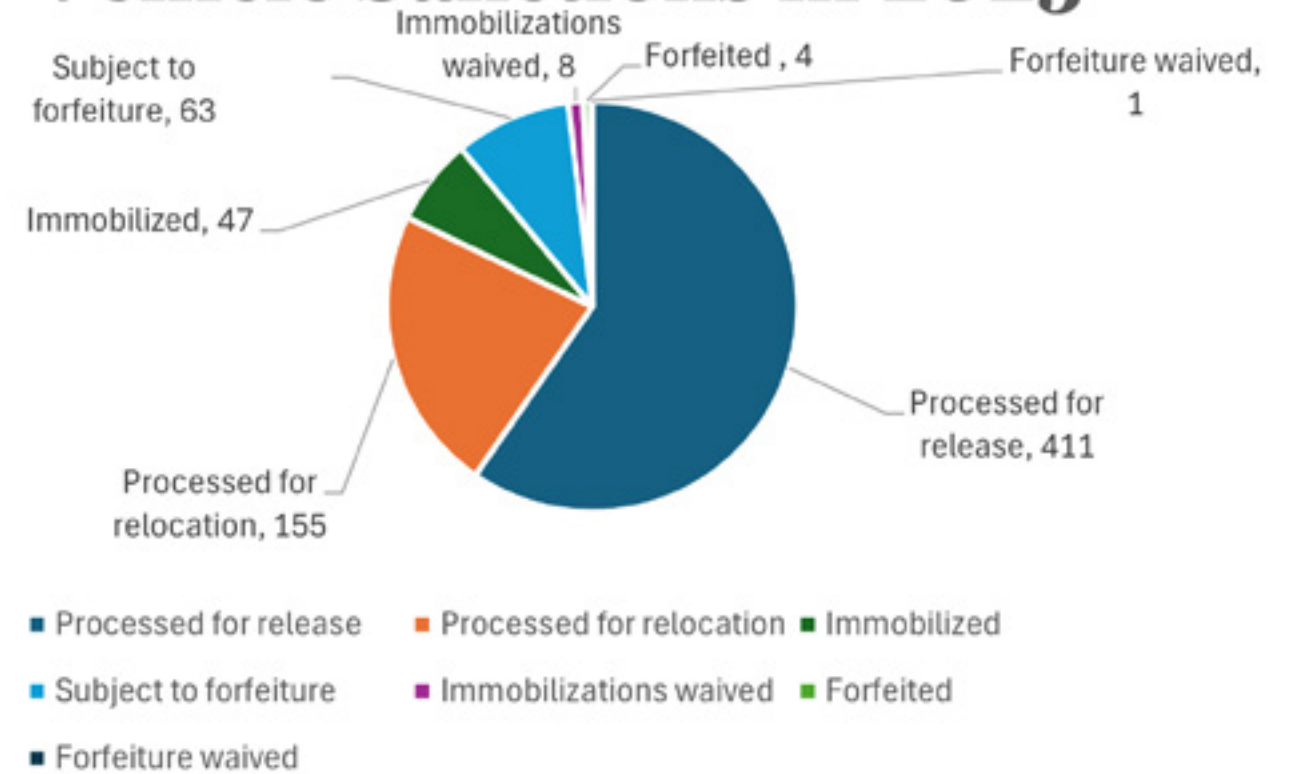
- arraignment bailiff coverage,
- vehicle sanctions,
- support for the Duty Room,
- the Court's Americans with Disabilities Act compliance, and,
- Managing Forensic Psychological Services, which requires competency evaluations, probate commitments, forensic restorations, and administrative communication with the judges.

If you have a case before the Court, they may have assisted in your case. In addition to those five leading roles, Court Support Services also manages various

Forensic Psychological Data for 2025

Defendants referred for evaluation	522
Referred to outpatient treatment	68
Referred to inpatient treatment	58
Referred to Probate Court	65

Vehicle Sanctions in 2025

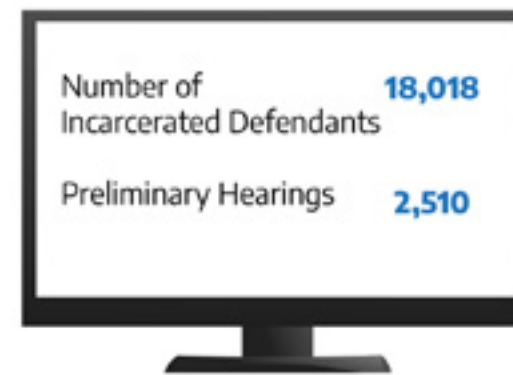


functions behind the scenes:

- Extending time to pay fines and court costs, or continuing court dates.
- Delaying the start of court-ordered incarceration.
- Withdrawing warrants or orders-in or assisting with impounded vehicles.
- Helping with Bureau of Motor Vehicles (B.M.V.) issues or modifying limited driving privileges.
- Managing all Americans with Disability Act grievances and accommodations.

In addition, Court Support Services serves as a vital liaison, facilitating communication among the Court, law enforcement, and defendants to ensure strict compliance with the Court's orders regarding the defendant's vehicle.

4D Video Arraignments - Defendants in Custody



LEGAL PRO	
Breakdown:	
Medically unable to attend	78
Refused to attend	1,069
Appearance waived by counsel	632
Interpreter Cases	775

ENVIRONMENTAL COURT

The Environmental Division, also known as "The Environmental Court," has successfully implemented unique sentencing strategies to address vacant and abandoned properties and persistent offending landlords.

Under [Presiding Judge Stephanie Mingo](#), the Division handles nuisance abatement cases involving various types of properties. Such cases include:

- derelict hotels,
- businesses violating health department orders,
- liquor establishments violating the law,
- illegal after-hours clubs,
- and drug houses and other residential and commercial properties engaged in illegal and nuisance activities such as
 - drug sales,
 - human trafficking,
 - and gun and general violence.

The Environmental Division also hears cases related to environmental crimes, code violations, and other environmental matters filed within the County. Many of those cases include:

- littering,
- illegal dumping,
- air and water pollution,
- hoarding,
- reoccupation of vacated buildings,



Municipal Judge Stephanie Mingo



Environmental Judge Stephanie Mingo answers questions from the public at one of the many public events the Environment Court staff attend yearly.

- and transportation of hazardous waste.

In addition to a considerable caseload, the Division provides mediation services to facilitate a resolution of disputes as an alternative to formal courtroom proceedings.

As the only Court in the county handling code enforcement cases, the Environmental Division employs unique techniques to restore communities and neighborhoods impacted by nuisance properties. The Court orders property owners to bring their properties into compliance under the supervision of the Court's Chief Environmental Specialist and the Environmental Investigations Section.

Penalties may include daily fines, jail time, and completion of community service hours in the [Court's Community Clean-Up Crew program](#). The Environmental Division prepares and issues compliance plans and timelines for defendants to follow.

The Environmental Division operates two courtrooms simultaneously, with Judge Mingo presiding over both civil and criminal hearings, and a Magistrate conducting civil case conferences. The Court is supported by three Environmental Specialists, a Staff Attorney/ part-time Magistrate, two Bailiffs, and an Administrative Assistant.

The Environmental Division remains committed to education and outreach efforts throughout Franklin County. Judge Mingo and the Division continue to develop and strengthen partnerships with stakeholder agencies and neighborhood groups with a shared vision of safe and clean communities.

The Division participates in community resource fairs and regular legal outreach events throughout the County. Educational outreach tools empower community partners, neighborhoods, businesses, and citizens to make meaningful changes in their environments.



Left: Environmental Specialist Josh Adam answers questions from the public at one of the many events the Court visits each year.

Next page: Environmental Judge Stephanie Mingo makes a site visit to the old Eastland Mall to better understand evidence and testimony presented in a case that alleged a series of code violations.

Environmental Division employs unique techniques to restore communities and neighborhoods impacted by nuisance properties. The Court orders property owners to bring their properties into compliance under the supervision of the Court's Chief Environmental Specialist and the Environmental Investigations Section.

A Look Back at the Environmental Court in 2025

The Court had 2,639 new criminal cases and 720 new civil cases. Environmental Specialists conducted 950 property inspections and court-appointed receivers rehabilitated or sold 43 properties to new owners to maintain compliance.

The Clean-up Crew completed 5,417 service hours and removed:



2,446 bags of trash



1,426 misc. items



563 bulk items



926 recycled tires



127 hazardous materials



INTERPRETERS

Few departments in the Court have experienced as much growth as the Interpreting Services in 2025. The Interpreting Department employs two full-time Spanish and one full-time Somali interpreter, as well as contracting with four part-time Spanish interpreters, and one part-time interpreter in three other languages - Nepali, Haitian Creole, and French.

Additionally, the Court has multiple contracts with outside vendors to provide interpreters in more than 43 languages, including American Sign Language.

In 2025, many requests were handled with on-site and remote interpreters.

The foreign languages for which interpreters are most in demand include Spanish, Nepali, Haitian Creole, French, Somali, Arabic, Amharic, and Kinyarwanda.

In addition, the Court provides interpreters for the deaf and hard of hearing in American Sign Language and Certified Deaf Interpreters.



Go online to schedule an interpreter for a court hearing or court meeting.

Some of the Most Common Languages Interpreted at Municipal Court in 2025

Listed in decending order based on interpreter frequency.

Spanish

Nepali

Haitian Creole

French

Somali

Arabic

Amharic

Kinyarwanda



JURY COMMISSION

The Jury Commissioner's Office uses a software provider to collaborate closely with the Board of Elections and the Court's Technology department to update an annual list of prospective jurors. This collaboration ensures the Court's 15 judges and nine magistrates have enough potential jurors.

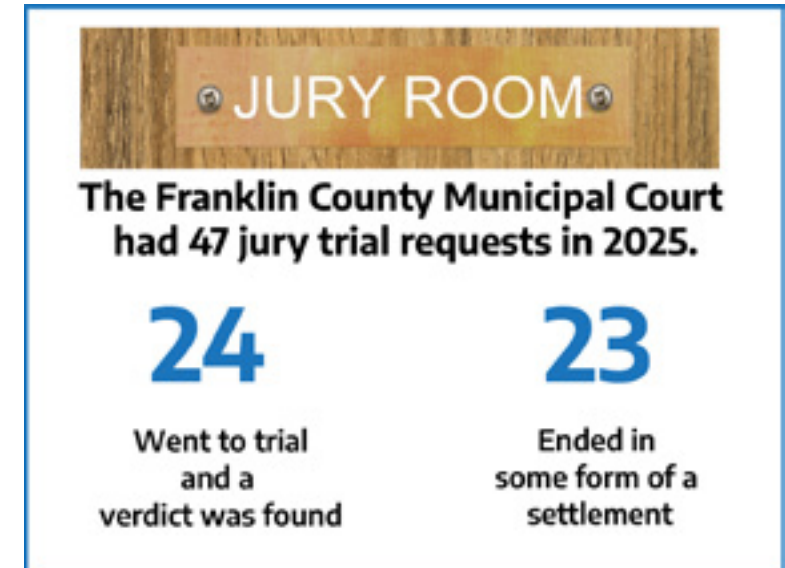
Sixty potential jurors are called in weekly, organized, and assigned to courtrooms. This allows for four jury trials each week.

In 2025, the Municipal Court had its first full year with improvements to jury service, so that jurors:

- Served one week or for the duration of one trial, instead of two.
- Reported in person, instead of using a call-in system.
- Received a higher per diem. Jurors earned \$25 a day for reporting, instead of the previous \$15 a day. Jurors also receive a bus pass or a daily parking voucher for two approved garages, if needed.
- The changes also meant that any potential juror not seated in a trial by Wednesday afternoon was dismissed for the week.

The Court also switched to Step Mobile for modernization and improved usability purposes.

Jurors gave the Municipal Court high ratings for jury service in 2025, with an average rating of 4.52 out of 5. They noted the Court's efficiency, transparency, and all the accommodations provided to jurors by the staff.



LEGAL DEPARTMENT

The Legal Department plays a crucial role in supporting the Court by researching and preparing proposed rulings and legal memoranda on pending issues, maintaining research and reference materials, and ensuring the Court's compliance with new case law.

The department under Magistrate Gene Edwards also reviews pending legislation that may impact the Court and advises judges and employees on new legal developments and the application of current law to court procedures. In addition to these responsibilities, the Legal Director serves as a part-time magistrate and acts as a liaison to the Clerk of Court and the Court's Self Help Center.



DEPARTMENT OF PRETRIAL AND PROBATION SERVICES

(Approximately 120 highly trained and specialized staff members fill the vital role of supervision within the Department of Pretrial and Probation Services (DOPPS), which oversees individuals found guilty of criminal charges and placed on probation, also known as community control.

Department staff added 4,352 new cases in 2025, bringing the total number of active cases to more than 12,000.

Goals, Procedures, and Requirements

DOPPS is the largest Court department and high standards and goals, including:

- a commitment to excellence in rehabilitation through evidence-based practices,
- reducing recidivism,
- changing offender behavior,
- fostering accountability, and
- promoting community safety.

Their work begins with a risk assessment.

Department officials then utilize evidence-based models that incorporate best practices for supervision, developed over many years and across multiple agencies nationwide.

The higher an individual's risk, the more stringent the reporting requirements are. They assure compliance with reporting requirements, random urinalysis, and behavioral health assessments.

DOPPS also offers tools that promote and facilitate rehabilitation, including:

- educational programming,
- counseling for mental health or substance abuse,
- LGBTQ programming,
- electronic monitoring,
- Work Release, and
- Specialized Dockets.

The success rate takes years to determine and is based on many factors, including whether the offender recidivates. The department's adherence to best practices yields a higher-than-average success and compliance rate. For example, the Department's Work Release Program boasts an overall participant success rate of 96%.

Elisha Zerman is the department's Chief Probation Officer, who oversees the department's overall operations, manages the operating budget, and ensures efficient departmental operations.

Batterer Intervention Program

In its first full year of operation within the Franklin County Municipal Court, DOPP's Batterer Intervention Program (BIP) had 48 defendants complete the program. At the end of 2025, 177 defendants were enrolled.

Additional groups are expected to be created.

Once in-house, DOPP made changes to the program, including ensuring best practices were maintained and removing barriers that hindered competition. BIP's long-term goal is to change Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) behavior to reduce the likelihood of a re-offense and thus increase the possibility of change.



The Franklin County Municipal Court's nine magistrates. Back row: Magistrates Ron Wadlinger, Raenell Nagel, Gene Edwards, Kirk Lindsey and Danielle Sparks. Bottom row: Magistrates Michael Allbritain, Administrative and Presiding Magistrate Tony Paat, Tanya Askew and Jessica Karrasch.

MAGISTRATES

The Franklin County Municipal Court's General Division has six full-time and one part-time Magistrates, all appointed to hear a wide variety of cases. The Environmental Court also has one full-time and one part-time Magistrate.

Like so many areas of the Court, the Magistrates experienced heavier caseloads. In 2025, Magistrates handled **2,941 new small claims cases, a 6.1% increase from 2024**. They also handled an additional 975 cases that were reactivated or carried over from years past.

The General Division Magistrates preside over driver's license suspension hearings, eviction proceedings, Traffic Court, and Small Claims cases, to name a few. However, these Magistrates may also be assigned specific cases referred to them by a Judge.

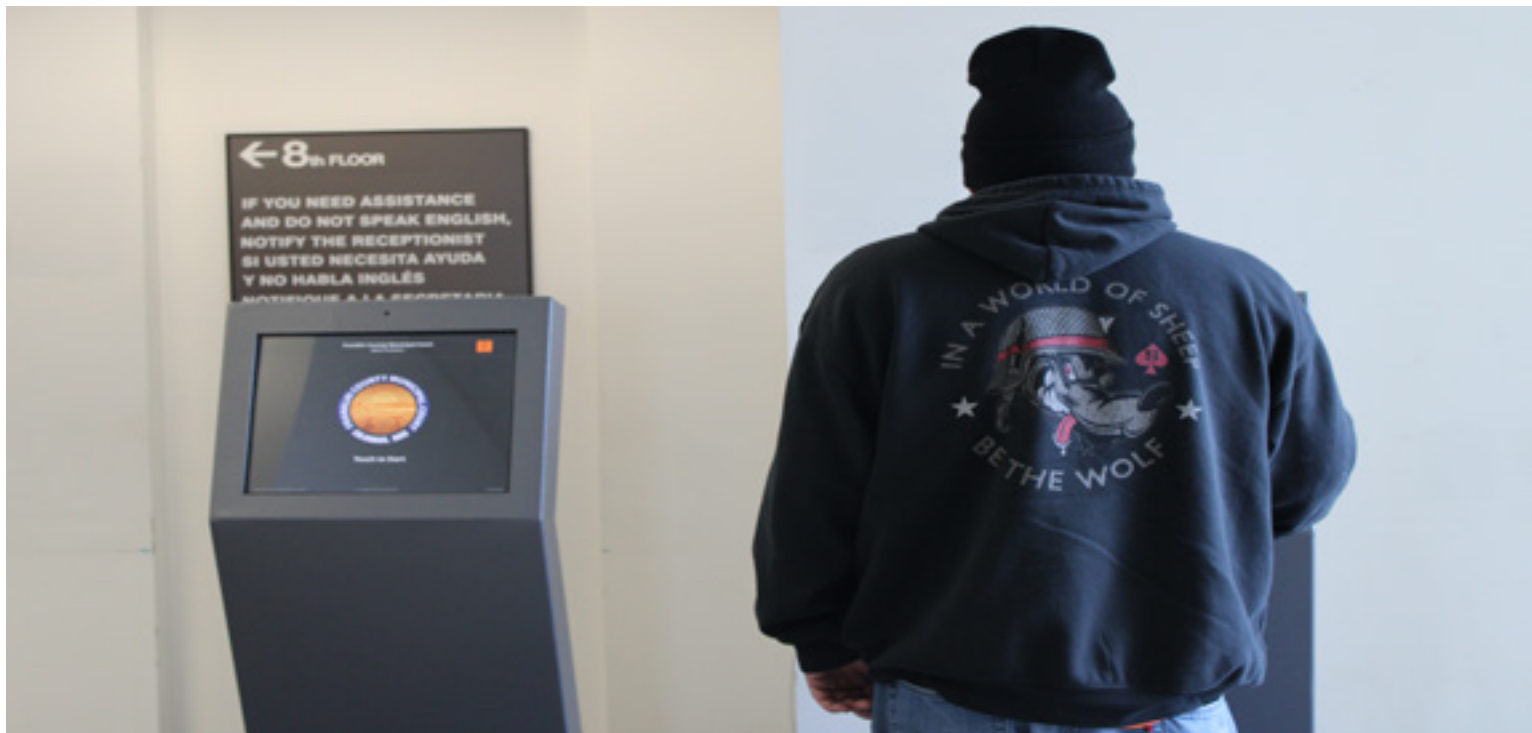
After hearing a case, Magistrates issue a Magistrate's Decision, which states their findings, conclusions, and recommendations for judgment. A Judge reviews each Magistrate's Decision and may accept, reject, or modify it.

Magistrates Judicial Role
Here is a look at some of the cases handled by the General Division's seven Magistrates in 2025

- Traffic Arraignments
- Evictions
- Small Claims
- Other cases



Magistrates preside over eviction court proceedings.



A probationer checks in at the 8th Floor kiosk.

Defendants can still pay to utilize an outside vendor for the programming, if they choose.

For example, the Court program is now free for defendants and offers male- and female-co-facilitated sessions held at the courthouse. Each defendant is assessed as having a low, moderate, high, or extremely high risk of re-offending. How long they report to the program depends on their risk assessment score, but the program's duration can range from 8 to 40-plus weeks.

Each enrollee must attempt a competency step before completing the program, which requires detailed ownership of an abusive incident within the confines of their co-facilitated group.

Community Sanctions Unit (CSU)

DOPP's Community Sanctions Unit consists of five case officers and one supervisor, who have a substantial caseload monitoring defendants ordered to Community Service while providing critical support for various other departmental functions.

Community Sanctions supervises (or assists in the supervision of) many types of cases, including:

- Community Service compliance.
- Restitution compliance,
- Provided No Convictions, which monitors for the same or similar infractions, and,
- Non-reporting Community Sanction Response.

If in any of these cases a defendant isn't complying with or completing the service hours offered instead of fines, Sanction offi-

Community Sanctions Unit	
Caseload snippets from 2025	
318	Community Service Compliance cases referred
439	Community Service Compliance cases monitored
518	New PNC cases - defendants re-assessed on same or similar charges
1,016	PNC cases continued from 2024
1,507	New non-reporting Community Sanction Response cases
2,448	Active non-reporting Community Sanction cases

cers file an entry in the court system that notifies the judge.

In 2025, the Court ordered restitution of \$495,547.63 in 507 cases, with \$289,374.31 collected and disbursed.

Electronic Monitoring/Home Confinement

The Electronic Monitoring/Home Confinement allows applicable defendants to be continuously electronically monitored rather than housed in jail, saving taxpayers money.

DOPPS operates the program with strict monitoring and notification of victims and has continually enhanced it over the years, resulting in a dramatic increase in judges ordering electronic monitoring as an alternative to incarceration.

A Pivotal Year

- In 2025, 416 GPS Monitors were installed on defendants, which monitor them 24 hours a day, seven days a week. **This was a 49.1% increase over 2024.**
- A new screening process was developed to identify when defendants are indigent or should be self-pay. This change aims to relieve financial burdens on vulnerable individuals while maintaining the integrity of the monitoring system.

These units worked with victim advocates and law enforcement to strengthen their strict protocols and procedures and improve public safety. For example, when a violation is detected, Court officials are notified immediately, regardless of the time of day or night, and the violation process is started instantly.

DOPPS ensures that victims are notified and, when applicable, that law enforcement is alerted when an arrest warrant is issued and that additional measures are implemented, including helping police locate the violator.

Human Trafficking/Soliciting

The Franklin County Municipal Court offers CATCH Court, a Specialized Docket that allows defendants convicted of soliciting to participate in a two-year program with demanding requirements and the potential to reap benefits.

But not everyone can meet those requirements and demands.

DOPP's Partnership for Advocacy, Care, and Treatment (PACT) Program is an alternative offered by the Court.

Like CATCH Court, it offers many supportive services, including specialized case management, alcohol and drug treatment, trauma services, mental health services linkage, safe housing, transportation, peer mentors, and GED.

However, PACT isn't as intensive.

In 2025, PACT participated in the Women's Risk Need Assessment, a national, data-driven study that examines crime records, risk factors, and other data to predict recidivism or future mis-



MARCH Center Entrance on the 6th Floor of the 375 S. High St. Municipal Courthouse.

conduct. Twelve referrals have been made to PACT through the WRNA so far, and eight have completed the program successfully.

This is part of the Court’s efforts to provide programming that promotes restorative justice, ensures community safety, and helps reduce recidivism.

Intake Unit

Ensuring DOPPS’s commitment to reducing recidivism starts by assigning people to the appropriate probation officer, which the Intake Unit manages.

The unit streamlined and enhanced its assessment process in 2025, resulting in a **50% reduction in processing days**. Defendants are now assigned in 10 days, down from the 15-day average in 2024. This enables defendants to be assigned to a probation officer at the correct risk level more quickly and reduces staff time.

The Process

The process begins with a defendant being assigned an Intake Probation Officer at the time of sentencing. When they report, they are directed to a kiosk, where they enter basic information.

The Intake Officer then conducts assessments and screenings to determine risk levels.

DOPP utilizes repeated training and requires certification to ensure officers conduct a comprehensive assessment. Their certification includes:

- Ohio Risk Assessment System,
- Community Supervision Tool,
- Impaired Driving Assessment, and
- Intimate Partner Violence Assessment.

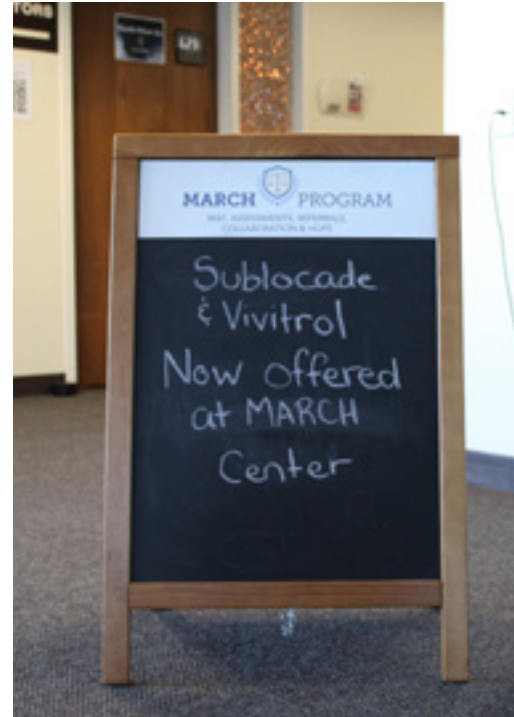
Investigation Services

The DOPPS provides investigation services to the Court through its Investigation Unit, which has six officers and three probation officer supervisors. In 2025, the Investigation Unit completed 22 presentence investigations and 2,172 sealing of record investigations.

The Investigation Unit also incorporates the Department’s risk assessment tools into its Presentence Investigation reports, providing the Court with the defendant’s assessed risk level and appropriate supervision placement if the defendant is under community control supervision.

MARCH

MARCH is commonly referred to as the Court’s resource and referral center, but its name and accomplishments show it does so much more. MARCH stands for “Medically-assisted treatment,



MARCH PROGRAM MAT, ASSESSMENTS, REFERRALS, COLLABORATION & HOPE	
2025 Statistics	
2,227	Visitors
79	New Safety Station Users
714	Treatment Referrals
359	Onsite Alvis Assessments
62	Vocational Services Provided
719	Visitors Met With JFS

Assessments, Referral, Collaboration, and Hope,” and helps more than the justice-involved. Many of its resources are also available to courthouse visitors.

The center and its staff of eight, are located on the 6th Floor of the courthouse and assisted 2,227 visitors in 2025. MARCH’s resources are offered through grants.

What they can do

The program begins with a comprehensive basic needs assessment to determine how a person can be best assisted.

From there, MARCH staff can assist with placements to residential treatment programs, and its half-way house program (HHRP), day programming response (Comprehensive Community Care), Safe Housing, and the Courthouse MAT programs.

The Center also added a new service in 2025, on-site HIV/Syphilis testing through Columbus Public Health.

Some of the service providers that visitors may be linked with include Maryhaven, Hope Valley Recovery, Brightview, Resolve Wellness, CompDrug, Celebrate One, Cairn Recovery, Leora Behavioral Health,

MARCH’S Partners

The Municipal Court’s Resource Center has 14 onsite community partners



Africentric Personal Development Workshop, Southeast Vocational Services, and more.

Probation Assisted Victim Empowerment Division (PAVED)

Victims of crime receive support and guidance through the court system through the Probation Victim Assistance Unit (PAVED).

A team of six – four Victim Assistants, one Assistant Supervisor, and one Victim Supervisor – helps victims of crime where the offender has been sentenced to probation, including many victims of domestic violence.

They are a small unit with significant responsibilities and an increasing demand. In 2025, the PAVED Unit assisted 6,927 victims, **representing a 42% increase over 2024.**

What They Do

Victim assistants have a wide range of responsibilities that inform and empower victims of crimes, including:

- Communicating with victims regarding all changes in the defendant's probation status, such as when a defendant becomes eligible for early termination or if there is a request to modify their supervision.
- Attending court hearings for/w the victim.
- Helping victims understand the risks and develop safety plans.
- Holding one-on-one meetings with the victim to collect information on no-contact order violations and victim affidavits.
- Ensuring compliance with Marsy's Law.



Above: the Victims Advocates of the PAVED unit.
Below: Judge Eileen Paley (left) and Probation staff join graduates of the CAP IT program's 2025 graduation ceremony.

How They Provide Tailored Support

The unit collaborates with various DOPPS units to ensure timely notifications, helping to keep victims safe. This includes working with the GPS/Electronic Monitoring unit to relay whenever a GPS violation occurs and the SERT unit, which is responsible for extremely high-risk domestic violence offenders.

Advocates' work and extensive training help create tailored responses. These individualized plans can be aided with the use of effective, evidence-based court programs, including:

- Specialized Dockets.
- Environmental caseloads.
- In-house Batterers Intervention Program, which addresses the root cause of domestic violence. PAVED victim assistants can notify victims when an offender enrolls, nears completion, or graduates.
- The CAP IT Program, which has resources tailored to the LGBTQ+ population.



Pretrial Services

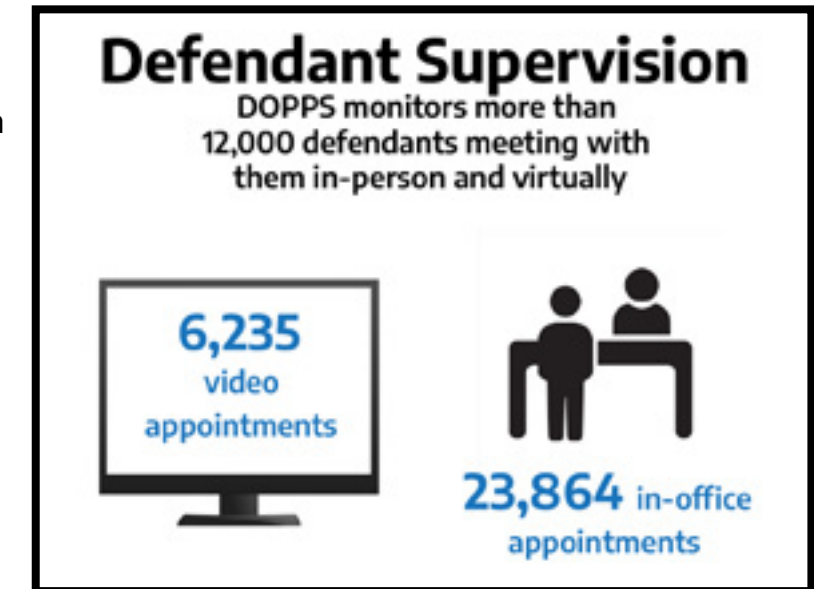
A core team within the Pretrial Services Unit plays a critical role in gathering information on defendants and judges, enabling them to make informed decisions on bonds and release supervision. Unit staff also help ensure defendants follow their release plans.

The unit has 11 bail investigators, seven pretrial supervision officers, and three supervisors, who have a wide range of responsibilities, including:

- bail investigation reports,
- Pretrial risk assessment,
- information for judges' considerations on release recommendations, and,
- Provide appropriate supervision and monitoring of defendants released by the Court on pretrial supervision to help ensure that they are engaging in their community-based release plan.

In 2025, the Pretrial Services unit experienced a significant increase in its workload. For example, the number of bail investigations climbed to 4,990 for the year – a **42% increase over 2024.**

Additionally, the supervised pretrial defendant investigation reached 2,726, representing a **12% increase over 2024.**



Professional Development

Helping probation officers to change offender behavior through training is one of DOPP's primary objectives. This not only allows defendants to learn skills that can modify their behavior, but it also enhances public safety.

DOPPS has about 120 officers who have received training to facilitate a variety of classes, including Anger Control, Thinking for a Change, Changing Offender Behavior, and Defensive Tactics. Officers also use individual Carey Guide Tools and interventions to change behavior.

Additionally, staff have played a crucial role in training officers both within the Court and statewide by hosting programs such as "In Their Shoes", assisting with Line Officer Training, facilitating Defensive Tactics Training, and facilitating classes with the Supreme Court for the state.

DOPPS has also been working to optimize the Ohio Community Supervision System (OCSS), a web-based case management system. Officers conducted 23,864 office visits and 6,235 video appointments in 2025. Continued use of electronic intervention tools and techniques from the Carey Group ensured that effective interventions were accessible to clients beyond traditional treatment programs.

Student Development/ Internships

The department continues to provide internship opportunities for students, demonstrating how probation or community control can promote offender change and rehabilitation.

In 2025, DOPPS began participating in a research study led by The Ohio State University's College of Public Health and the Columbus City Attorney's Domestic Violence Prosecution Unit. The study is funded by the Ohio Office of Criminal Justice Services, in cooperation with the federal government. The study uses focus groups to determine how justice programs might integrate accommodation for individuals with traumatic brain injuries and the correlation with future violence. This study will continue in 2026.

Substance Testing Laboratory

In the first full year of its existence, the Franklin County Municipal Court's substance testing laboratory processed an average of 110 tests per day. The laboratory was started in April 2024 and runs urinalysis samples in its machine, providing same-day results.

The Lab has four technicians, who are trained and certified to obtain and handle these samples. Defendants can be ordered randomly by the Court's probation intake process, probation officer or judge.

In addition, oral swabs are taken by the Court's lab technicians and shipped to an off-site lab for results. The creation of this lab in 2024 has expedited urinalysis results and saved the Court money.

Work Release

The Work Release Program (WRP) is a residential alternative to jail for court-ordered individuals, serving as a community response to mandatory jail sentences, Pretrial release, or Probation, and noncompliance/probation violations.

It facilitates the successful reentry of individuals into the community by monitoring, programming, and managing their community access, with random drug and alcohol testing. Participants are confined to a residential program, except for



A DOPPS staff processes a urine sample in the Testing Laboratory.

verified employment and/or court-approved programming, which provide opportunities to pay court-ordered fines, costs, child support, and restitution.

During Fiscal Year 2025, 88 defendants were admitted to the Work Release Program, serving 2,043 days instead of jail time. Of those defendants, 84 completed the program - a 96% participant success rate.

All 15 of the FCMC Judges utilized the services of the program for a variety of charges, including but not limited to OVI, Domestic Violence, Theft, Drug Abuse, Aggravated Menacing, Violation of Protection Order, Disorderly Conduct, Assault, Telephone Harassment, and Driving under Suspension.

The program collected \$46,074 from defendants during their Work Release term and saved \$128,263.00 in jail per diem costs.

SELF HELP CENTER AND DISPUTE RESOLUTION



The nationally and internationally recognized Self Help Center continues to innovate and improve the assistance it provides to civil litigants representing themselves, which enables them to navigate the court with confidence.

The center helped more than 33,000 in 2025, close to the same number as in 2024. Robert Southers had led the center for eight years. In November 2025, he stepped down and was replaced by Managing Attorney Lisa Armour.

Self Help Center Achievements

- Hosted two expungement clinics that served over 700 people collectively, attended numerous community events, and met with community leaders.
- Partnered with JusticeTech at Ohio State to create an asynchronous web-based text pre-file mediation platform for landlords and tenants to use.
- The Center was chosen by the Legal Services National Technology Assistance Project (LSNTAP) to pilot a new justice technology referral tool.
- The Center partnered with Ohio Legal Help to create online form builders for common motions filed by self-represented litigants.
- Center Staff hosted a justice simulation for the Ohio Association of Court Administrators.
- The Mediation program continued to build relationships with local law schools.

Work Release Program

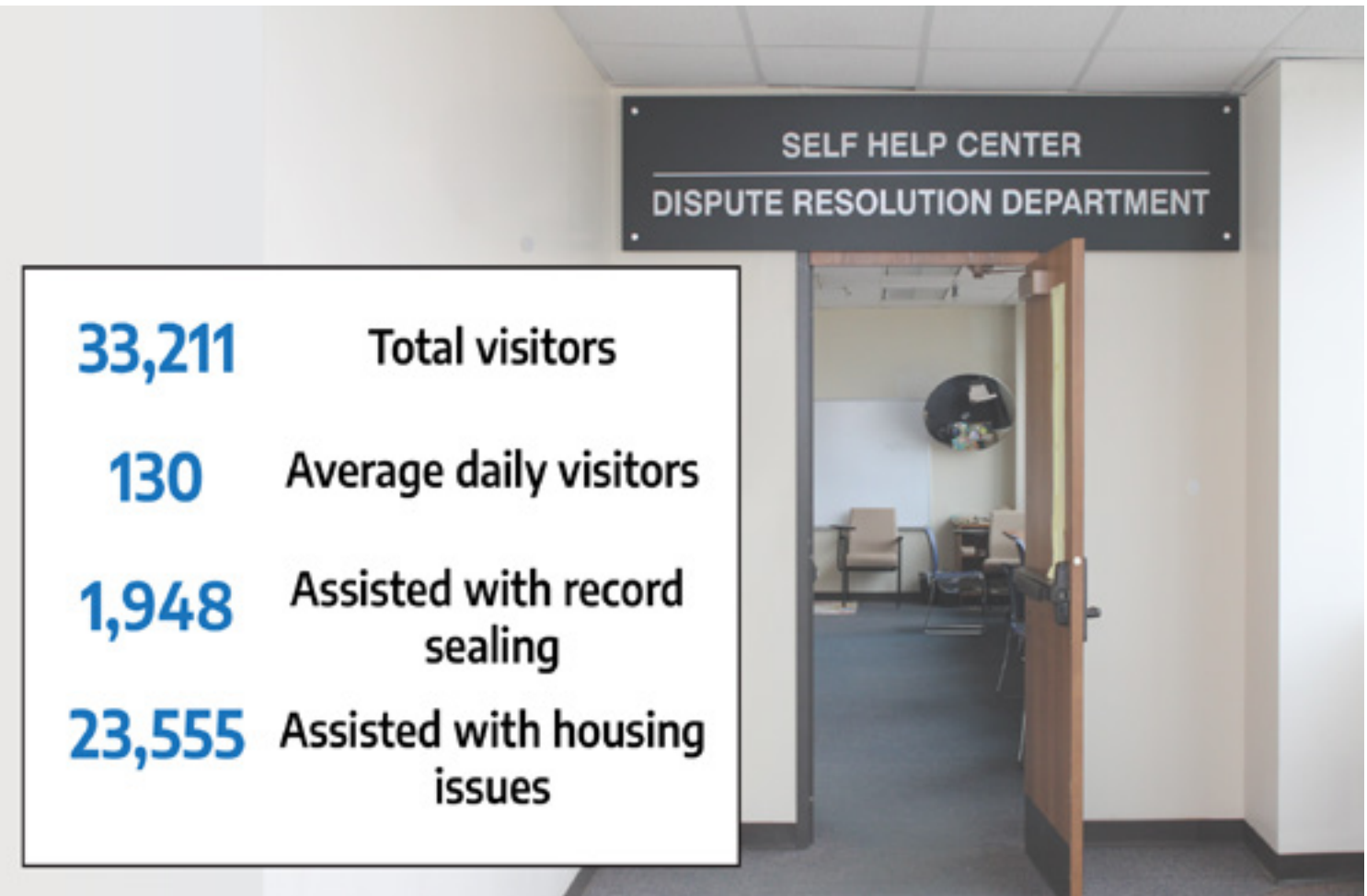
88 defendants admitted

74/10 male/female

84 completed the program

96% participation success rate

\$128,263 savings in jail per diem costs



33,211 Total visitors

130 Average daily visitors

1,948 Assisted with record sealing

23,555 Assisted with housing issues

Self Help Center Staff Notable Recognition

- Social Worker Megan Holt presented to the Central Ohio Stable Housing Network.
- Center Interim Managing Attorney David Vernon participated in the Supreme Court of Ohio’s Eviction Mediators Roundtable.
- Director Robert Southers was awarded the fifth annual Alli Gerkman Legal Visionary Award by the Institute of the Advancement of the American Legal System at the University of Denver.
- Center Director Robert Southers presented at the ABA Dispute Resolution Spring Conference, presented at the Supreme Court of Ohio’s webinar, and provided advice and guidance to leaders in Pittsburgh, PA, regarding building a debt diversion navigator program.



Self Help Center staff.

SECURITY

The Franklin County Municipal Court gets busier each year. The Court had more than 517,000 visitors last year, **a 4.4% increase from the year before.** The Security Department ensures the safety of all those visitors, as well as the Court’s 15 judges, eight magistrates, and its nearly 300 employees. To safeguard a high level of safety, the department follows plans and best practices set by the Supreme Court of Ohio and is overseen by Security Director Enoch White and Assistant Director Anetia Stansbury. Security staff screen visitors upon entry and can be seen throughout the building 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

SERVICE BAILIFFS

A unit at the Municipal Court serves court documents on behalf of the Court, litigants, and attorneys. These service bailiffs deliver complaints, summonses, criminal and civil subpoenas, garnishments, juror letters, and probation revocation hearing notices. These documents enforce pre-judgment and post-judgment remedies. The work of this office is done by 11 Street Deputy Service Bailiff Officers, one Deputy Chief Bailiff, one Chief Bailiff, and one Administrative Service Bailiff. Demand for these services was high in 2025, with 59,122 legal documents served, a 6% increase from 2024. This required the bailiffs to drive 98,988 miles across Franklin County in 2024.

Self Help Center Assistance Came in Many Forms

- 481** Traffic
- 2,600** Small Claims
- 1,393** Debt Collection
- 247** Criminal
- 511** General Division
- 553** Common Pleas
- 72** Environmental Court

Dispute Resolution

- 2,446** Referrals
- 85%** Participation rate
- 57%** Settlement rate



Note: Some 2025 cases are still being mediated at time of publication.

Chat with the Self Help Center attorneys online



Franklin County Municipal Judges and Columbus City Council Member Emmanuel take time to recognize community leader Melissa Thompson at the Driver’s License Clinic in 2025.

SPECIALIZED DOCKETS

 <p>CATCH Court Presiding Judge Jodi L. Thomas</p> <p>CatchCourt@FranklinCountyMuniCourt.org</p> 	 <p>L.I.N.C. Court Presiding Judge Gina Russo</p> <p>LINC@FranklinCountyMuniCourt.org</p> 	 <p>MAVS Court Presiding Judge Jarrod B. Skinner</p> <p>MAVS@FranklinCountyMuniCourt.org</p> 	 <p>h.a.r.t Court Presiding Judge Jodi L. Thomas</p> <p>hartCourt@FranklinCountyMuniCourt.org</p> 	 <p>Recovery Court Presiding Judge Jessica G. D'Varga</p> <p>Recovery@FranklinCountyMuniCourt.org</p> 
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Participants in the Specialized Dockets programs receive benefits including:

- Taking part in the most successful intervention available to help overcome barriers in life.
- Receiving a chance for recovery.
- Potentially avoiding lengthy jail sentences.
- Programming that provides a holistic and individualized approach to overcoming underlying issues.
- The possibility of charges being vacated or dismissed upon program completion, making it easier to seek jobs and housing.
- Involvement with programs that have a history of saving lives.
- Connection to peer recovery supporters.

Individualized services and supports include:

- connection to a wide range of social services in the community, such as housing and transportation, and support within the justice system.
- behavioral health programming, such as mental health and substance use treatment, and peer support.
- resources and support to becoming financially stable including linkage to employment and education.

Program requirements can vary, but typically include:

- active participation in programming for approximately two years.
- a referral by a defense attorney, prosecutor, or judge.
- a new criminal charge in the Franklin County courts.
- weekly meetings with the specialized docket judge and regular engagement with docket staff including probation and docket coordinators.
- randomized drug testing.

CATCH COURT

Creating Autonomy Through Collaborative Healing

Presiding Judge Jodi L. Thomas

CATCH is committed to the liberation of all women who have experienced the cycle of abuse embedded within human trafficking and the sex industry.



CATCH Court
375 S. High St., 6th floor
Columbus, Ohio 43215
Program Leader Gwen England
CATCHCourt@FranklinCountyMuniCourt.org
FranklinCountyMuniCourt.org/CATCH



In 2025, the Hon. Jodi Thomas collaborated with the Franklin County Court of Common Pleas to formalize a program that allows felony defendants to enter the CATCH Program. Presiding Judge Thomas and Franklin County Common Pleas Judge Sheryl Munson (right) earned certification from the Supreme Court of Ohio that allows human trafficking victims to have their cases remain in felony court, while taking part in the Municipal Court program. Photo: Courtesy of Freedom a la Carte. Below: The CATCH Court staff gather with Judge Thomas after the graduation.

Founded in 2009
Participants 2013-2023: 418
New Participants in 2025: 33
2025 Graduates: 14
Recidivism rate: 39.17%



H.A.R.T. COURT

Helping Achieve Recovery Together

Presiding Judge Jodi L. Thomas

h.a.r.t. addresses the needs of defendants who use opiates and whose history of insufficient treatment has resulted in criminal charges by establishing effective treatment as an alternative to incarceration, improving quality of life, and increasing the safety of the community by providing court oversight and linking defendants to appropriate treatment and service providers.



h.a.r.t. Court
375 S. High St., 6th Floor
Columbus, Ohio 43215
hart@FranklinCountyMuniCourt.org
FranklinCountyMuniCourt.org/hart



Presiding Judge Thomas waits to recognize a graduate who is being hugged by h.a.r.t. Probation Officer Jaymee Tomasso. Below: Judge Thomas sits with the h.a.r.t. Court staff at the October 2025 graduation.



The drug court was founded in 2014 and later renamed to h.a.r.t. Court
Participants 2013-2023: 992
New Participants in 2025: 84
2025 Graduates: 27
Recidivism rate: 29.74%



L.I.N.C. COURT

Learning to Identify & Navigate Change

Presiding Judge Gina R. Russo

The L.I.N.C. program aids defendants in navigating the legal and behavioral health system. The program works to promote public safety by providing structure for participants to link to appropriate treatment while being held accountable for their actions.



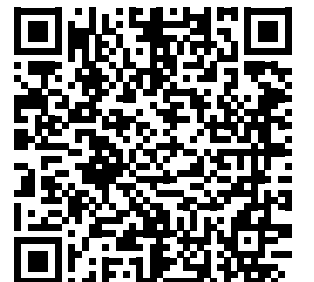
L.I.N.C. Court
375 S. High St., 6th Floor
Columbus, Ohio 43215
linc@FranklinCountyMuniCourt.org
FranklinCountyMuniCourt.org/LINC



Above: Presiding Judge Russo at the L.I.N.C. Court and the Judge with the program staff (below) at the L.I.N.C. graduation in November 2025.



Founded in 2004 and known previously as the Mental Health Court, the program was later renamed L.I.N.C.
Participants 2013-2023: 374
New Participants in 2025: 25
2025 Graduates: 19
Recidivism rate: 39.57%



MAVS COURT

Military and Veterans Services

Presiding Judge Jarrod Skinner

The MAVS program helps veterans overcome severe mental health and substance use disorders through appropriate treatment, supportive services, and veteran-specific resources, in an effort to reduce recidivism among these individuals.



MAVS Court
375 S. High St., 6th Floor
Columbus, Ohio 43215
MAVS@FranklinCountyMuniCourt.org
FranklinCountyMuniCourt.org/MAVS



Right: Honoring a veteran at the MAVS May 2025 graduation.
Below: Judge Skinner with MAVS staff at the spring graduation.



Founded in 2012
Participants 2013-2023: 204
New Participants in 2025: 11
2025 Graduates: 11
Recidivism rate: 30.88%



RECOVERY COURT

Effective Treatment as an Alternative to Incarceration

Presiding Judge Jessica D’Varga

Recovery Court addresses the needs of defendants whose primary dependency on alcohol or non-opiate drugs results in criminal charges and low-level felonies. The Court utilizes treatment instead of incarceration, thereby improving quality of life for those battling addiction and increasing community safety with proven lower recidivism rates.



Recovery Court
375 S. High St., 6th Floor
Columbus, Ohio 43215
Recovery@FranklinCountyMuniCourt.org
FranklinCountyMuniCourt.org/Recovery



Above: Presiding Judge D’Varga at the December 2025 Recovery Court graduation.
Below: Defense attorney Meriden Thomas, (left) who works directly with Recovery Court and Municipal Court Bailiffs Christine Cearfoss, and Ashley Schmidt volunteer to assist with the celebration.



Founded in 2010
Participants 2013-2023: 535
New Participants in 2025: 61
2025 Graduates: 29
Recidivism rate: 17.38%



Franklin County Municipal Court



Specialized Dockets

The Franklin County Municipal Court has five specialized dockets and two educational programs, which have a proven history of saving lives, reducing recidivism, and promoting recovery from drugs and alcohol for various high-risk offenders.

The five dockets focus on other underlying barriers and link them to specialized treatment, programming, peer support, social services, and more.

These five courts are highly regarded for their specialized programming and individualized treatment, which have led to some of the state's lowest recidivism rates for participants who meet these criteria. In 2025, these Specialized Dockets demonstrated continued innovation and improvement.

- The combined recidivism rate for the dockets was 30.32 % in 2025, down from 32.5% in 2024.
- In 2025, the CATCH Court was certified by the Supreme Court of Ohio for a collaborative program with the Franklin County Court of Common Pleas involving human trafficking cases. Victims of human trafficking who were charged with a felony can receive intensive supervision and judicial oversight consistent with the Municipal Court.
- The Recovery and MAVS Courts were given their initial re-certification in late 2025 and are in the process of working toward final certification.

More than \$1 million in funding for these programs comes from federal grant support.

What are Specialized Dockets?

The programs provide a restorative justice program that offers recovery instead of incarceration and provide all high-quality programming for high-risk, high-need individuals based on evidence-based practices.

These Franklin County Municipal Court dockets also accept some criminal charges from the Franklin County Common Pleas Court.

The dockets are located on the 6th floor of the Franklin County Municipal Courthouse at 375 S. High St., next door to the court's comprehensive behavioral health resource center, Medication-assisted treatment Assessment Referral



The Specialized Dockets have been credited with helping to save lives as they help those deal with substance abuse and mental health diagnosis.

Collaboration and Hope (MARCH).

The Specialized Dockets have their own courtroom and areas that can accommodate status review hearings, education classes, and community meetings.

The program's approach, use of evidence-based practices, and skilled partners are what make the facilities a transformational space.

Specialized Docket staff emphasize recovery and are there to help build confidence. The dockets' use of evidence-proven programming and support does more than make rehabilitation possible. Staff witness transformation every year.

And the low recidivism rates underscore what graduates say and judges and staff see.

Staff

Municipal Court staff are committed to building strong community treatment teams and to enhancing stakeholders' and the larger community's knowledge. The Department also strives to serve as a model for other Specialized Dockets, wherever possible.

The Municipal Court's programs have 13 coordinators, an assistant manager, who assists with day-to-day operations, and is led by Specialized Docket Manager Melinda Brooks.

The program staff are highly educated behavioral health specialists with expertise in mental health, substance use disorders, and criminal justice. Among these positions are eight social workers, three specialized drug and alcohol dependency counselors, one licensed counselor, one dual-licensed counselor/marriage and family therapist, and an outreach coordinator who carries information about the programs to the public at community events.

Specialized Court staff also work closely with other court employees, including:

- The Self Help Center staff, who review participants' records for case eligibility to be sealed or expunged in the future. Graduates receive packets to help them prepare.
- Probation, which addresses compliance issues while supporting and encouraging participants throughout their programs.
- MARCH Staff interact regularly with the MARCH program to schedule participants with Franklin County's Department of Job and Family Services, employment and vocational connections, and its on-site harm reduction vending machine.
- Peer Support who support participants by phone or text after traditional court hours, sharing their lived experiences and walking alongside them in their recovery journey.

It's A Team Approach

It takes a team from multiple disciplines to help enable recovery. A presiding judge oversees the program, utilizing coordinators, a designated probation officer, a defense attorney, a prosecutor, and representatives from community treatment providers.

- The team meets weekly, reviewing potential admissions, progress of current participants, evaluating individualized treatment plans, and more.
- The judge presides over weekly status review hearings to ensure participants receive personalized care, are actively involved, and are following the treatment plan.



Specialized Dockets Manager Melinda Brooks with Assistant Manager Kyle Keckley at the L.I.N.C. Court graduations in 2025.



MAVS Presiding Judge Jarrod Skinner and MAVS Coordinator Samatha Barbarek with a representative of the Wounded Warrior Project.

- The programs strongly emphasize open discussion and developing competency, compliance, trust, and self-efficacy.
- The Supreme Court of Ohio requires the programs to be certified every three years, guaranteeing that the dockets meet or exceed all Supreme Court standards and current practice guidelines.

Educational Programs

The Specialized Dockets also have two educational programs - CATCH 101 for victims of human trafficking, and the Drug Education Program (D.E.P) for those charged with felony drug offenses .

CATCH 101 is an education program that offers resources for women who are currently engaging in the sex trade and have been charged with a solicitation offense, which can be dismissed upon completion of the program. The course includes education about sex work, human trafficking, trauma bonding, harm reduction information on sex work and substance use.

The Drug Education Program, or D.E.P., is an educational intervention for individuals charged with 4th and 5th-degree felony drug possession charges. Monthly D.E.P.'s education sessions covered include the disease model of substance use, the recovery model of healing, and peer-led experience, and are designed to motivate change.

BEST PRACTICES

The Specialized Docket department is unwavering in its commitment to developing and implement-



CATCH Court Presiding Judge Jodi Thomas on stage with Program Leader Gwen England on stage at the Sept. 11, 2025, graduation at the Ohio Statehouse Atrium.

ing best practices with proven results. The department develops innovative programming to address service gaps, actively participates in research and pilot projects, and takes a leadership role in advancing the field.

STUDENT INTERNSHIP PROGRAM

The Specialized Dockets allow interns to learn from a variety of disciplines. Students learn from diverse fields of study, including behavioral health, substance misuse, criminal justice, public health, statistics/data analysis, and other related disciplines.

The program offers a wide range of opportunities to meet with a judge and screen an incarcerated defendant while being exposed to evidence-based practices, program development, grant implementation, data analysis, and policy change.

Every year, the dockets review goals set the year prior and establish new goals to ensure continual innovation and improvement in the programs.

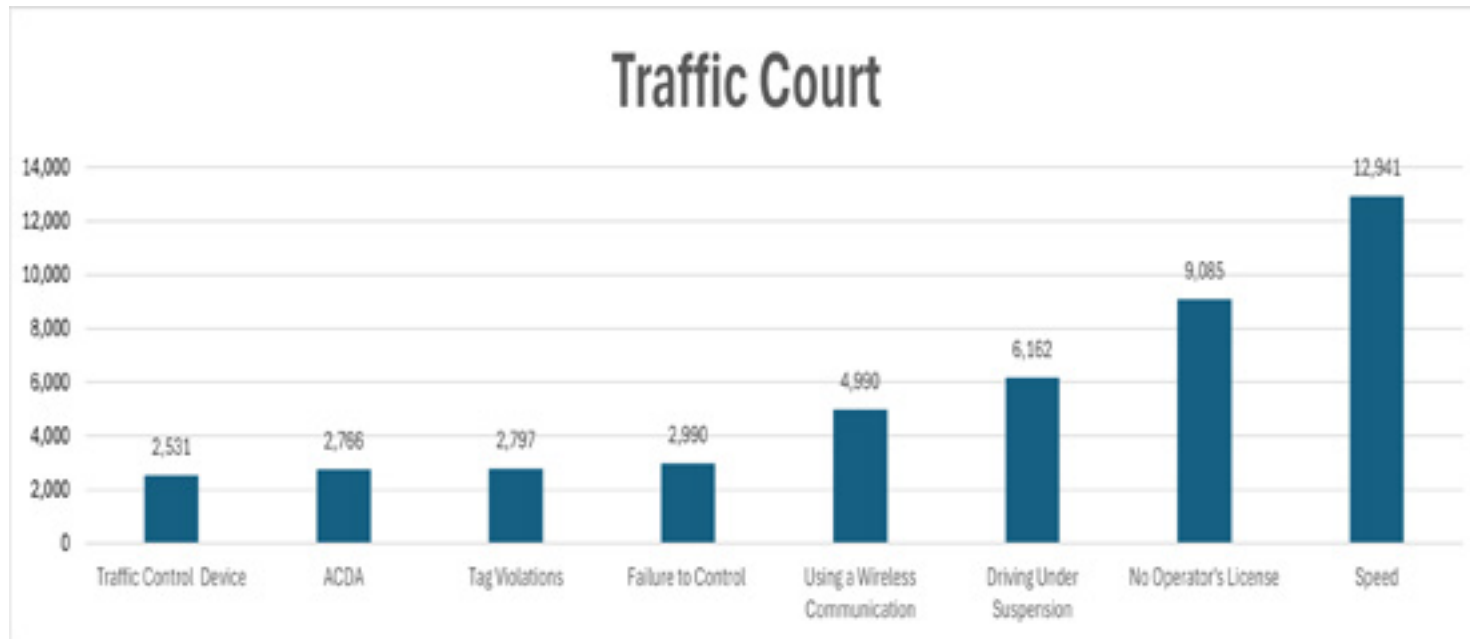
The Specialized Dockets department met or exceeded all its 2025 goals.



A community partner is recognized at the CATCH Court graduation. All five Specialized Dockets are so effective thanks to a team of veteran community partners, experienced treatment providers, peer support and a tireless Municipal Court staff.

TRAFFIC COURT

Traffic Court is a perennially busy court within the Franklin County Municipal Court. Traffic court cases are overheard by magistrates who handled 52,060 cases in 2025. The court operates Monday through Friday in courtrooms 1A and 1B.



Judges assist at the Franklin County Municipal Clerk's Annual License Reinstatement Workshop. Back row: the Self Help mascot bear, Common Pleas Judges Sheryl Munson, Mark Serrott and Bill Sperlazza, and Municipal Judge Eileen Paley. Front row: Municipal Judges Mary Fenlon, Bill Hedrick, Mike McAllister and Jim O'Grady.

WEDDINGS

The public can schedule a wedding anytime of the year in the Municipal Court's Duty Room. Scheduling can be done online at <https://franklincountymunicipal.org/Departments-Services/Weddings>.

In addition, the Franklin County Municipal Judges and staff also convert a courtroom into a festive wedding chapel on Valentine's Day. In 2025, 105 said their "I dos" in a courtroom adorned with frills to commemorate the joyous occasion. Walk-ins were accepted and couples were only charged the traditional \$25 court filing fee.



Municipal Court Judges Eileen Paley (left), Jodi L. Thomas, Mike McAllister, Bill Hedrick, Jim O'Grady and Mary Fenlon, along with Franklin County Probate Court Jeffrey Mackey (in red) and Chief Magistrate Kelly Green (far right) volunteered their time to wed couples on Valentine's Day.



Right: Judge Zach Gwin marries Columbus Crew goalie Nicholas Hagen and his bride Maria at an October 2025 wedding at the courthouse. Above: A U.S. service member weds his bride at the courthouse on Valentine's Day.





For more information about the court go to
FranklinCountyMuniCourt.org
or visit the court at
375 S. High St.
Columbus, Ohio 43215
614-645-8214