



CLEVELAND HEIGHTS MUNICIPAL COURT  
Judge J.J. Costello  
40 Severance Circle  
Cleveland Heights, Ohio 44118

March 31, 2025

Cuyahoga County Executive Chris Ronayne  
Cuyahoga County Council  
Cleveland Heights Mayor Kahlil Seren  
Council of the City of Cleveland Heights

**Re: Cleveland Heights Municipal Court - 2024 Annual Report**

Dear County Executive, Cuyahoga County Council Members, Mayor, and Cleveland Heights Council Members:

Pursuant to Section 1901.14(A)(4) of the Ohio Revised Code, enclosed you will find information about the work performed by the Cleveland Heights Municipal Court, a statement of receipts and expenditures of the civil and criminal branches, respectively, the number of cases heard, decided, and settled, and any other data the Supreme Court of Ohio, the Secretary of State, and the legislative authorities require. The Report also highlights some of the new and ongoing improvements, as well as community collaborations undertaken by the Court in the last year.

Over the past year, the Cleveland Heights Municipal Court has remained steadfast in its mission to administer justice efficiently, judiciously, and impartially. Our commitment to upholding the Court's independence, integrity, and fairness remains unwavering. None of this would be possible without the dedication and expertise of our incredibly capable and diverse staff, to whom I am deeply grateful.

It is with great pride that I present to you the 2024 Annual Report of the Cleveland Heights Municipal Court.

#### ABOUT THE COURT

The Cleveland Heights Municipal Court has jurisdiction within the corporate limits of Cleveland Heights. The subject-matter jurisdiction of the Court, that is, the types of cases that the Court can hear, includes preliminary hearings in felony cases, traffic and criminal misdemeanors, civil

cases in which the amount of money in dispute does not exceed \$15,000, and small claims cases in which the amount of money in dispute does not exceed \$6,000. The judge also has the authority to perform marriages; this past year, I officiated the weddings of 54 couples at the courthouse.

### ABOUT THE JUDGE

I was elected to serve as Judge of the Cleveland Heights Municipal Court beginning in January 2018 and was reelected in 2023 for a second six-year term. I am a lifelong Cleveland Heights resident, and my wife and I are proudly raising our two sons here.

I hold a Bachelor of Science degree from Miami University of Ohio and a Juris Doctor degree from Case Western Reserve University School of Law. After being admitted to practice in Ohio, I established a law practice in Cleveland Heights and later joined a boutique law firm, where I primarily handled landlord-tenant matters, real estate management, and housing/building code enforcement defense. Before taking the bench as Judge, I served as an Acting Judge of the Cleveland Heights Municipal Court.



In February of 2021, I was appointed to the Supreme Court of Ohio's Commission on Technology and the Courts. The Commission advises the Supreme Court of Ohio on matters such as the promulgation of standards for the development and use of information technology systems in Ohio courts, the development and implementation of educational and training programs, the exchange of data and information by and between Ohio courts and other justice system partners for greater efficiency of judicial administration, and any other issues necessary to aid and promote the orderly adoption and comprehensive use of technology in Ohio courts.

I also serve on the Court Technology Committee for the Ohio Judicial Conference, which explores new developments in court technology and related policies and serves as a resource to help Ohio judges effectively use technology.

I serve on the Ohio Judicial Conference's Civil Law and Procedure Committee, which analyzes pending legislation with a judicial impact on civil laws and procedures and reviews issues and proposals relevant to judges with civil jurisdiction. It makes recommendations to improve the

Ohio Revised Code, Ohio Rules of Civil Procedure, and relevant Supreme Court Rules of Superintendence.

I serve on the Ohio Judicial Conference's Legislative Committee. The Committee approves the Conference's legislative platform, which the various committees develop. The Committee meets almost monthly via conference call to discuss the Conference's legislative priorities and reactions to other legislation that impacts the judiciary and the fair administration of justice. In 2024, I participated in the Judicial-Legislative Exchange and had the opportunity to spend a day with State Representative **Juanita Brent** down at the Statehouse.

In 2024, I served as a trustee of the Association of Municipal /County Judges of Ohio; in January of 2025, the members elected me to serve as the secretary. The Association promotes the development and enhancement of judicial professionalism, efficiency, and responsiveness to improve the administration of justice and foster public confidence in the judicial system. It annually sponsors a winter and summer meeting to provide continuing legal education and to promote an interchange of ideas and experiences among its members.

In 2024, I served as the Secretary for the Northern Ohio Municipal Judges Association, and at the end of that year, I was elected to serve as its vice president. That association allows local municipal court judges an opportunity to meet, discuss best practices, and stay apprised of any current legislative or procedural changes relevant to our jobs.

Finally, but maybe most importantly, I am actively engaged in educational outreach programs such as reading and visiting elementary school students at our schools and participating in various discussion panels.

### CASE FILINGS

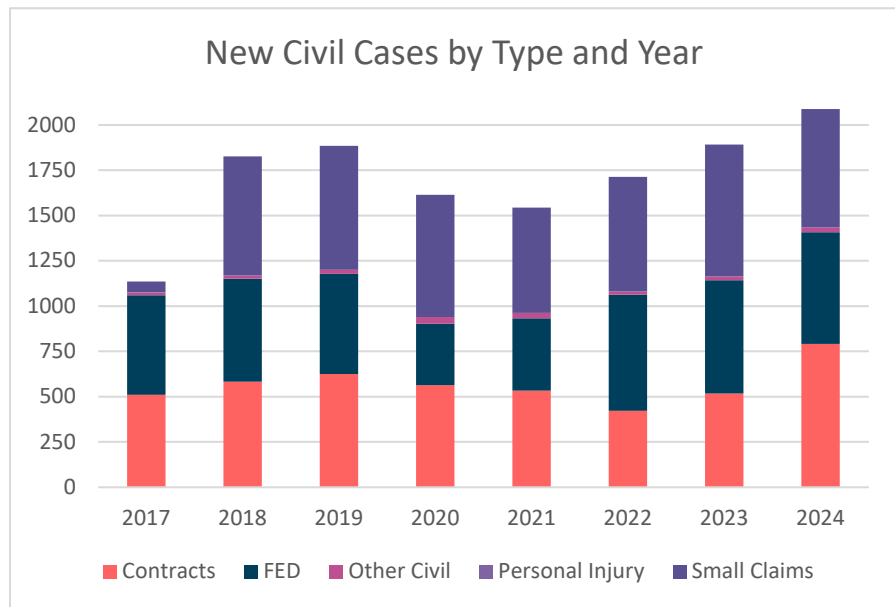
The Court heard a total of 11,738 cases in 2024. This is an increase of around 15% from 2023. Of those incoming cases, 2,119 were civil filings, 8,058 were traffic cases, and 1,561 were criminal cases.

According to the 2024 case statistics of the Supreme Court of Ohio, the average number of incoming cases per judge statewide was 7,162. The average number of incoming cases per judge in Cuyahoga County was 7,078. After adjusting incoming cases to a per-judge caseload, we had one of the highest numbers of cases compared to the other twelve general division municipal courts in Cuyahoga County. In addition, according to the Supreme Court of Ohio case statistics, in 2024, we heard nearly 48% more cases than the average number of cases heard per municipal court judge in Ohio.

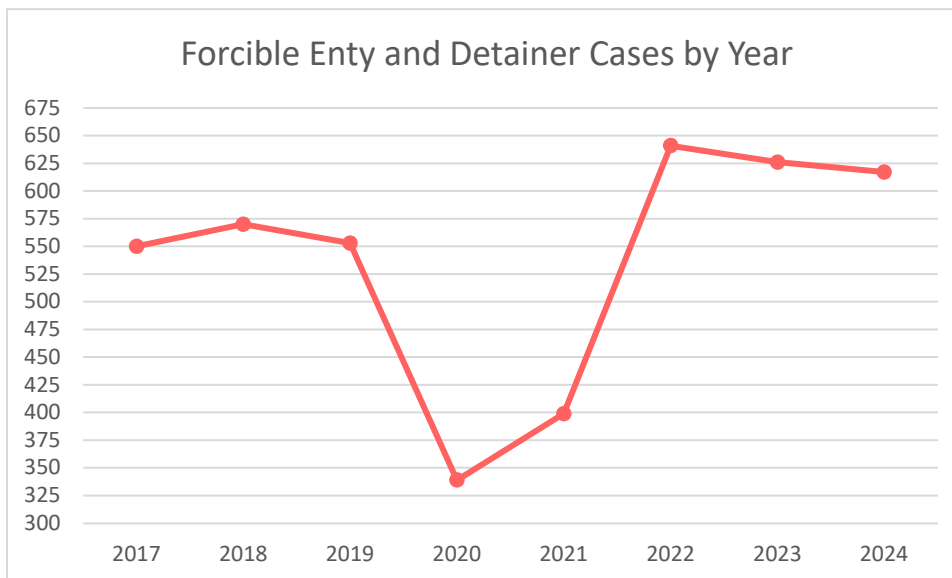
## Civil Cases

Civil case filings include contract, forcible entry and detainer (eviction), personal injury, and small claims cases.

The Court continues to encourage and facilitate the settlement of civil cases, especially small claims, evictions, and rent deposit actions. For example, landlords and tenants can enter into binding agreements, either with a pay-to-stay or with an agreed move-out date, with status hearings scheduled for a later date. The status



hearing docket provides landlords with the assurance that, if breached, the Court will enforce the agreement, and for the tenants, if they comply, there is no eviction judgment against them. This status docket has dramatically reduced the number of eviction judgments against tenants.

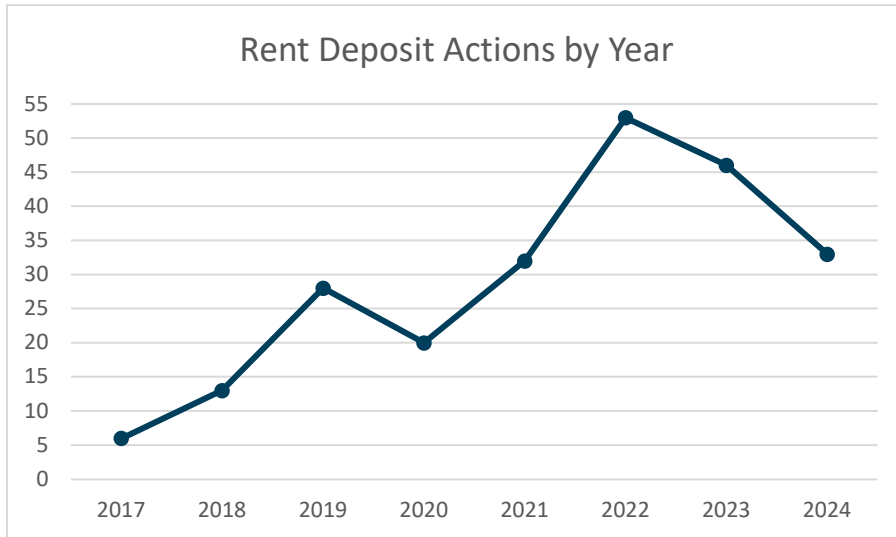


Although slight, for the second year in a row, the Court saw a decrease in the number of eviction filings. Primarily because of the settlement status docket, of those evictions filed where both the landlord and the tenant appear at

that first eviction hearing, the Court settles and resolves approximately 90% of them without a judgment on that day.

An additional resource that the Court provides at these eviction hearings is to make **Holly Thomas**, our Housing Enforcement Specialist, available to litigants. She is familiar with local agencies that offer rental assistance and keeps track of those that may provide not only rent but also other forms of assistance. Her presence has increased the likelihood that the parties can agree to allow the tenant to pay and stay. For those tenants who must leave the property, she can provide critical information and resources to lessen the effects of a difficult move.

**Thomas** has also coordinated a number food assistance events as well as tableing events that take place at City Hall where the Court has had different agencies such as the Division of Senior Services, Cleveland Housing Network, the Institute for H.O.P.E., Journey, Care Source, Passages, Ohio Guidestone, Heights Suburban Collaboration, Catholic Charities, and The Centers. Each event has contributed to strengthening community engagement and ensuring that residents can access the resources they need.



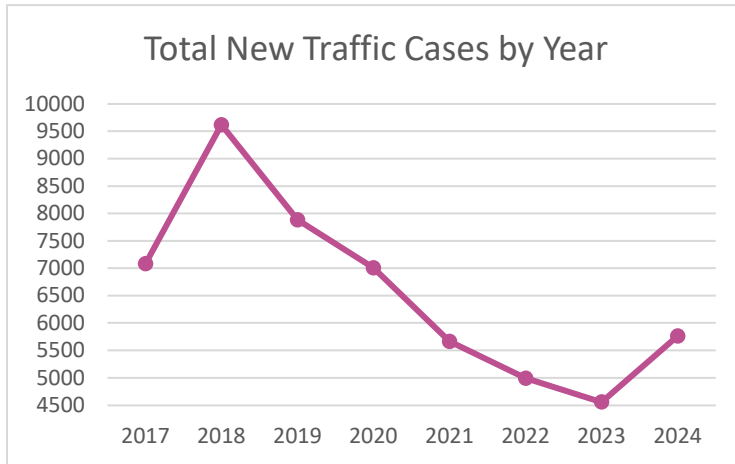
Additionally, for the second consecutive year, the Court experienced a decrease in the number of rent deposit actions initiated in our Court.

In Ohio, if a landlord fails to fulfill any obligation imposed upon it by the law or the lease, or violates a building, housing, health, or

safety codes that apply to any condition of the premises that could materially affect the health and safety of an occupant, the tenant may give notice in writing to the landlord, specifying the acts, omissions, or code violations that constitute non-compliance. After a reasonable time considering the severity of the condition, up to thirty days, a tenant may deposit all rent due with our Court. We then set the matter for a hearing to see if some resolution can be reached or, alternatively, determine how and under what conditions some or all of the rent should be returned to the tenant or the landlord.

Throughout 2024, the Court has tried to educate the public on rent deposit actions. The form used by tenants, available both from the clerk and online, was updated to make it more user-friendly. Additionally, I have attended several events, including “You Talk, I Listen,” hosted by Councilwoman Davida Russell, where I presented “Landlord/Tenant Law 101.”

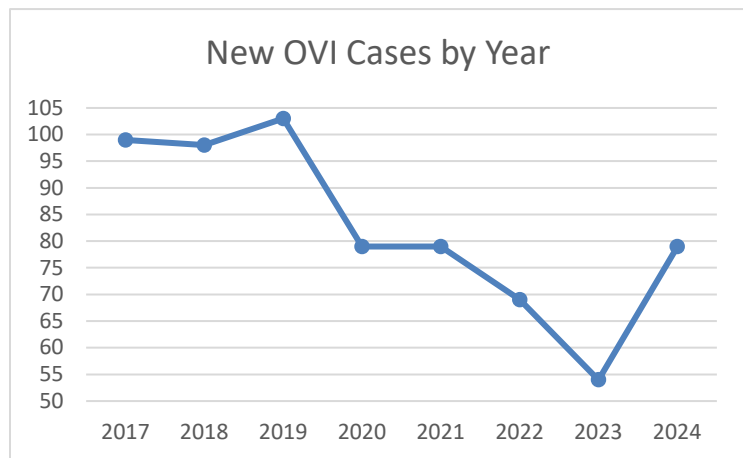
## Traffic Cases



The total number of traffic cases filed in 2024, broken down by charges for operating a vehicle under the influence of alcohol or drugs (OVI) and all other traffic cases, increased by over 23% from the prior year.

Many of these traffic cases include driving under suspension (DUS) charges. While an individual does not have the right to drive without a valid

license, this Court recognizes that being unable to drive results in general inconveniences, loss of employment, the inability to gain employment, and family hardships. Driving without a valid license also burdens law enforcement, municipal courts, and the general public who drive with valid licenses and proper insurance. The Court has a DUS Reinstatement Docket every Wednesday afternoon for these reasons. These dockets, presided over primarily by Magistrate **Kimberly Bolton**, aim to assist the defendants in identifying the requirements to become valid and allowing them to do so. This docket has helped traffic offenders break the cycle of suspensions and become valid, insurance-carrying drivers.

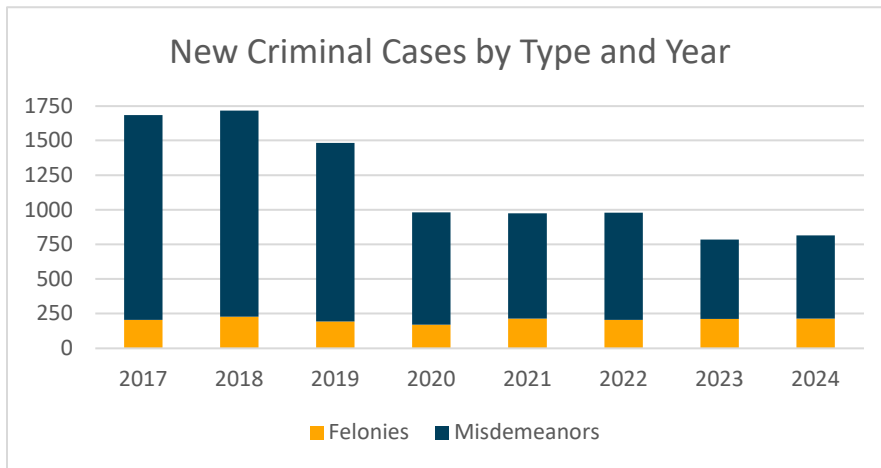


## Criminal Cases

Of the total number of new criminal cases filed with the Court, 601 were misdemeanors, ranging from a littering offense on public property with a maximum fine of \$150 to first-time domestic violence charges, which carry a maximum sentence of 180 days in jail and a \$1,000 fine.

The remaining 214 newly filed criminal cases were felonies. The Court only has jurisdiction to hold initial appearances and preliminary hearings in felony matters. At the initial appearance, the Court informs the defendant of their rights, the nature of the charges, and the possible

penalties and then sets bail. At a preliminary hearing, the Court determines if there is probable cause to bind the accused over to the Court of Common Pleas or order the accused discharged.



The number of criminal cases had been on a downward trend for several years. However, in 2024, there was an increase of just under 4%.

The Court provides appointed counsel on felony cases at the bail hearing and preliminary

hearing. The Court also provides appointed counsel to all indigent defendants facing possible jail time.

In setting a bond for all criminal matters, there is a presumption of pretrial release by the least restrictive means necessary to reasonably assure appearance in court and promote public safety. At the Cleveland Heights Municipal Court, that means that in most cases, other than felonies and crimes of violence, defendants are released on their own recognizance without needing to post a monetary bond. In addition, the determination on bail is generally made under twenty-four hours and never more than forty-eight hours after the arrest, even on weekends and holidays.

### Housing Code Violation Cases

The criminal matters referenced above include complaints filed by the City of Cleveland Heights alleging violations of the City's Health, Housing, Building, Fire, or Safety Codes. Like all criminal cases, a city, through its prosecutor, has complete discretion in deciding whether to bring a criminal charge and the nature of the charge to bring. The maximum penalty depends on the nature of the charge and how it is charged. Generally, for an individual in a code violation case, the penalty is up to a \$1,000 fine and six months in jail. The maximum penalty for an entity (an LLC, corporation, etc.) in a code violation case is a \$5,000 fine.

Although punishment may be warranted, I emphasize compliance with code requirements as the primary goal of criminal prosecution; we, as a community, are best served when properties are repaired, rehabilitated, and maintained. The Court uses community control supervision, also known as probation, as a means to that end. After an offender is sentenced, some of the penalty is suspended, and the Court places the offender on community control. That community control includes conditions that require the offender to develop and present a compliance plan

acceptable to the Court and then bring the property into compliance within that timeframe. If that occurs, the Court closes out the case without further penalty. If the offender violates any community control conditions, the Court can impose all or part of the suspended sentence.

We have a housing court diversion program for defendants where the subject property is owner-occupied. The defendant acknowledges the violations in open court, but rather than be sentenced, they are placed in the diversion program with a condition that they present an approved compliance plan for compliance. If the defendant then follows and brings the property into compliance, the case is dismissed, no conviction appears on their record, and they can apply to have the record of the case sealed or expunged.

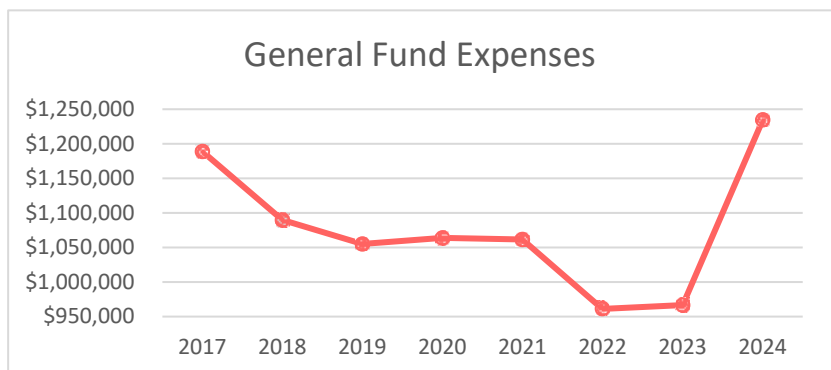
In 2024, the City filed 98 criminal housing violation cases. Each case alleged a single count of failing to comply with a housing violation notice against the named defendant. Of those, 31 were filed against individuals who owned and resided in their homes here in Cleveland Heights, and 67 were not owner-occupied and instead were filed against individuals or entities.

As of the writing of this Report, 47 of the 98 were voluntarily dismissed by the City; 13 have warrants for failing to appear; five are pending and are set for trial; 33 remain under the supervision of the Court; and nine have been brought into compliance. Of the 33 that remain under the Court’s supervision, 18 are owner-occupied properties in the diversion program, and 15 are on community control.

Our Housing Enforcement Specialist, **Holly Thomas**, now monitors all cases placed into the diversion program or community control. In addition to monitoring progress, she provides updates of that progress before court hearings and notifies the Court if there is a failure to comply, at which time the matter will be set for further hearing. She is also able to provide defendants with information to assist them in bringing the property into compliance, including resources such as the Home Repair Resource Center and other agencies that offer funding for repairs.

## EXPENSES

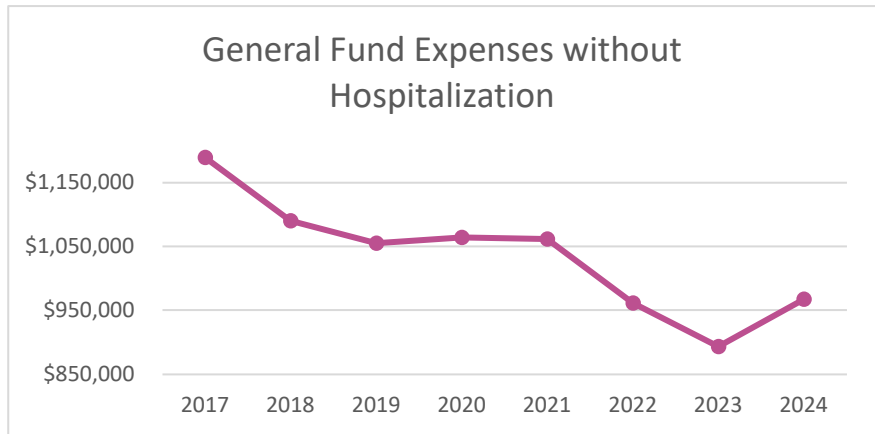
The Court’s 2024 general operating expenses, which included employee salaries and benefits, postage for all required notices and entries sent to litigants, translator expenses for non-English-speaking litigants, and other such costs, totaled





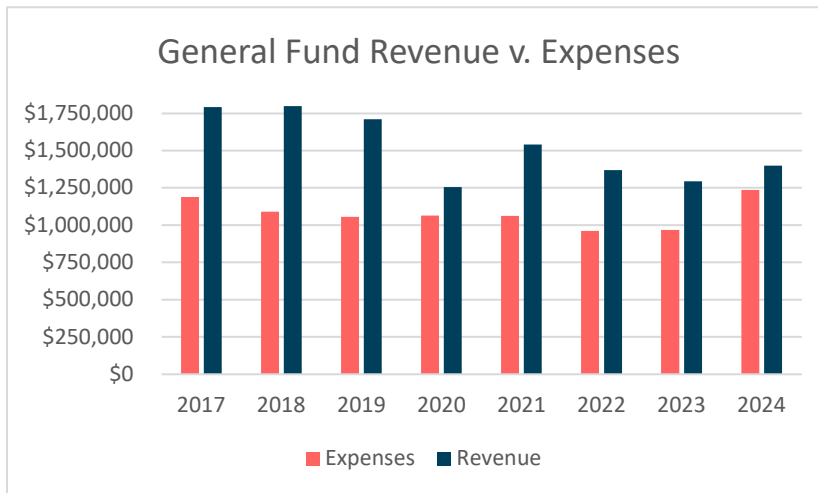
\$1,234,542. This was an increase from last year’s budget. However, the increase is not due to any significant new expense, but rather a shifting of healthcare coverage expenses from the City’s budget to the Court’s budget.

Group health care coverage provided to municipal court employees is paid from the city treasury and, where appropriate, the county treasury. In the fourth quarter of 2023 and throughout 2024, the accounting for this cost of the Court’s employees was shifted from the City’s general fund budget to the Court’s general fund budget.



Nonetheless, the Court came in under its projected budget and, as discussed below, the revenue of the Court exceeded its expenses.

**REVENUE**



The Court should never be viewed as a revenue center - our mission is to administer justice. In 2024, the Court collected fines, costs, and fees on civil, criminal, and traffic matters totaling \$2,356,205.55. Of this, \$1,182,435.80 went to the City of Cleveland Heights, \$92,893.28 to Cuyahoga

County, and \$269,290.57 to the State of Ohio. Additionally, \$81,027.80 was distributed to the Court’s special projects fund, and \$48,441.00 was allocated to the Computer Fund. The remainder went to litigants from the collection of civil judgments, which totalled \$766,534.82, and the balance to several special funds designed to provide for alcohol and drug abuse assessment and treatment for persons who are charged with committing a criminal or traffic offense where substance abuse was a contributing factor leading to the offense.

The general fund revenue from criminal fines and costs and civil costs collected by the Court totaled \$1,166,296.51. In 2024, just as it has for the last seven years, the Court's general fund revenue collected by the court exceeded the general fund expenses. In addition to the Court's revenue shown in the chart, \$231,735.73 was collected in parking fines and costs, which were allocated to the City's general fund.

The Court's commitment to equity is unwavering. While diligently collecting fines, fees, and costs, it ensures transparency in payment options and closely monitors payment plans. Under the guidance of Magistrate Kimberly Bolton, the Court conducts ability-to-pay hearings, focusing on creating reasonable payment plans, offering community service alternatives, and even providing job placement assistance where appropriate.

We aim to make the payment of fines and costs as convenient as possible. Payments can be made in person, by mail, or online from the Court's website. We have also introduced the option to make payments over the phone. In cases where all other attempts to collect fines and costs have not been successful, the Court has partnered with Capital Recovery Services, Inc., a service that incurs no additional expense to the Court, demonstrating our commitment to facilitating the payment process.

## TECHNOLOGY

The Court continues to improve its use of technology. I have continued to hone my grant writing skills, and the majority of those improvements are funded through grants.

We recently finalized the electronic search warrant application and the virtual court module, both of which were paid for through grants administered by the Ohio Department of Public Safety.

The Court also awarded a grant through the Ohio Attorney General that allowed us to obtain a LiveScan fingerprint device. Accurate reporting of criminal case information is the foundation of a reliable background check system for individuals seeking to possess firearms, obtain employment, or secure professional licenses. It also allows peace officers and the public to make informed decisions about safety. Fingerprinting is one of the most important tools for accurately and cost-effectively reporting crime. The LiveScan device lets court personnel capture fingerprints immediately after arraignment hearings, directly linking them to the respective case files. This integration ensures a seamless transition from the courtroom to the police department, reducing wait times and administrative burdens.

In 2024, the Court was awarded \$98,814 from the Supreme Court of Ohio's Technology Grant to upgrade audio and visual equipment crucial to its operations. The grant funds improvements in

the main courtroom and the lobby and allows for additional enhancements in the second, smaller courtroom to be paid out of our special projects fund.

In addition to those improvements, ours was one of the first municipal courts to allow litigants to file documents electronically. We have also upgraded our online docket so that everyone can access electronic images of the actual filings. When someone visits the Court's website, they can view the actual motion itself, rather than just seeing a docket entry indicating that a motion was filed in a case. With these improvements, we have been almost entirely paperless for several years. Our Court continues to send court filings and notices by email rather than simply hard copies through the mail. Finally, the Court implemented a texting module that automatically sends individualized text reminder messages based on the specifics of a case.

### LOCAL RULES UPDATE

First presented to the public for comment in 2024, the Court recently updated its local rules. To begin, I replaced the gender-specific terms with non-gendered language throughout. In addition, I updated Rule 3 concerning when animals are permitted in the courthouse, removed the ability to file by facsimile in Rule 9 (since we have electronic filing), modified to the conditions upon which a telephone CMC is set in Rule 11 and when a civil jury deposit is due in Rule 19, changed the consequences for not filing a certificate of occupancy in a forcible entry and detainer action, and made it clear that the costs of an interpreter in both criminal and civil cases would not be borne by the individual. Finally, I added Rule 32, which addresses the use of artificial intelligence in court filings (and for a bit of irony, I used AI to assist in the drafting of that rule).

### COURT PERSONNEL

#### Magistrates, Visiting Judges, and Acting Judges

Under Civil Rule 53, Criminal Rule 19, and Traffic Rule 14, a court of record may appoint one or more magistrates who have been engaged in the practice of law for at least four years and are in good standing with the Supreme Court of Ohio at the time of the appointment. Magistrates are required to complete 40 hours of continuing legal education, including 10 hours of instruction through courses offered by the Ohio Supreme Court Judicial College, every two years. Further, as part of the 10-hour Judicial College education requirement, three hours of instruction must be designated as "judicial conduct," which may include courses on topics such as judicial ethics, judicial professionalism, and access to justice.

Magistrates are authorized to conduct most, but not all, court cases, but only by reference from the judge. All magistrate orders and decisions are subject to objection and review by the judge.

In this Court, I refer non-OVI traffic cases, ability-to-pay hearings, and most civil cases, other than forcible entry and detainer trials, to the magistrates.

**Kimberly Bolton** joined the Cleveland Heights Municipal Court as a magistrate in April 2018. A native of Cleveland's east side, Magistrate Bolton holds a Bachelor's Degree in Political Science from Hiram College and earned her Juris Doctor degree from Ohio Northern University Pettit College of Law. Before taking the bench, Magistrate Bolton opened her practice in both criminal and civil law. Magistrate Bolton came to the Cleveland Heights Municipal Court from the City of Cleveland Heights, where she was an Assistant Law Director. She oversaw many of the civil and traffic dockets and reviews and conducted probation violation hearings.

In addition to the Magistrate, the Court was occasionally assisted by assigned and acting judges. The Chief Justice of the Ohio Supreme Court may assign a retired judge to serve on a court when a judge is unavailable due to recusal or otherwise. The Honorable **Donna Congeni Fitzsimmons**, a retired judge of the Rocky River Municipal Court, and the Honorable **Deborah A. LeBarron**, formally of the Euclid Municipal Court, each served in that capacity this last year.

The Court also had several acting judges who sat for me when I was temporarily absent during vacations and judicial conferences. **Peggy Foley Jones**, a highly regarded mediator, arbitrator, and private judge for nearly 20 years and Judge on the Common Pleas Court of Cuyahoga County for 12 years, serves in this role. So, too, does **Rod Mastandrea**, a Cleveland Heights High School graduate and practicing criminal defense attorney defending the rights of accused defendants for over 15 years. Finally, **Leslie Johns** is a criminal defense lawyer who serves as a part-time magistrate at the Shaker Heights Municipal Court. Their support was greatly appreciated.

### Clerks

Clerks are entrusted with recording and preserving all court proceedings by maintaining a general index, a docket, and other records. State law also mandates that a clerk receive, collect, and disburse all monies.

Our Clerk's Office was led by **Sandra Berry**, a Certified Public Accountant certified in government accounting and auditing. Her many accolades include a professional certification award from the Ohio Association of Municipal / County Court Clerks and a Certificate of Educational Achievement in Government and Auditing from the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants.

**Lisa Walker**, who holds a bachelor's and a master's degree and served as a deputy clerk for both our Court and the Cuyahoga County Court of Common Pleas, served as the Chief Deputy Clerk.

Assisting those supervisors, the Clerks Department also included **Michael Amaddio, Antoinette Jones, Mark Koss, Karen Szekely, Lorraine Mumaw, and Samira Parker.**

### Bailiffs

The Court's bailiffs are responsible for the safety and security of all persons entering the courthouse and maintaining order and the required decorum during all courtroom proceedings. Chief Bailiff **Cassandra M. Jones** led the bailiff department. She joined the Court as a deputy bailiff in August 2005. She holds a bachelor's in political science from Cleveland State University and an associate's degree in paralegal studies. In 2023, while maintaining her full-time role with the Court, she earned a master's degree in business administration with a specialization in organizational leadership from Youngstown State University. She served as my personal bailiff and managed all the day-to-day functions of the Court. In collaboration with the Supreme Court of Ohio and the National Center for State Courts, she completed the Certified Court Management Program, a national certification curriculum that addresses the educational needs of court leaders. The Department also includes **Marvin Simms** and **Diamonique Green**, each of whom joined the Court in 2024.

To help ensure the safety and security of all persons entering the courthouse, the Court utilizes a walk-thru metal detector, a security wand for use at the point of entry when necessary, and a 24-hour closed-circuit camera surveillance system consisting of several cameras in certain areas of the courthouse, including the upstairs probation offices. The bailiffs operate and help maintain that equipment. In addition to providing security, they also check in persons scheduled for court hearings, assist with establishing ability-to-pay agreements, preserve and properly dispose of evidence, do outside service, conduct eviction move-outs, and run LEADS (criminal background) reports on defendants for traffic and criminal cases. Each bailiff is certified and trained through the Ohio Peace Officer Training Academy.

### Probation Department

The Court's probation department included Chief Probation Officer **William "Skip" Gibson** and Probation Officer **Sherri Travis.**

Chief Probation Officer **Gibson** holds a Bachelor's Degree from Cleveland State University and a Master's in Education Administration/Counseling from Case Western Reserve University. He served 26 years as an Intensive Probation Manager for the Cuyahoga County Juvenile Court, and he has served the last eight years as Chief Probation Officer for the Cleveland Heights Municipal Court. Probation Officer **Travis** has a Bachelor's Degree from Bowling Green State University and a Master's Degree in Criminal Justice from Kent State University. Before joining the Cleveland

Heights Municipal Court in 2018, she served as a probation officer with the Euclid Municipal Court for nearly ten years.

The probation department primarily supervises offenders while on community control. Rather than imposing jail, many offenders are put on community control, better known as probation. Often, community control includes prohibitions, like not having any further convictions or not using alcohol and non-prescribed drugs. It also often includes specific requirements, like completing anger management or anti-theft programs. The probation department focuses on placing a probationer in the best position to succeed by monitoring their progress while also reporting any probation violations. When the probation department believes that someone has violated their community control, they report this to the judge, who can potentially extend the term of the offender's community control or impose a more restrictive sanction or a jail term if the conditions of community control are not met. Last year, a total of 168 probation violation allegations were reported.

The probation department also assists the Court with numerous other functions. For example, the probation officers conduct investigations and prepare pre-sentence reports for criminal and traffic cases as referred by the Court. Those reports provide the detailed background information needed for a more informed court sentencing disposition. Last year, 212 pre-sentence investigation reports were prepared, 78 for traffic and 134 for criminal cases.

The probation department also occasionally assesses jailed defendants to provide the Court with information to assist with setting bail and suggesting and providing viable alternatives to cash bonds. One alternative the Court is increasingly utilizing is GPS monitoring of defendants while they wait to conclude their cases. Rather than sit in jail, the defendant is released with a tracking device. In addition, when an offense is alcohol related, a defendant may also be placed on an electronic alcohol monitoring device as a condition of their release.

In addition to conditions of release, defendants are also subject to electronic monitoring of location and alcohol use as conditions of their community control. The probation department facilitates the electronic monitoring connection for defendants, both pre- and post-conviction, and it receives constant reports enabling it to notify both victims and the police if there is an issue of non-compliance. Last year, the Court placed 25 individuals on electronic location monitoring; there was a total of 1,243 days of monitoring defendants for alcohol with a secure continuous remote alcohol monitor.

The probation staff also assists in court warrant investigations, permitting, when possible, the offender to schedule a date and time to turn themselves in rather than requiring a police arrest process. The Court has partnered with Cleveland's In the Neighborhood Program to allow individuals with outstanding warrants to appear in court without the threat of arrest. In addition,

the Court has begun partnering with other municipal courts, allowing individuals who have warrants in multiple jurisdictions that appear on a warrant in one municipal jurisdiction to more easily address the warrants they have in other jurisdictions. In addition, the Court has a standing order that when a person turns themselves in on a failure to appear warrant for an ability-to-pay hearing or non-OVI traffic case and is financially unable to post the bond, the Cleveland Heights Police may issue the person a form that allows them to appear on the first Tuesday thereafter at 10:00 AM and not be arrested on the warrant, but instead have them addressed by the Court.

Any time a victim suffers an economic loss as a direct and proximate result of the commission of an offense, they are entitled to full and timely restitution. This requirement, found in the Ohio Revised Code, was bolstered by the passage of Marsy's Law in November of 2017. When restitution is ordered on a case, the probation department oftentimes monitors the payments the offenders are ordered to make as a condition of their community control. Last year, defendants paid \$19,476.21 in restitution, \$15,172.88 from traffic cases, and \$4,303.33 from criminal cases into the court, which was then distributed to the victims.

The Court and its probation department continue to partner with the Cleveland Municipal Court and its specialized dockets, including the Mental Health Docket, the Drug Court Docket, and the Veterans Treatment Court. The defendants referred to these dockets from Cleveland Heights are still ultimately monitored by this Court; however, this partnership enables the Cleveland Heights Municipal Court to provide defendants with the benefits of these specialized dockets without the cost and time associated with creating a duplicative specialized court.

The probation department also monitors all community service orders from the Court. The Court orders community service as part of the punishment or permits it for indigent defendants instead of paying fines and costs. Last year, defendants completed 579 hours of community service. Of that, 485 hours were done through the Cleveland Heights Public Works Department.

On April 4, 2023, a new law took effect, introducing sweeping changes to the process of removing criminal records. For example, while a defendant has long been able to seal a criminal record, that record can now potentially be expunged. The difference is that sealing a record removes it from all public records, and the public can no longer access the criminal record. An expungement results in the complete destruction of the record, making it permanently irretrievable. For every sealing or expungement filed, the probation department prepares a report detailing the defendant's prior criminal history and their efforts at rehabilitation. The recent changes in the law have significantly increased the number of individuals seeking to have their cases either sealed or expunged. Last year, the probation department prepared reports for 80 individuals who sought to have their records sealed or expunged.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

It is an honor to serve Cleveland Heights as its Judge. Regardless of the case before me, I strive to uphold the ideals of our judicial system and promote the well-being of our community. I could only do this work with the support of my capable and dedicated staff. We strive to meet and exceed our obligations to the citizens of Cleveland Heights and the public at large.

In addition to the support of my staff, we continue to work well with our partners, including Mayor **Kahlil Seren** and the members of City Council. I want to thank Police Chief **Chris Britton**, Cleveland Heights Law Director **William Hanna**, Housing Director **Allan Butler**, and their respective staff. I also must acknowledge the City's Information Technology, Public Works, Finance, and Human Resources departments for all the behind-the-scenes work that helps the Court function. We are also fortunate to work with many others dedicated to their profession, including victim's advocate **Deborah Benn** and the staff at Home Repair Resource Center, as well as numerous attorneys, including defense attorneys on our criminal and traffic indigent appointment list. Without all of them, the work of the Court could not be done.

Finally, as always, I would like to emphasize that I am supported by an incredible community of active, vocal, and passionate citizens. The citizens of Cleveland Heights are, simply put, incredible. Although this Report is meant for the Cleveland Heights City Council, Cuyahoga County Council Members, and the County Executive, I hope that the citizens of Cleveland Heights find it helpful in understanding the features, functions, and benefits of the Cleveland Heights Municipal Court.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "J.J. Costello". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of the first and last names being capitalized and prominent.

Judge J.J. Costello



**CRIMINAL/TRAFFIC BRANCH RECEIPTS**

	<b>2022</b>	<b>2023</b>	<b>2024</b>
<b>City of Cleveland Heights</b>			
Local Costs	411,136.90	369,157.00	390,752.47
Computer Fund	33,288.00	30,942.00	33,077.50
Indigent Fund	9,768.99	9,209.09	10,358.62
Special Projects Fund	55,619.20	51,547.20	55,139.80
Fines	556,375.40	530,977.50	541,462.40
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Sub-Totals	1,066,188.49	991,832.79	1,030,790.79
 <b>Cuyahoga County</b>			
CRIS	24,262.50	22,805.00	24,778.00
Crime	659.21	416.00	369.00
	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>
Sub-Totals	24,921.71	23,221.00	25,147.00
 <b>State of Ohio</b>			
Indigent Defense Support Fund	184,949.65	162,370.14	170,465.22
General Revenue	602.00	492.00	552.00
Victims Crime	48,764.50	45,511.65	48,795.85
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Sub-Totals	234,316.15	208,373.79	219,813.07
 <b>Other Receipts</b>			
Debt Collection	36,510.91	30,339.75	22,054.50
OVI Fines	7,049.90	8,026.00	8,421.00
Miscellaneous	7,397.80	6,764.50	10,734.18
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Sub-Totals	50,958.61	45,130.25	41,209.68
 <b>TOTAL</b>			
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	1,376,384.96	1,268,557.83	1,316,960.54

**CRIMINAL/TRAFFIC BRANCH DISBURSEMENTS**

<b>City of Cleveland Heights</b>	<b>2022</b>	<b>2023</b>	<b>2024</b>
Fines	466,482.27	464,774.56	471,774.56
Costs	413,179.17	369,884.62	390,656.56
Housing	1,245.00	945.00	660.00
Computer Fund	33,288.00	30,936.00	33,072.00
Special Projects Fund	55,618.70	51,577.00	55,419.80
Indigent Fund	9,768.99	9,905.55	10,358.62
Drug Fines	0.00	25.00	2,682.00
Other Cost	7,397.80	6,764.50	4,291.42
Sub-Total	<u>986,979.93</u>	<u>934,812.23</u>	<u>968,914.96</u>
 <b>Cuyahoga County</b>			
Regular Fines	40,443.90	27,473.40	30,392.20
Uniform Traffic Fines	46,058.10	35,377.72	32,425.08
REDDS	24,262.50	22,805.00	24,778.00
Crime Stop	659.21	416.00	369.00
1/2 Liquor Fines	437.50	0.00	0.00
Public Defender	2,720.00	3,511.50	4,656.00
Reimburse/Witness/Jury	396.00	310.00	273.00
Sub-Total	<u>114,977.21</u>	<u>89,893.62</u>	<u>92,893.28</u>
 <b>State of Ohio</b>			
RRF/Victims Fund	48,764.50	45,502.65	48,795.35
Indigent Defense Support Fund	181,474.75	162,370.14	170,465.22
Seat Belt	1,941.00	3,110.00	5,205.00
Expungements	895.00	570.00	690.00
1/2 Liquor Fines	437.50	0.00	0.00
BMV Fees	90.00	60.00	42.00
Pharmacy Board (Drug)	75.00	30.00	0.00
Sub-Total	<u>233,677.75</u>	<u>211,642.79</u>	<u>225,197.57</u>
 <b>Other Disbursements</b>			
Debt Collection	36,154.91	30,339.75	22,054.50
OVI Housing Fund*	2,253.00	2,700.00	2,682.00
OVI Arrest Agency*	1,078.00	977.00	1,243.00
Sub-Total	<u>39,485.91</u>	<u>34,016.75</u>	<u>25,979.50</u>
 <b>TOTAL</b>	<u><u>1,375,120.80</u></u>	<u><u>1,270,365.39</u></u>	<u><u>1,312,985.31</u></u>

\*Money from these two funds goes into accounts for the Cleveland Heights Police Department for future OVI education and enforcement.

**CIVIL/SMALL CLAIMS BRANCH RECEIPTS**

<b>City of Cleveland Heights</b>	<b>2022</b>	<b>2023</b>	<b>2024</b>
Local Costs	235,023.99	260,936.00	294,044.00
Computer Fund	13,195.00	14,706.00	16,617.00
Special Projects Fund	21,990.00	24,500.00	27,678.00
Sub-Total	<u>270,208.99</u>	<u>300,142.00</u>	<u>338,339.00</u>
State of Ohio Legal Aid	35,220.00	38,371.00	44,093.00
Judgements & Deposits	470,562.68	446,924.72	637,498.80
Bailiff Fee	0.00	0.00	0.00
Miscellaneous Receipts	2,450.00	2,665.00	18,089.54
Sub-Total	<u>508,232.68</u>	<u>487,960.72</u>	<u>699,681.34</u>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<u><u>778,441.67</u></u>	<u><u>788,102.72</u></u>	<u><u>1,038,020.34</u></u>

**CIVIL/SMALL CLAIMS BRANCH DISBURSEMENTS**

<b>City of Cleveland Heights</b>	<b>2022</b>	<b>2023</b>	<b>2024</b>
Costs	235,596.63	260,936.00	272,239.00
Computer Funds	13,195.00	14,706.00	15,369.00
Bailiff Fees	0.00	0.00	0.00
Marriage Fees	2,400.00	2,665.00	16,853.09
Special Projects Fund	21,990.00	24,500.00	25,608.00
Sub-Totals	<u>273,181.63</u>	<u>302,807.00</u>	<u>330,069.09</u>
State of Ohio Legal Aid	35,200.00	38,371.00	44,093.00
Judgements & Refunds	470,562.68	446,924.72	637,498.80
Sub-Totals	<u>505,762.68</u>	<u>485,295.72</u>	<u>681,591.80</u>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<u><u>778,944.31</u></u>	<u><u>788,102.72</u></u>	<u><u>1,011,660.89</u></u>

**LANDLORD-TENANT RECEIPTS AND DISBURSEMENTS**

<b>RECEIPTS:</b>	<b>2024</b>
Rent on Deposits January 1, 2022	77,218.92
Deposits in 2021	91,481.78
	<u>168,700.70</u>
<b>DISBURSEMENTS:</b>	
City of Cleveland Heights	-
Rent Disbursed	129,036.02
<b>TOTAL</b>	<u>129,036.02</u>
Rents on Deposit at December 31, 2023	<u><u>39,664.68</u></u>

**PAYMENT RECONCILIATION**

**CRIMINAL/TRAFFIC**

	January	February	March	April	May	June	July	August	September	October	November	December	Total
Fines Collected	28,027.47	46,901.25	52,377.25	45,710.30	45,590.00	37,855.50	38,817.00	35,690.70	37,906.20	37,354.00	30,503.50	34,985.91	471,719.08
Jury/Wit	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Court Costs Collected	26,503.50	34,976.50	39,363.30	38,402.00	37,042.00	32,251.50	31,854.37	31,091.72	30,841.10	29,916.00	25,854.00	28,563.30	386,659.29
Clerk Computer (1901.261)	2,232.00	3,300.00	3,271.00	3,250.00	3,121.00	2,866.00	2,739.00	2,577.00	2,617.00	2,580.00	2,165.00	2,354.00	33,072.00
Other Court Cost	775.00	190.00	70.00	1,349.09	184.29	465.89	698.00	165.00	0.00	50.00	10.00	40.00	3,997.27
Special Projects (1901.26B1)	3,697.00	5,538.00	5,485.00	5,472.80	5,175.00	4,745.00	4,566.00	4,289.00	4,578.50	4,363.50	3,595.00	3,915.00	55,419.80
City Housing	45.00	30.00	210.00	120.00	15.00	0.00	30.00	15.00	90.00	60.00	30.00	15.00	660.00
Bailiff	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
DUI Arresting Agency	248.00	75.00	70.00	75.00	220.00	50.00	35.00	40.00	85.00	75.00	135.00	135.00	1,243.00
DUI Indigent	712.35	962.06	1,000.25	935.42	1,137.60	875.41	780.38	769.56	950.28	716.51	710.30	808.50	10,358.62
DUI Housing	461.00	170.00	276.00	150.00	460.00	135.00	135.00	100.00	184.00	55.00	241.00	315.00	2,682.00
Drug CLH	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	300.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	300.00
Unclaimed Checks	0.00	0.00	15,824.10	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	15,824.10
<b>TOTAL CITY</b>	<b>62,701.32</b>	<b>92,142.81</b>	<b>117,946.90</b>	<b>95,464.61</b>	<b>93,244.89</b>	<b>79,244.30</b>	<b>79,654.75</b>	<b>74,737.98</b>	<b>77,252.08</b>	<b>75,170.01</b>	<b>63,243.80</b>	<b>71,131.71</b>	<b>981,935.16</b>
Regular (1901.31)	2,660.00	1,487.00	2,579.00	4,459.00	3,005.00	2,601.00	1,270.00	6,721.00	1,812.20	-1,036.00	2,765.00	2,069.00	30,392.20
Uniform Tr	3,347.50	3,706.00	2,102.00	3,497.00	1,945.00	3,519.58	2,784.00	1,710.00	3,008.00	1,993.00	2,294.00	2,519.00	32,425.08
Witness/Jury	42.00	60.00	0.00	65.00	20.00	20.00	20.00	0.00	0.00	10.00	6.00	30.00	273.00
Liquor (4301.57)	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Public Defender	516.00	214.00	465.00	564.00	386.00	325.00	320.00	445.00	340.00	315.00	325.00	441.00	4,656.00
CRIS Fund	1,649.00	2,625.00	2,355.00	2,399.00	2,387.00	2,168.00	2,068.00	1,850.00	2,005.00	1,957.00	1,570.00	1,745.00	24,778.00
Crime Stop	33.00	27.00	36.00	48.00	25.00	20.00	26.00	31.00	45.00	26.00	17.00	35.00	369.00
Law Library	1,331.03	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	1,331.03
<b>COUNTY TOTAL</b>	<b>9,578.53</b>	<b>8,119.00</b>	<b>7,537.00</b>	<b>11,032.00</b>	<b>7,768.00</b>	<b>8,653.58</b>	<b>6,488.00</b>	<b>10,757.00</b>	<b>7,210.20</b>	<b>3,265.00</b>	<b>6,977.00</b>	<b>6,839.00</b>	<b>94,224.31</b>
Capital Recovery	2,140.50	1,945.50	2,347.00	3,433.80	1,588.20	2,378.75	1,753.75	1,647.80	1,980.10	1,074.80	1,149.50	614.80	22,054.50
RRF/Victims (State line 1)	3,357.85	4,919.00	4,917.00	4,821.00	4,550.00	4,128.00	4,082.00	3,826.00	3,822.50	3,896.00	3,052.00	3,424.00	48,795.35
GRF/General (State line 2a)	10,751.72	15,264.00	16,255.00	15,560.50	15,182.50	13,215.50	13,045.00	12,225.00	12,202.00	11,970.50	9,833.00	11,260.00	156,764.72
(State line 2b)	1,169.00	1,848.00	1,736.00	1,697.50	1,694.00	1,515.50	1,484.00	1,347.50	1,393.00	1,379.00	1,092.00	1,223.00	17,578.50
Expungement (State line 5)	60.00	0.00	150.00	120.00	30.00	0.00	30.00	90.00	60.00	90.00	0.00	60.00	690.00
Seat Belt (State line 10)	420.00	485.00	720.00	742.50	617.50	415.00	335.00	320.00	485.00	225.00	250.00	190.00	5,205.00
Liquor Board (State line 4)	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
BMV OL Forfeiture	0.00	0.00	0.00	15.00	0.00	0.00	15.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	12.00	0.00	42.00
BMV Warrant Block	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Board Pharmacy	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Adjustment	0.00	20.00	(15,824.10)	0.00	0.00	0.00	291.82	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	(15,512.28)
Community Service	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
<b>MISC TOTAL</b>	<b>17,899.07</b>	<b>24,481.50</b>	<b>10,300.90</b>	<b>26,390.30</b>	<b>23,662.20</b>	<b>21,652.75</b>	<b>21,036.57</b>	<b>19,456.30</b>	<b>19,942.60</b>	<b>18,635.30</b>	<b>15,388.50</b>	<b>16,771.80</b>	<b>235,617.79</b>
<b>CRIMINAL TOTAL</b>	<b>90,178.92</b>	<b>124,743.31</b>	<b>135,784.80</b>	<b>132,886.91</b>	<b>124,675.09</b>	<b>109,550.63</b>	<b>107,179.32</b>	<b>104,951.28</b>	<b>104,404.88</b>	<b>97,070.31</b>	<b>85,609.30</b>	<b>94,742.51</b>	<b>1,311,777.26</b>

**PAYMENT RECONCILIATION CONTINUED**

**CIVIL/SMALL CLAIMS**

	January	February	March	April	May	June	July	August	September	October	November	December	Total
Court Costs Collected	21,805.00	20,648.00	25,570.00	23,517.00	22,430.00	22,461.00	26,511.00	28,784.00	24,534.00	22,564.00	25,474.00	29,746.00	294,044.00
Baliff Fees	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Marriage Fees	1,236.45	984.13	1,113.42	1,399.86	1,246.22	1,267.26	1,909.00	1,755.03	1,485.45	2,081.70	1,878.08	1,732.94	18,089.54
Special Projects (1901.26B1)	2,070.00	1,740.00	2,348.00	2,240.00	2,030.00	2,190.00	2,540.00	2,680.00	2,420.00	2,030.00	2,480.00	2,910.00	27,678.00
Clerk Computer (1901.261)	1,248.00	1,044.00	1,410.00	1,344.00	1,219.00	1,314.00	1,524.00	1,610.00	1,452.00	1,217.00	1,489.00	1,746.00	16,617.00
Unclaimed Funds	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
<b>TOTAL TO CITY</b>	<b>26,359.45</b>	<b>24,416.13</b>	<b>30,441.42</b>	<b>28,500.86</b>	<b>26,925.22</b>	<b>27,232.26</b>	<b>32,484.00</b>	<b>34,829.03</b>	<b>29,891.45</b>	<b>27,892.70</b>	<b>31,321.08</b>	<b>36,134.94</b>	<b>356,428.54</b>
Rental Escrow Court Costs	168.78	147.16	81.50	120.50	107.80	111.17	90.99	67.70	51.51	36.30	116.78	124.48	1,224.67
Legal Aid	3,372.00	2,785.00	3,632.00	3,350.00	3,168.00	3,728.00	3,326.00	4,196.00	4,441.00	3,319.00	4,215.00	4,561.00	44,093.00
Reconciling Adjustment	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
<b>CIVIL TOTAL</b>	<b>29,900.23</b>	<b>27,348.29</b>	<b>34,154.92</b>	<b>31,971.36</b>	<b>30,201.02</b>	<b>31,071.43</b>	<b>35,900.99</b>	<b>39,092.73</b>	<b>34,383.96</b>	<b>31,248.00</b>	<b>35,652.86</b>	<b>40,820.42</b>	<b>401,746.21</b>
<b>GRAND TOTAL</b>	<b>120,079.15</b>	<b>152,091.60</b>	<b>169,939.72</b>	<b>164,858.27</b>	<b>154,876.11</b>	<b>140,622.06</b>	<b>143,080.31</b>	<b>144,044.01</b>	<b>138,788.84</b>	<b>128,318.31</b>	<b>121,262.16</b>	<b>135,562.93</b>	<b>1,713,523.47</b>

**NEW CASE FILINGS**

	FELONY	MISDEMEANOR	O.V.I.	TRAFFIC	PER INJ	CONTRACT	F.E.D.	OTH CIV	SM CLMS	TOTAL
January	29	30	3	444	0	69	39	2	57	673
February	18	32	10	612	0	49	68	2	5	796
March	13	50	6	585	0	66	45	2	56	823
April	17	45	6	561	0	58	47	10	53	797
May	18	61	6	457	0	47	55	2	60	706
June	16	63	1	529	0	52	52	0	59	772
July	26	72	13	413	0	32	56	2	68	682
August	13	53	9	448	0	83	53	2	62	723
September	22	63	5	369	0	80	67	1	61	668
October	15	52	4	432	0	83	40	1	59	686
November	13	43	7	374	0	86	42	1	33	599
December	14	37	9	462	0	85	53	2	81	743
<b>Total New</b>	214	601	79	5686	0	790	617	27	654	8668

**REACTIVATED OR REDESIGNATED**

	FELONY	MISDEMEANOR	O.V.I.	TRAFFIC	PER INJ	CONTRACT	F.E.D.	OTH CIV	SM CLMS	TOTAL
Administrative	11	40	3	119	0	0	2	0	6	
Individual	0	18	0	20	0	0	0	0	0	
January	11	58	3	139	0	0	2	0	6	219
Administrative	17	47	1	177	0	0	0	0	0	
Individual	0	19	1	28	0	0	0	0	0	
February	17	66	2	205	0	0	0	0	0	290
Administrative	6	30	0	165	0	0	3	0	1	
Individual	0	17	0	40	0	0	0	0	0	
March	6	47	0	205	0	0	3	0	1	262
Administrative	9	47	1	194	0	0	2	0	2	
Individual	0	14	4	46	0	0	0	0	0	
April	9	61	5	240	0	0	2	0	2	319
Administrative	12	43	1	194	0	1	1	0	0	
Individual	0	15	2	34	0	0	0	0	0	
May	12	58	3	228	0	1	1	0	0	303
Administrative	6	37	0	141	0	0	1	0	0	
Individual	0	8	0	38	0	0	0	0	0	
June	6	45	0	179	0	0	1	0	0	231
Administrative	12	29	1	189	3	0	0	0	1	
Individual	0	15	1	36	0	0	0	0	0	
July	12	44	2	225	3	0	0	0	1	287
Administrative	17	19	0	154	0	1	1	0	0	
Individual	0	18	0	28	0	0	0	0	0	
August	17	37	0	182	0	1	1	0	0	238
Administrative	13	49	0	151	0	1	0	0	0	
Individual	0	11	0	21	0	0	0	0	0	
September	13	60	0	172	0	1	0	0	0	246
Administrative	11	58	0	168	0	0	0	0	0	
Individual	0	13	3	37	0	0	0	0	0	
October	11	71	3	205	0	0	0	0	0	290
Administrative	10	17	0	105	0	1	0	0	1	
Individual	0	12	0	18	0	0	0	0	0	
November	10	29	0	123	0	1	0	0	1	164
Administrative	9	22	0	144	0	1	0	0	2	
Individual	0	15	1	27	0	0	0	0	0	
December	9	37	1	171	0	1	0	0	2	221
<b>Total Reactivated</b>	133	613	19	2274	3	5	10	0	13	3070
<b>Grand Total</b>	347	1214	98	7960	3	795	627	27	667	11738