



CUYAHOGA COUNTY COURT OF COMMON PLEAS
DIVISION OF DOMESTIC RELATIONS

ADMINISTRATIVE JUDGE
LESLIE ANN CELEBREZZE

ADMINISTRATOR FOR COURT OPERATIONS
JAMES S. ZAK

JUDGES
HON. DIANE M. PALOS
HON. LESLIE ANN CELEBREZZE
HON. FRANCINE B. GOLDBERG
HON. TONYA R. JONES

November 1, 2021

Members of the County Council

Re: Budget Proposal

On behalf of the Cuyahoga County Common Pleas Court, Domestic Relations Division, I accept the proposed detailed budget for Fiscal Years 2022-2023 as conveyed in the Executives Recommended Biennial Budget.

Over the past two years we have reviewed how we can better serve our community and to advance new initiatives and goals that focus on our customers to improve their court experience, while operating within the framework of our budget. Our Court continues to focus on reducing the number of court visits, making court events meaningful and to improve the experience of all parties that we interact with daily.

Recently, The Domestic Relations Court was selected to participate in a joint endeavor between the **National Center for State Courts** and the Ohio Supreme Court to launch the **Access and Fairness Survey**, which only a select few Ohio courts were asked to participate. NCSC has designed questions to specifically gather feedback when proceedings are conducted remotely. This was the first survey of its kind in the U.S.

The Domestic Relations Court was also invited to participate in notarizing documents electronically as part of an **Ohio Supreme Court e-Notarization Pilot**, in which the Court was awarded grant money. SCO relaxed its notarization requirements for certain SCO forms, but some forms must, by statute, be notarized, such as the military affidavit and the parenting proceeding affidavit. Notarization requirements have been a challenge for Domestic Relations Court and Juvenile Courts especially during the Covid public health emergency. The results will be reported to the Chief Justice and will inform the recommendations of the *Ohio Task Force on Improving Court Operations Using Technology*

The Domestic Relations Court participated in the **Ohio Supreme Court's Online Dispute Resolution Project**. Several Ohio DR courts with the help of a grant have been working closely with Matterhorn, an online dispute resolution platform, to create pathways for parties to communicate with each other using a messaging software to facilitate reaching a settlement, and if so, to prepare any required documents, without the involvement of court personnel. The platform will also incorporate mediation using our mediators and mediators across the state (capacity available through the Ohio State Bar Association) if the parties are unable to reach agreement on their own. The plan is to spend the first six months adapting the software to the designated case type(s), and the following year using the platform in actual cases. The goal is to determine if ODR is a viable tool for the administration of justice in family cases.

Our Domestic Violence Department in Conjunction with **the U.S Department of Justice Office on Violence against Women** is **among an elite group of Mentor Courts throughout the nation** that continues to serve as a **national model and Mentor Court** to share our expertise by hosting site visits, linking up with courts that are facing similar challenges and assisting other domestic violence courts to implement best practices to respond effectively to difficult cases.

The Domestic Relations Court, under the direction of Judge Tonya Jones, and partnering with a **Grant** from the ADAMHS Board, is continuing the **Families First Program, the first of its type in the State of Ohio** which is an intervention program aimed at helping divorcing parents battling Substance Abuse and Mental Health issues.

Our Families First Program is an ongoing initiative that combines judicial supervision with identification and treatment of parents involved in contested divorce proceedings and experiencing substance use and mental health issues with the goal of improving the co-parent relationship. Essential elements of this program are judicial supervision, status review, treatment team, screening and assessment, evidence-based treatment services and mentored court visits. The program also provides assistance with housing, supervised parenting time, medication, treatment and essential gap services to maintain stability for the family. The program is voluntary and available to all families in the process of divorce and experiencing substance use, mental health issues and/or co-occurring disorders. This program has been in existence for the past 3 years and has seen a tremendous growth since its inception. During this past year, The Families First Program has helped 26 parents and 25 children by linking individuals with community resources to assist with healthy co-parenting.

Our Recognized **Navigation Department Help Center** is designed to assist self-represented parties who now make up over 66% of cases. The Center is expected to serve over 17,547 people in 2021, a 34% increase from 13,131 in 2019. A rapid area of growth for our court, we realize that we are facing a challenge to continue to provide service to self-represented litigants.

With the number of self-represented litigants on the rise, the Domestic Relations Court in September began training other departmental staff with the resources and tools that they need to assist the center when called upon. Our goal by merging departments under one umbrella titled **Navigation Services Help Center** is to have more employees properly trained in multiple areas to assist parties and reduce job fatigue. Additionally, we are continuing to review an Intelligent

Filing Solution which is designed to increase efficiency with self-guided interviews that allows the litigant to prepare their court case accurately online. Litigants will be guided through a series of questions to help determine the exact forms and other documentation required to prepare their case. An intelligent filing solution provides consistent accurate information which ensures that users file the correct forms, dramatically reducing review and correction work. Help Center staff then can review and process the filing electronically which will allow the court to serve more individuals, more efficiently.

I feel that it is critical to enabling the ongoing improvement of this Court to meet the changing needs of the public that the budget reflect the true needs of the Court, the safety of all who enter and that it provides fair remuneration for employees. We are asking that you approve the recommended budget that has been presented.

Thank you!

- **Our partners**

- ADAHMS Board,
- Applewood Centers,
- Bellefaire Jewish Children's Bureau,
- Glenbeigh Hospital,
- Laurelwood Hospital,
- Moore Counseling and Mediation Services,
- Domestic Violence and Child Advocacy Centers (DVCAC),
- Change of Direction Youth Programming,
- Metro Health Hospital,
- Children's Rights Family Advocates,
- Psychological and Behavioral Health Inc (Psych BC),
- New Values Sober Housing