



# 2023 ANNUAL REPORT

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# A Message from the Chief Judge

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It is once again my honor and pleasure to serve as the Chief Judge of the 57th District Court, Allegan County. It is my privilege to report on the progress our court and staff have made to promote greater access to Justice and create efficiencies within the courthouse.

District Court has led Allegan county and West Michigan in the development of specialty courts. Judge Skocelas' mental health treatment court was one of the first in West Michigan and is now considered the gold standard. Judge Skocelas also mentors judges starting new mental health treatment courts in their own jurisdictions.



I am proud that I have also been able to establish strong specialty courts for the benefit of our county. First came the Adult Drug Treatment Court, which focused on felony drug offenders. The second court, which I confess is my proudest achievement, is the pioneering West Michigan Regional Veterans' Treatment Court (WMRVTC). The first such regional veterans court that partners with and has jurisdiction over Allegan, Ottawa and Van Buren counties. WMRVTC turned 10 years old this year and we celebrated the successful graduation of our 50th veteran corps member this December. Thirdly we have created and I continue to preside over a strong and highly successful sobriety treatment court. We are doing our best to expand our capacity in this court as demand continues to grow.

After many years of discussing the possibility, our District Court, teamed with the SCAO to launch MiFILE, allowing the entirety of our civil docket to transition to 100% paperless. Although this transition created some unique challenges, the district court staff rose to the occasion to make this process seamless for the public. This, together with allowing nearly all of our hearings to be conducted via zoom, further enhances public access to Justice. Obviously, this removes a significant obstacle for many of our citizens by allowing them to attend court hearings without having to take off time from work, arrange transportation or childcare or any number of other matters that interfered with physically appearing in court.

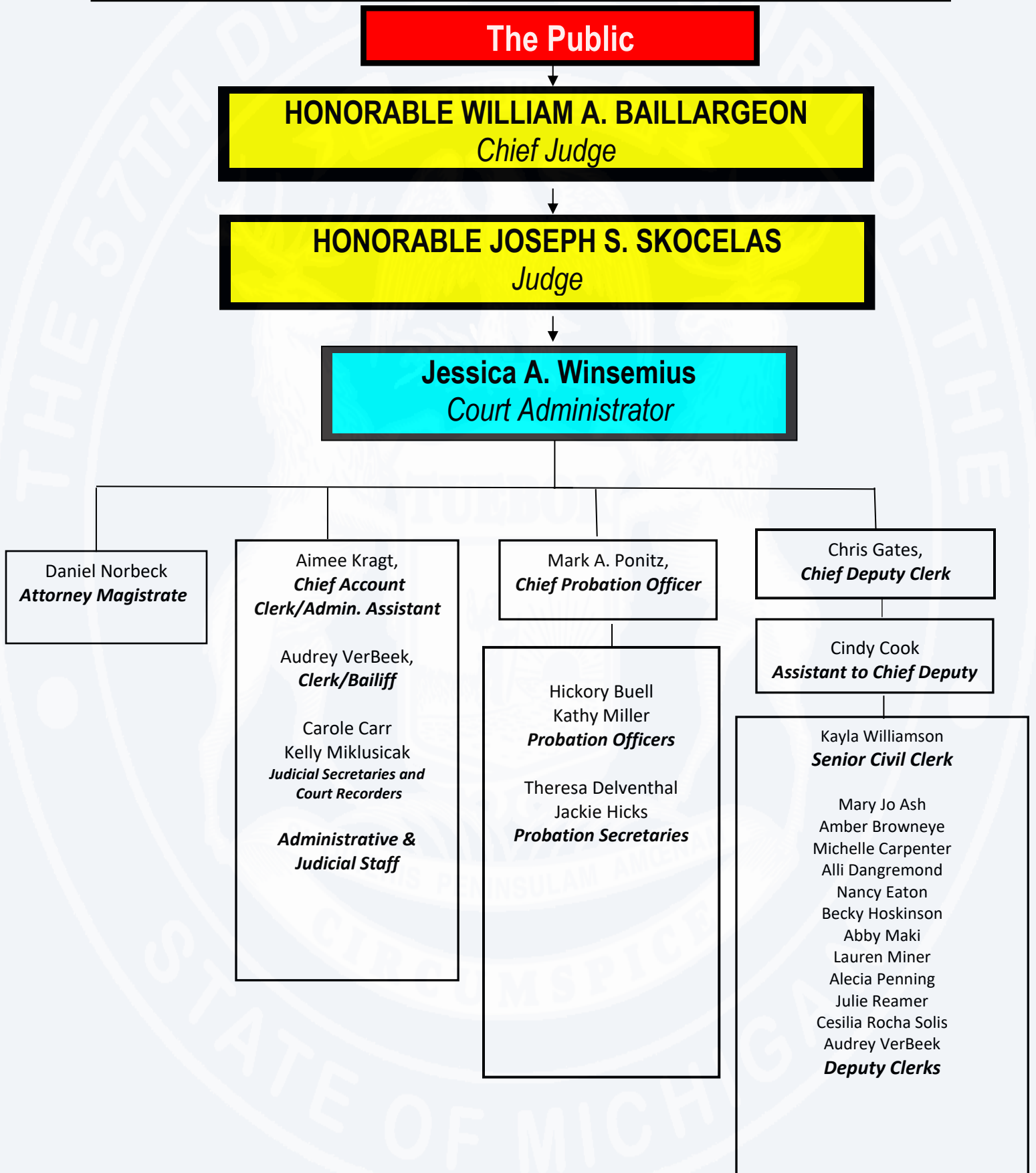
District Court also had a great deal of success implementing the Clean Slate legislation, allowing citizens to effectively hit the reset button for some of their past mistakes.

Happily, continuing our march back from the restrictions of the pandemic era, District Court has fully eliminated all backlogs and has also resumed conducting marriage ceremonies.

Respectfully,

Judge William A. Baillargeon  
Chief District Court Judge

# ORGANIZATIONAL CHART



# DISTRICT COURT JUDGES FAQs

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**HONORABLE WILLIAM A. BAILLARGEON**, Chief District Court Judge, was appointed by Governor Jennifer Granholm on March 5, 2009 to fill the vacancy left by the retirement of the Honorable Stephen Sheridan. Prior to this appointment, Judge Baillargeon served as Circuit Judge for Allegan County's 48<sup>th</sup> Circuit Court from 2007-2009. Judge Baillargeon was elected in November 2010 to complete Judge Sheridan's term through 2012, then re-elected again in November of 2012 and 2018 for six-year terms.



**HONORABLE JOSEPH S. SKOCELAS**, District Court Judge, was appointed by Governor Jennifer Granholm on April 26, 2006 to fill the vacancy left by the retirement of the Honorable Gary Stewart. Judge Skocelas was subsequently elected in November 2006 to complete Judge Stewart's term through 2008, then again in November of 2008, 2014 and 2020 for six-year terms.



# JURISDICTION

DIVISIONS	JURISDICTION	FACTS TO KNOW
<b>CIVIL</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Civil suits up to \$25,000</li> <li>• Small claim suits up to \$6,500 (effective 1/1/21)</li> <li>• Landlord tenant disputes, garnishments, and land contract summary proceedings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Civil suits can be filed by either an individual or a business</li> <li>• Corporations must have attorney representation outside of small claims</li> <li>• Parties must represent themselves in small claims cases – attorneys may not be involved</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>CRIMINAL</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Michigan statute violations</li> <li>• City/village/township ordinances</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All felony cases such as murder and criminal sexual conduct are heard by a district judge through the preliminary exam stage only</li> <li>• Domestic violence, retail fraud, disturbing the peace are examples of misdemeanor violations</li> </ul>
<b>TRAFFIC</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Michigan statute violations</li> <li>• City/village/township ordinances</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Operating while intoxicated, reckless driving, expired operator’s license are examples of misdemeanor traffic offenses</li> <li>• Speeding, careless driving, no safety belt are examples of civil infraction violations</li> </ul>

# NEW CASES FILED

## CIVIL DIVISION

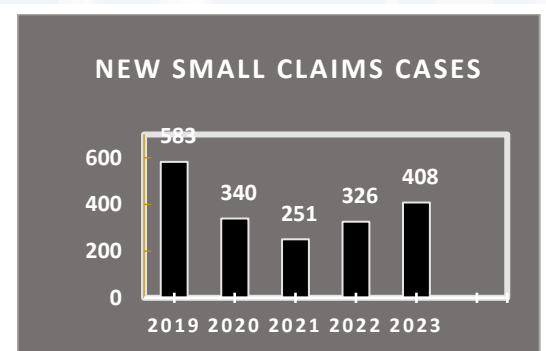
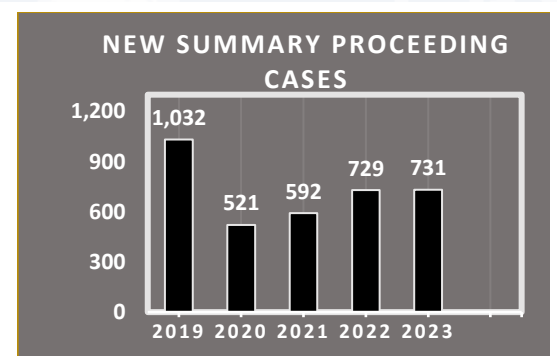
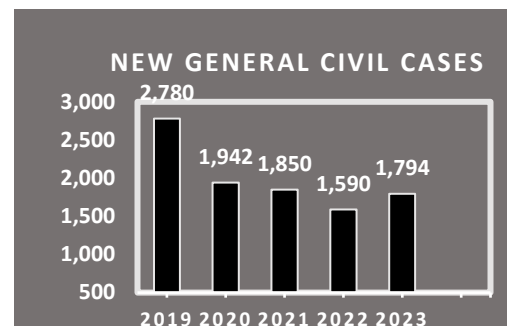
The *Civil Division* consists of the following sub-divisions:

The *General Civil Division* processes all civil cases under the \$25,000 jurisdictional limit; limited claim and delivery civil actions; limited writ of attachment and garnishment; and forfeiture or seizure of certain property.

The *Summary Proceeding Division* processes cases generally brought by a landlord to recover possession of a dwelling when a tenant fails to pay the rent or when the landlord or owner wishes to regain possession of his/her property. Summary proceedings include land contract forfeitures arising when a purchaser does not pay the amount agreed upon in a contract. A landlord may obtain an Order of Eviction to evict a tenant, or land contract vendee.

The *Small Claims Division* processes cases with recoverable maximum monies up to \$6,500.00 (increased from \$6,000 to \$6,500 on 1/1/21). Small claims litigants have the right to remove a case to the General Civil Division or to remove a case from magisterial jurisdiction. Actions are filed in the county in which the cause of action arose, or in which the defendant is established or resides or is employed. Small claims litigants waive their right to a jury trial and cannot be represented by an attorney.

Small claims cases are heard by the Attorney Magistrate.

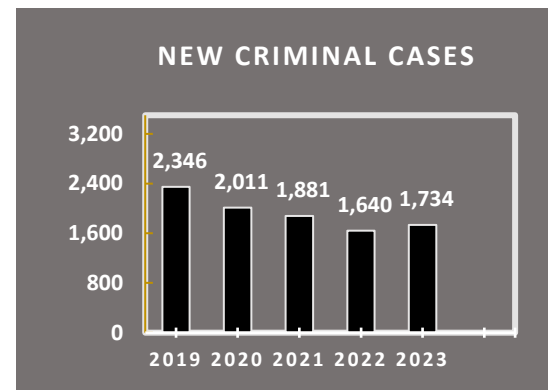


# NEW CASES FILED

## CRIMINAL DIVISION

The **Criminal Division (including Felony Traffic violations)** adjudicates cases involving violations of Michigan statute as well as violations of local ordinance. The Prosecuting Attorney’s Office, Michigan Attorney General’s Office, local police agencies, and ordinance city/township/village attorneys file felony and misdemeanor cases with the Court. District Court Judges preside over felony cases through the preliminary examination hearing stages only. Effective January 1, 2015, District Court Judges are now able to accept guilty pleas on felony charges. In 2023, seven (7) felony pleas were accepted by District Court Judges.

In 2023, the criminal division processed 1,734 new case filings. The Court conducted felony preliminary examinations and waiver hearings and bound over 719 cases to the 48<sup>th</sup> Circuit Court. This number includes traffic division bind overs, as well.

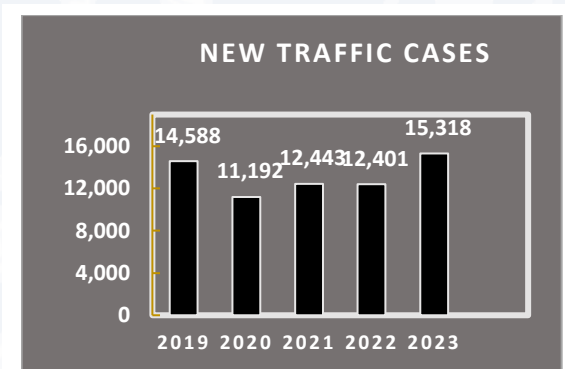


## TRAFFIC DIVISION

The **Traffic Division (including non-traffic civil infractions)** adjudicates misdemeanor and civil infraction cases involving Michigan statute violations, the motor vehicle code and local ordinances.

In 2023, the traffic division accepted 15,318 new case filings. The traffic division disposed of 16,155 cases through various dispositions, i.e., guilty plea, admission of responsibility, default, dismissal, warrant, and trial/hearing verdict. In 2023, the Judges disposed of 27 cases by jury verdict (all case types) and 194 cases by bench trial, formal or informal hearing for all case types.

New case filings in the traffic division have increased to pre-pandemic levels.





# NEW CASES FILED

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## TOTAL NEW CASE FILINGS

Each year, the District Court prepares and files with the State Court Administrative Office, a caseload report of all new cases filed, re-opened cases, warrants, and dispositions in categories of Traffic, Criminal and Civil cases. The Court uploads these numbers to the State Court Administrative Office’s web site.

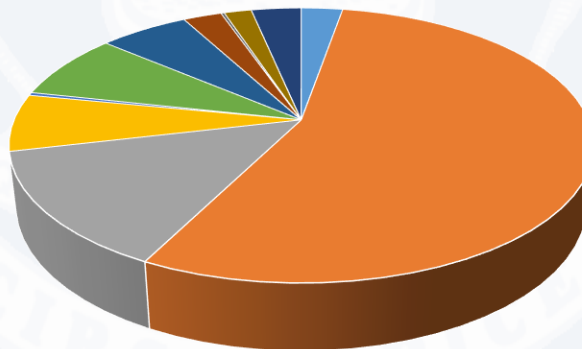
TOTAL NEW CASES FILED	
Traffic cases filed	15,318
Criminal cases filed	1,734
Civil cases filed	<u>2,933</u>
<b>Total new cases filed</b>	<b>19,985</b>

# CASE DISPOSITIONS

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## TOTAL DISPOSITIONS BY CATEGORY

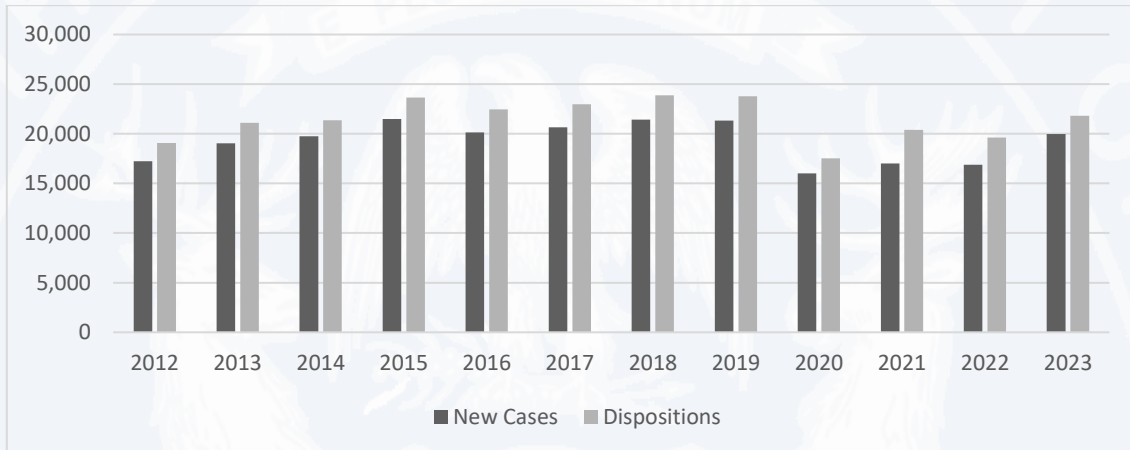
Total Dispositions: 21,801



- Civil Infaction Non-Traffic
- Civil Infaction Traffic
- Felony and Misdemeanor Traffic
- Felony Non-Traffic
- Felony OUIL
- General Civil
- Misdemeanor Non-Traffic
- Misdemeanor OUIL
- Parking
- Small Claims
- Summary Proceedings

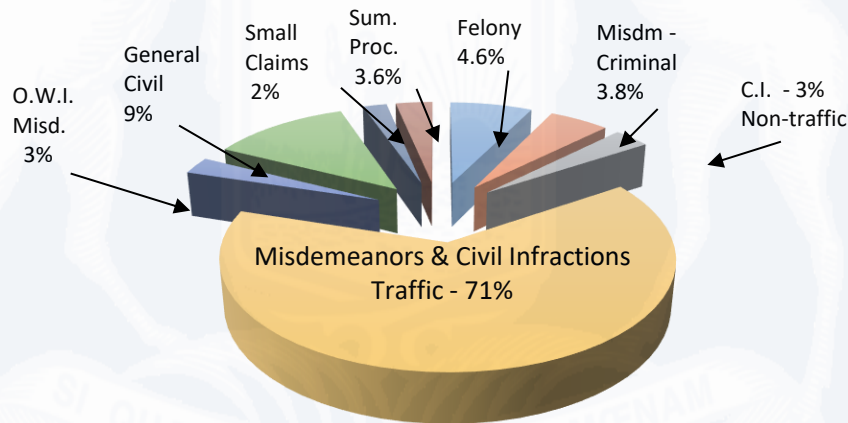
# STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

As you can see from the comparison chart below, total new case filings have been increasing and the District Court has continued to diligently dispose of its caseload in a timely fashion.



## CASELOAD MIX

The pie chart reflects both the total number of cases filed and the percentages by divisions.



## Clearance Rate Ratio of Dispositions to New Case Filing

The ratio of dispositions to new case filings and reopened cases are reflected below.

New Case Filings and Reopened Cases	22,254
Dispositions	21,801
Ratio	98%

# PROBATION

The functions of the *Probation Department* are to assist the Judges in determining an appropriate sentence and to supervise probationers ensuring that they comply with the terms and conditions of the orders of the Court. Probation Officers are responsible to refer probationers to qualified treatment personnel and to introduce them to vocational or educational resources.

The total number of defendants placed on probation during 2023 was 316. The total number of probationers being supervised by the Probation Officers for the period ending December 31, 2023, was 429 including diversion programs.

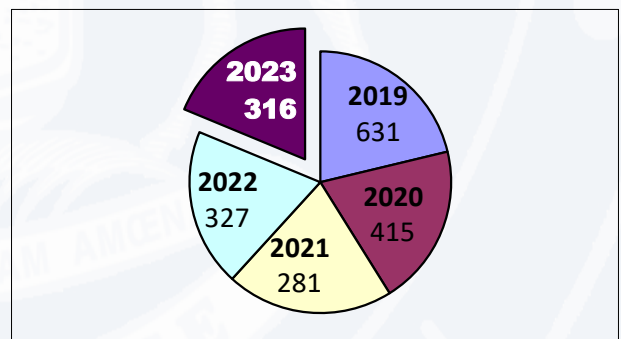
The difference between the total number placed on probation (316) and supervised (429) reflects the number of probationers who completed their terms and conditions of probation and were released. The time span of probation can generally range from a minimum of 30 days to a maximum of two years. Consequently, probationers are continually being released and new probationers added.

The table below reflects the number of probationers placed on probation during the year.

## DEFENDANTS PLACED ON PROBATION

Judge	Jan.	Feb.	March	April	May	June	July	Aug.	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.	TOTALS
SKOCELAS	13	22	26	26	20	14	12	15	13	14	3	10	<b>188</b>
BAILLARGEON	14	13	5	13	7	12	7	13	15	15	11	3	<b>128</b>
NORBECK	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	<b>0</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>316</b>

The pie chart reflects the total number of cases or individuals that were placed on probation from 2019 through 2023. For the period of 2019 through 2023, the caseload decreased 315 cases. Caseload decreased by 11 cases between 2022 and 2023.



# MENTAL HEALTH TREATMENT COURT

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Mental Health Court Graduate  
Michael Milburn and Judge Skocelas

On September 14, 2009, Judge Skocelas and the 57<sup>th</sup> District Court, teamed with representatives of the Allegan County Sheriff's Department, Allegan City Police, Allegan County Prosecutor's Office, Allegan County Community Mental Health, Michigan State Police, local defense attorneys, and local substance abuse providers to create a Mental Health Treatment Court in Allegan County. The treatment court is fully certified by the State Court Administrative Office as a Mental Health Treatment Court in Michigan. The court operates on grant funding also awarded by the State Court Administrative Office. The program accepts both felony and misdemeanor cases.

Since its inception, 503 defendants have been referred to the program. Of those, 225 were accepted into the program and 273 were rejected. Of the 225 who were accepted, 139 have successfully graduated, and 5 are currently in the program – 4 in Phase I and 1 in Phase II. After acceptance into the program, 81 were discharged unsuccessfully – 58 for cause and 23 for other reasons.

**Mental Health Treatment Court** is a two-phase program designed for adult offenders charged with one or more criminal offenses and who are having difficulty with mental health issues, are developmentally disabled, or mentally ill defendants with co-occurring disorders (mental health/substance abuse). It involves frequent court appearances and active participation by the participant towards their recovery. It also includes frequent random drug/alcohol screens. The court provides incentives for progress and sanctions for negative behaviors. If the participant fails to follow certain rules, they may be required to report more often to the Court, spend time in jail, or face serious sanctions such as termination from the Mental Health Treatment Court. This court is voluntary; the defendant must consent to participation before he/she can be placed into the court program. The mental health courts share the objective of preventing the jailing of the mentally ill and/or of securing their release from jail to appropriate services and support in the community. In addition, each court gives a high priority to concerns for public safety when arranging for the care of mentally ill offenders.

# WEST MICHIGAN REGIONAL VETERANS' TREATMENT COURT

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The West Michigan Regional Veterans' Treatment Court began operation on February 7, 2014, and was the first fully regionalized Veteran Treatment Court in the State of Michigan. The jurisdiction of the Veterans' Treatment Court is that of both the district and circuit courts of Allegan, Van Buren and Ottawa counties but it also accepts veterans from surrounding counties. It was developed and organized by Judge Baillargeon and the treatment court team to help veteran participants address underlying service related issues that bring them in contact with the criminal justice system. The court currently has 9 veterans participating with new applicants being reviewed by the team for admission as they arise. The court makes sure that veterans are provided proper mental and physical health care and follows up to ensure that they maintain their treatment protocol as well as a complete abstinence from drugs and/or alcohol. Common issues addressed by the treatment court include Post Traumatic Brain Injury, Post-Traumatic Stress Injury and issues related to substance abuse. The goal of the court is to divert veterans from prison or jail, to help them have a more satisfying productive law abiding life by addressing the underlying conditions impacting them and thereby assisting them to restore their sense of honor and integrity. The court has participants from Van Buren County, Kent County, Ottawa County, and Allegan County. We are proud to report that our regional court has already recognized 47 veterans for successfully completing the treatment court program. Many of these veterans continue to visit and support the efforts of their fellow veterans that continue to make up our veteran participant corps.

Partnering with the court from all three counties are county commissioners, judges, prosecutors, probation, law enforcement, mentors, community supervision providers, treatment providers, the Veterans Health Administration, Veterans Benefit Administration, veteran employment representatives and veterans service organizations service officers. Attorney Magistrate Daniel W. Norbeck is the Administrator/Case Manager for the Veterans Treatment Court. Magistrate Norbeck directs our field agents, Troy McCabe, who performs the remote supervision and substance abuse testing.

As required by statute, this court achieved certification in 2019 from the State Court Administrative Office.



# SOBRIETY TREATMENT COURT

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In May of 2017, the 57<sup>th</sup> District Court created a new treatment court specifically designed to address Operate while Intoxicated (OWI) - 2<sup>nd</sup> offenses. The goals of this new treatment court are to:

- Goal One: Divert offenders from jail.
- Goal Two: Eliminate substance use among substance abusers.
- Goal Three: Reduce OWI Recidivism.

The target population criteria includes:

1. Allegan County resident or residing within the Court's jurisdiction.
2. No history of serious violent behavior or felony weapon charges.
3. Alcohol and/or drug addicted or serious substance abuse pattern.
4. Repeat OWI offender.



The mission of the 57th District Court Sobriety Treatment Program is to promote community safety and reduce alcohol and drug abuse through a coordinated program involving intensive supervision, judicial interaction, treatment, incentives, sanctions and accountability.

The program is now at full capacity with fifteen (15) current participants both male and female. To date, we have graduated eighty-seven (87) participants and helped one hundred and two (9) participants gain a restricted driver's license. As required by statute, this court achieved certification in 2019 from the State Court Administrative Office.

The program was developed and presided over by Judge Baillargeon. Attorney Magistrate Daniel W. Norbeck is the Administrator/Case Manager for the Sobriety Court and the probation for the participants is overseen by both the 57<sup>th</sup> District and 48<sup>th</sup> Circuit Court Probation Department.

# REVENUES & EXPENSES

Revenue is generated as a by-product of the fines, costs, and fees imposed by the Judges and Attorney Magistrate. State Constitution and statutes determine how the money is distributed.

The Court maintains and monitors two expense and revenue budgets: the District Court budget and the District Court Probation Department budget. Revenues collected from the District Court Probation Department for alcohol assessments and supervision/oversight costs are combined with the District Court's general fund revenues that are deposited on a monthly basis with the County Treasurer.

## REVENUES

AGENCY OR FUND	AMOUNT
Drug Case Reimbursement Fund	0.00
Drunk Driving Reimbursement Fund	29,363.53
Court Costs	1,004,274.95
Appointed Attorney Fees	12,038.43
10% Bond Costs	0.00
Crime Victims' Rights Fund	13,970.00
Civil Filing Fees	153,165.00
Miscellaneous Fees	13,522.30
Driver's License Reinstatement Fees	13,1187.25
Motion Fees	7,530.00
NSF Fees	50.00
Bond Forfeitures	51,869.00
DNA Sample Fee (Court)	78.00
Ordinance Fine and Costs	43,166.05
Jury Reimbursement	13,226.75
Insurance Fee	4,970.00
Probation Alcohol Assessments	25,768.00
Probation Oversight Costs	94,747.92
Cities, Townships, Villages	16,850.82
DNA fee – Sheriff's Department	195.00
State Treasury – Trust and Agencies	816,863.18
Libraries	548,413.57
Veterans' Court Participant Fees	1,290.00
Mental Health Court Participant Fees	84.00
Sobriety Court Participant Fees	9,825.00
Interest Earned	0.00
Cash Over/Short	0.00
Credit Card Fees	(-4,675.78)

# EXPENSES

EXPENDITURE	DISTRICT COURT	PROBATION DEPT.
Salary and wages	1,192,338.87	311,485.82
Employee benefits	454,573.66	122,759.66
Office supplies	8,689.45	1,556.28
Printing and binding	11,177.61	88.85
Books and maps	682.50	0
Probation Assessment Fees	0	3,303.00
Jury	26,125.99	0
Witnesses	52.00	0
Interpreter fees	9,110.80	0
Court appointed attorney fees	0	0
Memberships and subscriptions	4,038.70	50.00
Other Contractual Services	55.50	0
Travel Expense – routine	212.04	399.03
Education – miscellaneous	0.00	0.00
Education – travel	0.00	485.26
Education – registration	238.38	250.00
Travel – visiting judge	0.00	0
Repairs and maintenance	13,403.00	0
Software lease	39,727.02	0
Equipment	1,750.92	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1,762,176.44</b>	<b>440,377.90</b>

# CUMULATIVE TOTALS

## REVENUES

General fund	1,467,826.43	
Jury Reimbursement	6,236.71	
Interest	0.00	
Credit Card Fees/Cash over/short	(4,675.78)	
Trust and Agencies	833,714.00	
Libraries	548,413.57	
Grant Specialty Courts	92,086.08	
Problem Solving Court Transfer to Another Court	7,075.00	
Restitution Payable	206,413.70	
Bonds Payable	531,289.09	
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>\$3,688,378.80</b>

## EXPENDITURES

Court	1,762,176.44	
Probation	440,377.90	
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>\$2,202,554.34</b>

# COLLECTIONS

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## COLLECTIONS TOTAL FOR 2023

JANUARY	\$33,312.68
FEBRUARY	\$47,952.25
MARCH	\$43,713.55
APRIL	\$38,389.68
MAY	\$39,752.40
JUNE	\$35,702.34
JULY	\$32,578.65
AUGUST	\$36,585.30
SEPTEMBER	\$35,603.86
OCTOBER	\$36,161.95
NOVEMBER	\$33,207.96
DECEMBER	\$30,889.49
<b>YEAR END TOTAL:</b>	<b>\$443,850.11</b>