



OFFICE OF

TOM ORLANDO

LORAIN COUNTY CLERK OF COURTS

2023 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 official court records.

Sweeping statutory changes became effective in April to protect the rights of crime victims afforded under the "Marsy's Law" amendments to Ohio's Constitution. Our office quickly came up to speed on HB343 (134th GA) and spearheaded conversations with local justice system stakeholders (the General Division of the Lorain County Common Pleas Court, the Lorain County Prosecutor, and the Adult Probation Department) to create new processes for handling sensitive victim information in court records.

Additional legislation (SB 288) expanding the rights of those with criminal histories to seal or expunge their records also became law in April. Again, the Clerk's office took the initiative to review the changes and collaborated with various stakeholders at the county level and across the state to facilitate understanding and develop clear, comprehensive procedures to maintain court records in compliance with the new legal requirements.

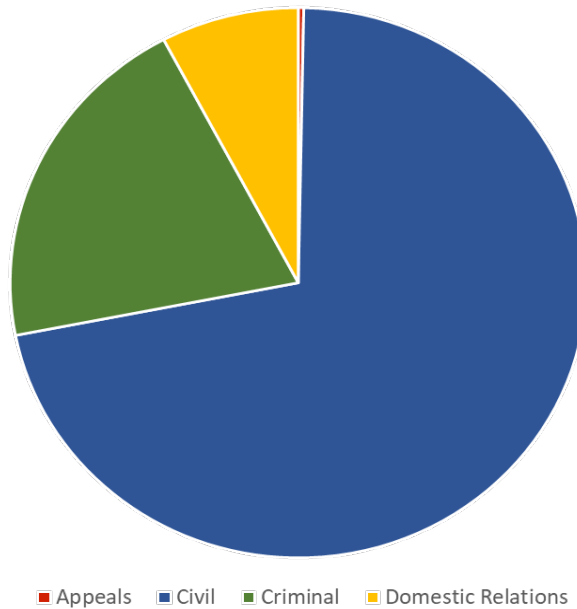
On the information technology side, the Clerk's office has taken many steps to modernize and enhance the security of our records systems. All legacy servers have been virtualized, which improves efficiency and saves money. Additional improvements have been made to the disaster recovery protocol and our system backup functionality. The General Division and Domestic Relations Divisions of the Common Pleas Court selected a new electronic case management system last year, and the Clerk's office has participated in

application migration and contract discussions with the Court and the vendor throughout this year.

Operational costs for the common pleas courts represent a significant economic responsibility for county government. Court costs and fees are an additional funding source that can offset some of that responsibility. The Clerk's office works diligently for the courts and 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 of each case. These amounts are added to case cost bills and first collected by the Clerk 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 2023, the total amount collected through the Ohio Attorney General's office was \$505,980.39. This amount is significantly higher than what was collected in 2022 (\$422,564.66). The Clerk's office collected \$18,745.41 in 2023 from the inmate collections program through the ODRC. This amount is slightly lower than the \$19,728.16 received from inmate commissary collections in 2022.

The chart below reflects all monies received (including funds held upon further order of the court and security deposits) in 2023 by the Legal Division of the Clerk's office separated by department:



Appeals: \$14,003.45
 Civil: \$3,324,349.19
 Criminal: \$943,202.25
 DR: \$359,121.29
TOTAL: \$4,640,676.18

Of these monies, a total of \$718,136.35 was disbursed by the Clerk's office to the county General Fund in 2023, and \$2,063,249.01 was disbursed to various county Special Revenue funds. Mandatory state agencies received disbursements of \$145,077.58. The Clerk's office also collected and paid a total of \$263,621.36 in restitution payments to victims.

The Clerk's office performs a vital part in the collection of many court-ordered financial obligations for private debt as well. Many post-judgment collections proceedings, from writs of execution to garnishments, are initiated by creditors through the Legal Division. A total of \$1,455,998.91 was collected by this office on all new and continuing garnishments in calendar year 2023.

AUTO TITLE & PASSPORT DIVISION

The Clerk's Auto Title and Passport Division offers a variety of services to the citizens of Lorain County through two convenient locations. The Main office is located in the Lorain County Administration Building in downtown Elyria,

and the Lorain branch office is adjacent to the Lorain Palace Theatre on Broadway Avenue in Lorain. The Division's primary responsibility involves issuance of certificates of title for motor vehicles and watercraft. In addition to titling, these offices also serve as U.S. passport acceptance facilities, offer ID photographs, and provide watercraft registration services. The Limited Authority Deputy Registrar (LADR) branch Lorain is also authorized by the state to issue temporary vehicle tags with title transfers and conduct out-of-state vehicle inspections.

In 2023, the Clerk's office processed a grand total of 132,176 titles, 1,309 watercraft registrations, 5,894 LADR transactions, and 1,675 new passport book and card applications. Both offices also provided a combined total of 1,715 photographs to customers. Fees for processing all of these transactions are paid over in legally proscribed amounts to the registrar of the Bureau of Motor Vehicles, the chief of the Division of Parks and Watercraft, ATPS Board, the U.S. Department of State, or retained locally in the Clerk's Certificate of Title Administration (CTA) Fund. The chart below reflects all of the

In conjunction with the office's titling responsibilities, the Clerk is statutorily required to collect the sales and use tax paid by the purchaser of the vehicle or watercraft and forthwith remit those tax payments to the state and county. In 2023, the Auto Title and Passport Division collected over \$45,000,000.00 in taxes; of this amount, \$36,084,535.80 in state tax was paid over to the Ohio Department of Taxation, and \$4,181,378.76, representing Lorain County's county taxed portion of these funds, was disbursed to the County Treasurer. 2023 taxes collections by the Clerk's office resulted in locally retained poundage fees of \$452,416.89 in the CTA Fund.

Since the state's launch of the Ohio Title Portal (OTP) in mid-2022, buyers engaged in person-to-person sales of motor vehicles previously titled in Ohio have the flexibility to apply for a certificate of title online and bypass the need to personally visit a Clerk's Auto Title branch office. 2023 is the first full calendar year that this functionality has been available to citizens. These OTP transactions only make up a small number of the total titles processed by the Lorain County Clerk of Courts (22 titles, to be exact), but it is expected over time this volume will increase as more Lorain County customers become familiar with online services.

The Clerk's office engaged in various community outreach events in 2023 to provide information on the services provided by the Auto Title and Passport Division. Specifically, the Clerk's office operated a booth at the 2023 Lorain

County Fair, spoke with visitors at the Lorain County Labor Day Family Celebration in Lorain, and offered tips to avoid probate to attendees at the Aging Well Senior Expo held at Lorain County Community College in November. Information about the Clerk's "photo to finish" passport acceptance and photo services was provided, and title forms such as surviving spouse affidavits and transfer-on-death affidavits were distributed.

In December 2023, the Clerk's office was pleased to be able to donate \$1,000,000.00 from the CTA Fund to benefit the county General Fund.