



OFFICE OF

TOM ORLANDO

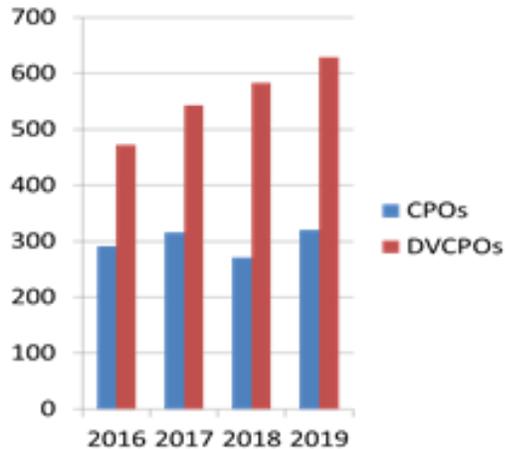
LORAIN COUNTY CLERK OF COURTS

2019 Annual Report

LEGAL DIVISION

Statutorily, the Lorain County Clerk of the Common Pleas Court is responsible for serving as the clerk to both the Domestic Relations and General Divisions of the Common Pleas Court, as well as clerk for the Ninth District Court of Appeals in Lorain County. Responsibilities include such tasks as taking in new filings, issuing warrants and subpoenas, and serving as the custodian of the court records.

Case filings in 2019 were down overall from the prior year. Appellate filings in the Court of Appeals were down significantly, to 154 cases from 208 cases in 2018. At the Common Pleas level, the Criminal Department experienced a 16% decline in cases filed between 2018 (2,272 cases) and 2019 (1909 cases). New Civil Department case filings were up from 2018, primarily in the "Other Civil" and "Other Torts" case classifications. Certificate of Judgment filings were down in 2019, from 8,461 liens filed in 2018 to 7,077 filed last year. The Domestic Relations Department case filings saw a 4% increase in cases filed. In both the Civil and Domestic Relations Department, there was a marked increase in the number of petitions for protection orders filed in 2019 compared with the prior year. In 2018, there were a total of 271 civil protection order petitions and 583 domestic violence protection order petitions filed. Those numbers jumped to 320 and 629 petitions, respectively, in 2019. Worryingly, these numbers have continued to hold steady or increase over the last several years:



The numbers at the left of the graph represent the number of petitions filed.

In January, our office assisted the General Division of the Lorain County Common Pleas Court to create a driving privileges pilot program. In total, there were 39 such matters filed for the court’s consideration. The program allows individuals whose driver licenses have been suspended to see restoration of driving privileges.

At the beginning of the year, the Clerk’s office in significant collaboration with the General and Domestic Relations/Juvenile Divisions of the Lorain County Common Pleas Court and the Lorain County Prosecutor presented a comprehensive case management system solution for approval to the Lorain County Board of Commissioners. The contract with Pioneer Technology Group was approved and signed in February. The new paperless system, called Benchmark, will be integrated with technology used by the Prosecutor and Juvenile Court to allow for greater efficiency among the justice system partners. Other features of the solution include electronic filing, online document viewing, and enhanced jury management capabilities. Implementation details are continuing to be worked out, but the project is currently on schedule to launch some time in year 2021.

Within the office, the Civil and Appellate Department embarked on an ambitious cross-training program for the first five months of 2019. Due to changes resulting from the passage of Ohio’s Notary Modernization Act, the Clerk’s office stopped distributing notary public applications or providing notary certification services in September. The Criminal Department has taken on the task of issuing certificates of judgment against criminal defendants whose court costs, fines, and fees remain outstanding. This type of execution preserved the judgment for future collections opportunities. In the Domestic Relations Department, legislative changes required the creation of a new “married but separated” case type. The Clerk’s office

worked with judicial staff and the Lorain County Child Support Enforcement Agency to ensure the propriety of the process. Upon the Clerk's initiative, bond release procedures with adult and juvenile offenders have been standardized to make things work more efficiently with the Lorain County Sheriff's office and the jail. Additionally, the Clerk's office worked with both the General and Domestic Relations Divisions to create a process for more expeditious e-mail service to the Cuyahoga County Sheriff's Office.

One issue that has dominated headlines has been the problem of individuals purchasing firearms who are not legally eligible under the law to own them. The federal Brady Act requires a federal criminal background check be completed for all potential purchasers of firearms through a national database called NICS (National Instant Criminal Background Check System). Certain individuals, such as those who have been convicted of a crime punishable by at least one year of imprisonment, fugitives, those who have been convicted of domestic violence or who are by court order restrained from harassing or stalking a family member, or those who are unlawful users of controlled substances may be prohibited from purchasing, transporting, or possessing a firearm. This criminal information is obtained through criminal case disposition reporting to the NICS database by courts and clerks in all jurisdictions throughout the country. The case disposition information may also be used for noncriminal justice background check purposes. In Ohio, clerks transmit this information to Ohio's Bureau of Criminal Identification (BCI), which in turn sends it to NICS.

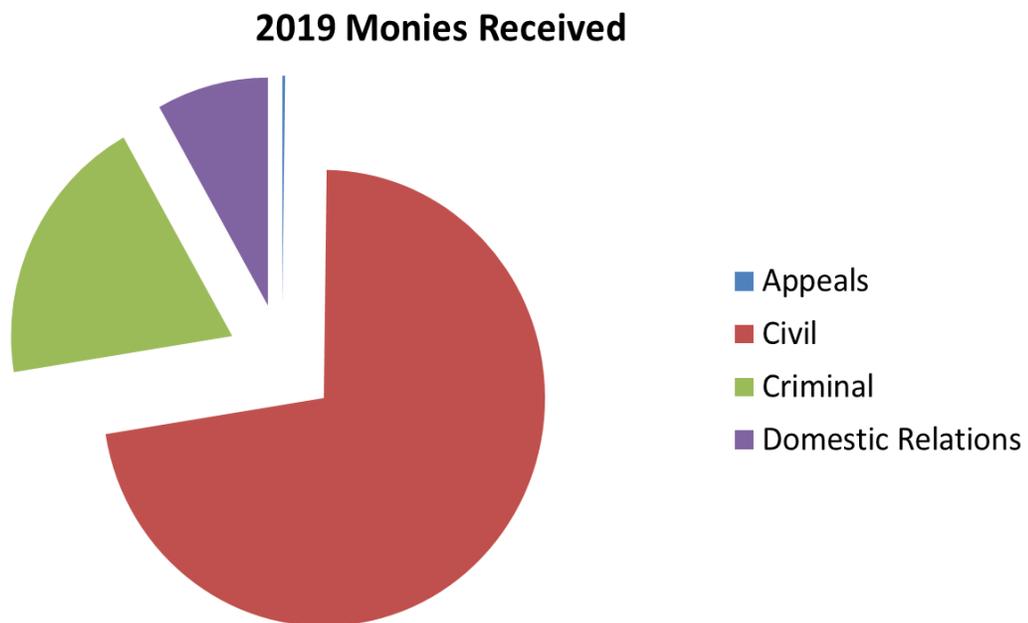
The Lorain County Clerk of Court's office spearheaded a collaborative effort among the Sheriff, local police departments, the Court, the Lorain County Crime Lab, and the Prosecutor's office to evaluate and make changes to existing procedures, which involve the use of fingerprints taken at the time of arrest. BCI was instrumental in providing guidance. These changes have improved communication among the involved justice system partners and help us ensure that all relevant criminal case disposition information is being transmitted to BCI in a timely fashion.

The Clerk's office works diligently for taxpayers to collect all court-ordered financial obligations pursuant to its statutory requirements. Individuals may be assessed court costs, fines, fees, and restitution, depending upon the circumstances. These amounts are added to case cost bills and first collected through internal processes before outstanding delinquencies are referred to outside collections through the Ohio Attorney General's office. Incarcerated defendants who owe money may be subject to commissary account garnishments through procedures established by the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction (ODRC). Court cost obligors

have the option to sign up for payment plans. Collected funds are then disbursed by the Clerk’s office to the appropriate recipients, which can include, but are not limited to, the following: victims, the county General Fund, local municipal courts, various state-established funds, or providers of services to the Court, such as guardians ad litem or real estate appraisers.

In 2019, the total amount collected through the Ohio Attorney General’s office was \$244,705.28. This amount is similar to what was collected in 2018 (\$246,362.60). The Clerk’s office collected \$12,010.01 in 2019 from the inmate collections program through the ODRC, and an additional \$6,093.12 was received for inmates whose accounts were paid in full to avoid commissary collections.

This chart reflects all monies received (including funds held upon further order of the court and security deposits) by the Legal Division of the Clerk’s office broken down by department:



Appeals: \$9,544.91
Civil: \$3,384,669.31
Criminal: \$906,526.27
DR: \$383,085.49
TOTAL: \$4,683,825.98

Of these monies, a total of \$855,709.77 was disbursed by the Clerk's office to the county General Fund, and \$2,390,301.98 was disbursed to county Special Revenue funds. Mandatory state accounts received disbursements of \$157,219.61 in 2019.

The Legal Division is an instrumental component of post-judgment proceedings to collect on court-ordered financial obligations. Many processes, from writs of execution to garnishments, are initiated by creditors through the Clerk's office. New garnishments were filed in 142 civil cases in 2019, and a total of \$1,035,376.56 was collected by this office on all new and continuing garnishments last year.

Additionally, the Legal Division of the Clerk's office was able to return over \$110,000 in unused monies appropriated by the Lorain County Board of Commissioners for its budget back to the county at the end of the year.

AUTO TITLE & PASSPORT DIVISION

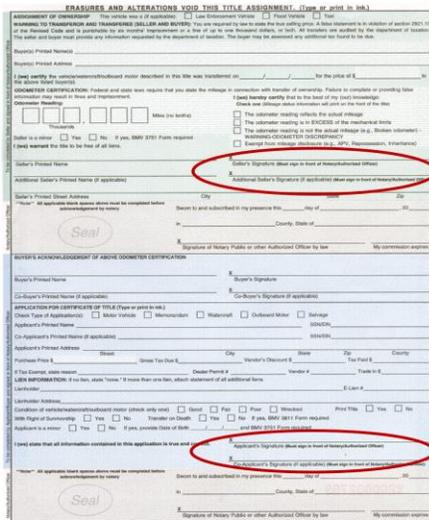
The Clerk's Title Division offers a variety of services to the citizens of Lorain County. The Division's primary responsibility involves issuance of certificates of title for motor vehicles and watercraft, and 2019 was an incredibly busy year in that regard. A total of 160,416 titles were issued among the four Auto Title & Passport Offices, located in Elyria, Amherst, Lorain, and North Ridgeville. In addition to titling functions, these offices also serve as passport acceptance facilities, offer ID photographs, and provide watercraft registration services. The Limited Authority Deputy Registrar (LADR) branches in North Ridgeville and Lorain are also authorized by the state to issue temporary vehicle tags with title transfers.

In 2019, the Division registered a total of 745 watercraft, and our LADR offices processed 4,229 transactions. Passport acceptance services are offered without the need for appointments in all office locations, and the Clerk was pleased to be able to assist 2,930 customers with their new U.S. passport applications. Additionally, 3,004 identification photos, for use with passport applications or for other purposes, were issued for the year.

One of the most visible changes to occur in this division was the rollout of newly-redesigned certificates of titles.



FRONT



BACK

(Specimen courtesy of Ohio Bureau of Motor Vehicles.)

These 8½" x 11" titles replaced the former 7" x 8" titles in the spring of 2019. The older, longstanding titles continue to remain valid, but customers applying for new titles will receive the redesigned version. To accommodate the size of the redesigned titles, all offices received new printers, which were purchased by the state of Ohio.

In addition to the redesigned titles, the state implemented a new application for scanning title evidence that required replacement of the existing scanners. The new application produces cleaner images and requires fewer instances of rescanning, which has improved efficiency. All scanned images are stored electronically in a repository securely maintained by the state.

The filing system used in the Title Division had remained unchanged for decades - until last summer. After two of the managers spent time learning about the best practices of another Clerk's Title Division, they came back with some ideas on how to streamline filing while saving precious space in the Elyria file room. Thanks to their initiative, the Title Division filing method was successfully overhauled. The changes have resulted in the reduction in use of consumables such as staples as well as 15% increase in the volume of title evidence that can be filed in the same physical space.

Labor negotiations with the Title Division bargaining unit concluded last spring. A new agreement was reached with the United Steel Workers that expires in December of 2021. Consistent with the terms of the contract, changes were made to Title Division hours of operation so that all branches offering extended hours one evening a week (Lorain on Mondays, Amherst

on Tuesdays, North Ridgeville on Wednesdays) would remain open to serve customers until 6:30 pm on those days.

Finally, the Clerk's office has taken steps to increase its community outreach. It is important that those who live or work in Lorain County have a better understanding of the myriad of services offered by the Title Division. In order to provide this education, the Clerk's office shared booth space (with the kind permission of Lorain County Auditor Craig Snodgrass) at the 2019 Lorain County Fair, talked with visitors to the Lorain County Labor Day Family Celebration at Black River Landing, and offered tips to avoid probate to attendees at the 14th annual Senior Living Fair held at the Lorain County JVS last October.