



CUYAHOGA COUNTY COURT OF COMMON PLEAS
DIVISION OF DOMESTIC RELATIONS

ADMINISTRATIVE JUDGE
LESLIE ANN CELEBREZZE

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

October 28, 2019

Members of the County Council

Re: Budget Proposal

On behalf of the Cuyahoga County Common Pleas Court, Domestic Relations Division, I accept the proposed budget for Fiscal Years 2020-2021 as conveyed in the Executives Recommended Biennial Budget.

Over the past two years the Domestic Relations Court has better served our community by advancing new initiatives and goals which focus on customer service while operating within the framework of our budget. We are committed to enriching the experience for every person that comes in contact with our court by continuing to develop court services and case management practices, reduce court visits and make each and every court event meaningful.

The Domestic Relations Court was one of four courts **nationally** selected to participate in the **Family Justice Initiative Project**. The Family Justice Initiative is a project of the National Center for State Courts, the Institute for the Advancement of the American Legal System, and the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges and is supported by a **grant from the State Justice Institute**. The focus of this project is to guide courts toward better family outcomes, while managing costs and delays. As one of the **four pilot sites nationally**, our Court will implement Family Justice Initiatives, Principles and Pathways to develop strategies and promising practices to improve the way courts handle domestic relations cases as well as becoming a Trauma-Informed and Safety Responsive Court.

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, and partnering with a **Grant** from the ADAMHS Board, has launched 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 a new 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 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 new program has helped over 20 parents and 15+ children in the past year by linking individuals with community resources to assist with healthy co-parenting.

In August of this past year we launched **CourtConnect**, a free mobile application designed to connect litigants and attorneys with the Domestic Relations Court. CourtConnect is available on iOS & Android and provides the public with quick, easy, 24/7 access to court-related information through their mobile devices including case searches, push notifications, pay court costs, contact information for Domestic Relations Court services and links to outside agencies.

We are researching a joint docket for divorce and criminal cases with a criminal component to work in conjunction with General Division to assist litigants that are involved in both a criminal matter, mental health issue, substance abuse issue, domestic violence issue and/or on a Veterans' court docket, as well as Domestic Relation cases. This will involve working to establish appropriate parenting plans as well as to provide needed support from the DR Court. By coordinating with General Division, we can reduce the amount of court visits for the parties involved in two separate courts and provide greater access to justice.

Our recognized Help Center is designed to assist self-represented parties who now make up over 66% of our cases. Our Help Center Specialists have served over 14,000 people in 2019 and 22,305 since its inception. A rapid area of growth for our court, we realize the challenges ahead and are committed to providing superior service to self-represented litigants.

With the number of self-represented litigants on the rise, the Domestic Relations Court is reviewing intelligent filing solutions designed to increase efficiency by using self-guided interviews that allows litigants to prepare their court case accurately online. Litigants are 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 can then review and process the filing electronically which will allow the court to serve more individuals, more efficiently.

In the past year the Domestic Relations Court has seen major changes in Domestic Relations Law.

House Bill 366, That went into effect this past March, modernized the way child support is calculated in Ohio. To comply with the new legislation, the Court made major revisions to its forms and judgment entries.

House Bill 595, That went into effect in March as well, changed the jurisdiction of Ohio juvenile courts and domestic relations courts in child custody and support matters. The purpose is to spare parents from litigating in two courts.

Given these recent statutory changes with challenging timelines, the Domestic Relations Court partnered with local and state agencies including the Juvenile Court and has worked collaboratively to smooth the process for parties as much as possible as new cases are filed and existing cases are transferred to Domestic Relations. We don't know the direct impact these recent changes will have to our volume of business, but we are prepared to address them.

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!