



**PROBATE COURT OF CUYAHOGA COUNTY**

DIVISION OF THE COURT OF COMMON PLEAS

1 LAKESIDE AVE. W.

CLEVELAND, OHIO 44113

ANTHONY J. RUSSO  
Presiding Judge

October 28, 2019

Armond Budish  
Cuyahoga County Executive  
2079 East Ninth Street  
Cleveland, OH 44115

Cuyahoga County Council  
2079 East Ninth Street- 8th Floor  
Cleveland, OH 44115

Re: 2020/2021 Probate Court Budget Statement

Dear Mr. Budish, Mr. Brady, and members of County Council:

I am Judge Anthony J. Russo, Presiding and Administrative Judge of the Probate Court since 2009. Thank you for the opportunity to be here today to discuss the vital services we provide to the citizens of Cuyahoga County.

The Probate Court will have almost 10,000 case filings by the end of this year. In addition, we have issued more than 6,000 marriage licenses in 2018 and expect a comparable level this year. Judge Laura Gallagher and I have also performed over 1,200 marriage ceremonies during the past 10 years.

The Probate Court continues to strive for excellence in performance, serving our citizens with courtesy, competence and respect. We are constantly searching for more effective ways to perform the necessary functions mandated by the Ohio Constitution and the Ohio Revised Code.

The Court continues to expand its electronic filing system. We expect to add guardianship of the person and land sales on estates, guardianships and trusts in 2020. More than 5000 individuals are registered e-file users, of which approximately 1,800 are attorneys.

We continue our unique collaboration with the Municipal Courts and Clerk's offices in Garfield Heights, Berea, Rocky River and Shaker Heights to issue marriage licenses. All applicants pre-register online and have the option to travel to the suburban location or the Court for the issuance of their marriage license. This service is provided at no additional cost to the general fund.

The Court and its partner, Cuyahoga County ADAMHS Board, collaborate on the Assisted Outpatient Treatment Program in an effort to reduce the incidence and duration of inpatient psychiatric hospitalizations, homelessness and interactions with the criminal justice system among persons with severe mental illness. The Probate Court conducts bi-weekly meetings with grant participants diagnosed with Severe Mental Illness (SMI) and their treatment managers to encourage commitment to treatment goals. The program has seen great success.

Court proceedings involving the death of a loved one and guardianship issues are often emotional and confusing. We opened our Court's Resource Center in February 2019 to assist self-represented parties in dealing with simple estates, guardianships and name changes, including general review of probate forms and procedures. The Resource Center currently has 16 attorneys offering their services one day each month. In just over 7 months, the Resource Center attorneys have assisted more than 500 self-represented individuals. The program is funded by the Court's restricted funds and not from the County's general fund.

The Probate Court has also partnered with the Cleveland Metropolitan Bar Association to offer legal assistance clinics for people who cannot afford legal services. We have held 4 clinics each year, offering legal assistance to everyone in attendance.

The Cuyahoga County Probate Court is proud to announce the creation of our newest program, Guardian Partners. The Court currently has almost 7,000 wards under guardianship in Cuyahoga County. The Court wants to ensure that the most vulnerable residents of our community who are unable to care for themselves due to physical or mental disabilities receive proper care.

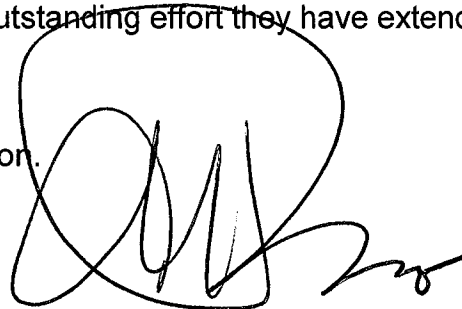
We are recruiting both graduate level students and social workers to make wellness visits to the adult wards at nursing homes, assisted living facilities, group homes and private residences. After these visits, a report will be filed with the Court to ensure that the needs of the wards are being met. The Court plans to implement this program through use of its own restricted funds and not request additional appropriation from the general fund over the next biennium.

The Probate Court has consistently been an effective partner with the county in development of its budget. Since 2009, we have worked within the budget appropriated by this Council; we have every expectation to continue to do so. The court generates almost \$1.56 million dollars annually in filing fees and costs each year. The court also contributes \$513,746 from its special revenue funds to offset general fund appropriations. In addition, the County is reimbursed by the Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (OhioMHAS) every year; the reimbursement to the general fund in 2019 totaled \$113,532.43. When reviewing the revenues generated, restricted funds transferred and reimbursements paid to the general fund, a total of \$2.3 million dollars is a direct offset of the current general fund budget of \$6.67 million dollars, representing a 34% share of the total 2019 budget.

We therefore respectfully request that you approve the 2020/2021 budget being recommended by the Office of Budget and Management and the County Executive.

On a personal note, I would like to commend OBM Director Maggie Keenan and our budget analyst Wendy Feinn for the outstanding effort they have extended to myself and my administrative staff.

Thank you for your time and attention.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Anthony J. Russo', written over a large, faint circular watermark or stamp.

Anthony J. Russo  
Presiding and Administrative  
Judge of the Probate Court  
One Lakeside Avenue West  
Cleveland, OH 44113