

RESOLUTION ACCEPTING ANNUAL REPORT OF CONNEAUT MUNICIPAL COURT FOR 2024

WHEREAS, In accordance with the provisions of Section 1901.14 of the Ohio Revised Code, Conneaut Municipal Court has filed with this Board their 2024 Annual Report as required by law; and

WHEREAS, Said report which shows the work performed by the court, a statement of receipts and expenditures of the civil and criminal branches, and the number of cases heard, decided and settled has been duly examined by this Board; now

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, By the Board of Commissioners of Ashtabula County, Ohio, that said report is hereby accepted and filed.

**ASHTABULA COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
CERTIFICATION PAGE**

Resolution No. 2025-230

May 13, 2025

**RESOLUTION ACCEPTING ANNUAL REPORT OF CONNEAUT MUNICIPAL COURT
FOR 2024**

Upon the motion of Kathryn L. Whittington, seconded by J.P. Ducro IV.

VOTE:

J.P. Ducro IV

Casey R. Kozlowski

Kathryn L. Whittington

Aye

Absent

Aye

CERTIFICATE OF CLERK

IT IS HEREBY CERTIFIED that the foregoing is a true and correct transcript of a resolution acted upon and duly passed by the Board of County Commissioners of Ashtabula County, Ohio, on the date noted above.

Crystal Sturgill
Crystal Sturgill, Clerk of the Board
Board of County Commissioners
Ashtabula County, Ohio

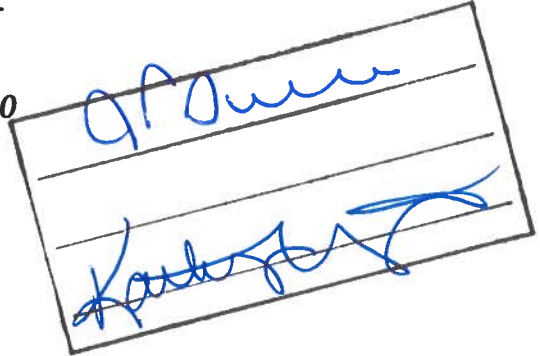
Acting

Nicholas A. Iarocci
Judge
Telephone (440) 593-7410

Angelina Vazquez
Clerk of Court
Telefax (440) 593-6402

Conneaut Municipal Court
Conneaut City Hall
290 Main Street
Conneaut, Ohio 44030

March 24, 2025



Kathryn L. Whittington
Board of Ashtabula County Commissioners
25 W. Jefferson Street
Jefferson, Ohio 44047

RE: Conneaut Municipal Court 2024 Annual Report

Dear Ms. Whittington:

Enclosed please find the Annual Report for the Conneaut Municipal Court for calendar year 2024, which is being sent to you pursuant to Ohio Revised Code Section 1901.14(A)(4).

Calendar year 2024 marked the 95th year of operations for the Conneaut Municipal Court. As you are aware, the Conneaut Municipal Court currently serves the City of Conneaut and Lake Erie to the Canadian Border and specifically, the following agencies: Conneaut City Police Department, Conneaut City Zoning Department, Ashtabula County Dog Warden, Ashtabula County Humane Society, Ashtabula County Sheriff's Department, Ohio Bureau of Employment, Ohio Department of Liquor Control, Ohio Department of Natural Resources – Division of Natural Areas and Preserves, Division of Watercraft, Division of Wildlife; Ohio Department of Public Safety, Ohio Department of Taxation, Ohio State Highway Patrol, Ashtabula County Metroparks and Public Utilities Commission of Ohio.

Staff Changes

The composition of the Court staff changed dramatically in 2024, with Angelia Vazquez being appointed the new Clerk of Court (replacing Julie Myers); Michelle Ross transferring from Probation Officer to Deputy Clerk – Traffic Division (replacing Debby Tisdale); Lisa Talladino becoming the new Deputy Clerk – Criminal division (replacing Bridgette Morris); Megan Lardi becoming the new Deputy Clerk – Civil Division (replacing Angelina Vazquez); Shaun Benoit becoming the new Probation Officer; and, in January 2025, Jonathan Balcomb becoming the new Bailiff (replacing Jeff Raisian). I am very pleased with the wonderful staff that is now serving the public at Conneaut Municipal Court.

In 2024, the Conneaut Municipal Court employed six full-time and one part-time staff who work in the Criminal, Civil and Traffic Divisions of the Court, the Probation Department and



Security Division. In 2020, the Court created a Court Security Division and hired two additional part-time staff who provide security to the Court and all of City Hall. Of all Court employees, one full-time and two part-time staff (along with two other “on call” staff) provide security for the Court and City Hall. As a result of an agreement reached between the Court, the former City Manager and current Finance Director, the costs associated with employment of Court Security Staff are shared equally between the Court - utilizing the Special Project Funds discussed below - and the City of Conneaut.

Budget

For the first time since I became Judge in 2020, and for the first time in several years prior to my tenure, the Court timely submitted to the City a budget for the Court for fiscal year 2025. This work was an absolute priority for the Court. The new Clerk of Court Angelina Vazquez, without any training from the former Clerk, assumed this responsibility. The budget process was accomplished after many years of implicit reliance on the Finance Director to prepare a budget for the Court.

Expansion of Court Jurisdiction

As a result of the outstanding work of Casey Kozlowski, Ashtabula County Commissioner, and Sarah Fowler Arthur, State Representative, House Bill 301 was signed into law by Governor Mike DeWine on July 24, 2024. H.B. 301 expanded the jurisdiction of Conneaut Municipal Court to include North Kingsville Village, Monroe Township, Kingsville Township, and Sheffield Township. For the first time in the Court’s 95-year history, the jurisdiction of the Court has expanded beyond the City of Conneaut. With the support of former City Manager Jim Hockaday, former Council President Jon Arcaro, and City Council, I first suggested expansion of this Court’s jurisdiction as a vital step toward the long-term existence and operation of Conneaut Municipal Court. H.B. 301 went into effect on January 1, 2025. The legislation also combined Eastern and Western Courts in Ashtabula County; such consolidation will be effective on January 1, 2031.

Number of Filings and Jury Trials

In 2024, the number of court filings (and a comparison with cases filed in 2023) are as follows:

- 83 (69) Felony Criminal cases (20% **increase**)
- 316 (313) Misdemeanor Criminal cases (1% **increase**)
- 26 (20) OVI cases (30% **increase**)
- 798 (910) Traffic cases (12% **decrease**)
- 279 (180) Civil cases (55% **increase**)
- 6 (9) Small Claims cases (33% **decrease**)

In 2024, the Court conducted 7 jury trials, a substantial increase over the 1 jury trial that was conducted in 2023.

Special Projects Funds

Under Title 19 of the Ohio Revised Code, the Conneaut Municipal Court created the Municipal Court Improvement Fund and Municipal Court Security Fund, known as the Court Special Projects Funds and referred locally by the Conneaut Finance Department as “214 Accounts.” The monies in these Funds are financed entirely by court costs, are only disbursed by Court order, and are not generally available to Conneaut City Council or the Board of Commissioners of Ashtabula County. For the past 33 years, all the computer, security, and technology needs of the Court have been acquired, maintained and funded entirely from these Special Project Funds and other grant funds obtained by the Court, and no tax dollars or general revenue funds have been used to pay for the acquisition or maintenance of these items. During the 33-year history of the Court Improvement Fund and Municipal Court Security Fund, the sum of **\$2,047,189.38** has been utilized from such Funds without any burden being placed on the City or the County’s General Funds.

Renewal Court

In 2024, the Court started a Specialized Docket known as “Renewal Court” with the goal of addressing the unique needs of offenders with mental health and/or substance abuse disorders that have contributed to an underlying criminal offense. On January 24, 2024, and with the considerable assistance of the Ashtabula County Mental Health and Recovery Services Board (MHR SB), Renewal Court received “Initial Certification” from the Ohio Supreme Court as a Substance Abuse Mental Illness (SAMI) specialized docket, one of only four SAMI courts in all of the State of Ohio. On June 7, 2024, Renewal Court received final certification from the Ohio Supreme Court.

To fund the salaries and costs associated with operation of Renewal Court, and with the continued assistance of the MHR SB, Conneaut Municipal Court, in August 2024, received Specialized Docket Subsidy Project grant funds from the Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (OhioMHAS) in the amount of \$35,000.00 for this state fiscal year. These funds are paying in part the salary of one of the Court’s Probation Officers. Additionally, in January 2024, Conneaut Municipal Court received \$29,847.19 in Ohio Office of Criminal Justice Services (OCJS) Edward Byrne Memorial Justice Assistance Grant (JAG) funds for fiscal year 2024. These funds will be used to pay the salary of the Renewal Court Coordinator. We are well on our way in accomplishing the goal to have operation of Renewal Court exclusively funded with grant funds.

Most recently, in November 2024, the Court received a \$30,000.00 grant from the OneOhio Recovery Foundation to be used over three years to purchase basic needs items for Renewal Court participants, such as personal hygiene products and toiletries, laundry detergent, as well as other necessary items such as phone cards, snacks, frames for certificates and picture albums, coffee mugs, planners, and school supplies.

Renewal Court has now conducted two graduations on April 4, 2024 and August 8, 2024. In roughly 2 years, Renewal Court has had 36 participants; 9 were successfully discharged; 5 unsuccessfully discharged; 3 neutrally discharged; 18 are currently in the program; and several are

pending admission. Renewal Court has a capacity of 25 participants. Stephanie Belconis, the former Felony Drug Court Coordinator for the Ashtabula County Common Pleas Court, serves as part-time Renewal Court Coordinator and has done an outstanding job.

Livestreaming and Video Remote Proceedings

Conneaut Municipal Court is one of a very small number of courts in all of Ohio to livestream criminal court proceedings. Since February 2021, Conneaut Municipal Court has been committed to transparency and ensuring that the community is able to view and have virtual access to the criminal court proceedings being conducted in its local courtroom. The Court's YouTube channel has proven to be very popular, having as of the date of this letter over 1,800 subscribers. In addition, the Court also conducts a substantial number of video remote proceedings. Video remote proceedings of those charged with a crime and who are incarcerated saves significant staff time and expense and protects public safety from having the inmate transported to Court. In 2020, Conneaut Municipal Court conducted 290 video remote hearings; in 2021, 350 video remote hearings; in 2022, 415 video remote hearings; in 2024, 336 video remote hearings; and in 2024, 324 video hearings. The Court conduct livestreaming and video remote hearings as a result of grants the Court has received in the past for technology upgrades.

e-Citation

In November 2024, the Court announced that it is the recipient of the Electronic Citation Special Funding (e-Citation) grant jointly co-sponsored by the Supreme Court of Ohio and the Ohio Department of Public Safety's Traffic Records Coordinating Committee. The e-Citation funding opportunity is available to eligible courts seeking to implement a technology project that enables electronic citation processing. Funding is restricted to upgrading traffic case systems. In an ongoing effort to modernize the Court, the Court applied for this funding opportunity, and received notice that it has been awarded **\$19,070.00** in funds to upgrade and install an electronic citation module to the Court's current case management system. The e-Citation installation and operational process is ongoing, which will involve the Conneaut Police Department, the Ashtabula County Sheriff's Department, and the Ohio State Highway Patrol.

The Court sincerely appreciates having a cooperative working relationship with City Manager Nick Sanford, Finance Director John Williams, Law Director John Lewis, Police Chief Michael Colby, and all of City Council and County Commissioners. I wish to express my personal thanks to each of you for your assistance in making Conneaut Municipal Court the best court it can be for all the residents of the City of Conneaut, North Kingsville, and Kingsville, Monroe, and Sheffield Townships. Conneaut Municipal Court will also continue to serve our community by timely and correctly disposing of all cases filed with the Court.

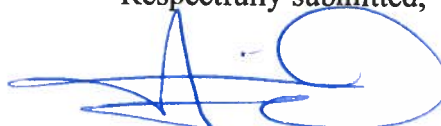
Ohio Attorney General Collections

Last year, I reported that the Court will soon be transferring overdue unpaid fine and cost accounts to the Ohio Attorney General Office (OAG) for collection. I reported that the Court had entered into an agreement with the OAG to begin collections. Unfortunately, with the dramatic

change of Clerk of Court staff in 2024, implementation of OAG collections has been delayed again. Implementation of this process is a priority of the Court in 2025 and 2026.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this report, and please feel free to contact me if you have any questions or comments.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of a large, stylized 'N' followed by a large, circular flourish.

Nicholas A. Iarocci
Judge

NAI/jam
Enclosures

**IN THE CONNEAUT MUNICIPAL COURT
CONNEAUT, OHIO
ANNUAL REPORT FOR THE YEAR 2024**

<u>CRIMINAL BRANCH</u> (Misdemeanors)	2024
Cases Pending January 1, 2024	11
Cases filed during year 2024	316
Cases transferred in or reactivated	25
Total cases for 2024	352
Cases pending December 31, 2024	18
Cases disposed of during year 2024	334
<u>CRIMINAL BRANCH</u> (Felonies)	
Cases pending January 1, 2024	04
Cases filed during year 2024	83
Cases transferred in or reactivated	11
Total cases for 2024	98
Cases pending December 31, 2024	00
Cases disposed of during year 2024	98
<u>TRAFFIC CASES</u>	
Cases pending January 1, 2024	14
Cases filed during year 2024	798
Cases transferred in or reactivated	40
Total cases for 2024	852
Cases pending December 31, 2024	16
Cases disposed of during year 2024	836
<u>OVI CASES</u>	
Cases pending January 1, 2024	01
Cases filed during year 2024	26
Cases transferred in or reactivated	01
Total cases for 2024	28
Cases pending December 31, 2024	00
Cases disposed of during year 2024	28
<u>CIVIL CASES</u>	
Cases pending January 1, 2024	63
Cases filed during year 2024	279
Cases transferred in or reactivated	00
Total cases for 2024	342
Cases pending December 31, 2024	88
Cases disposed of during year 2024	254
<u>SMALL CLAIMS DIVISION</u>	
Cases pending January 1, 2024	00
Cases filed during year 2024	06
Cases transferred in or reactivated	00
Total cases for 2024	06
Cases pending December 31, 2024	00
Cases disposed of during year 2024	06
TOTAL CASES DISPOSED OF DURING YEAR 2024	1,556

MISCELLANEOUS CRIMINAL PROCEEDINGS **2024**

Preliminary Hearings	04
Search Warrants Issued	40
Cases appealed to Higher Court	06
Jury Trials	07
Extradition Proceedings	13
Rule (4) Bond Hearings	04
Financial Status and Review Hearings	75
Declarations of Forfeitures	51
Revocation Hearings	29
Expungements	08
Pre-trials	514
Trial	15

MISCELLANEOUS CIVIL PROCEEDINGS

Marriages	30
Judgment Debtors Examination	01
Landlord-Tenant Cases filed	60
Hearings on Motions	79
Cases Appealed to a Higher Court	00
Judgments Transferred In	00
Appeals (Bureau of Motor Vehicles)	01
Writs of Restitution Issued	24
Pre-trials	27

TRUSTEESHIP PROCEEDINGS

Trusteeships Pending January 1, 2024	01
Trusteeships Filed During Year 2024	00
Trusteeships on Docket During Year 2024	01
Trusteeships Dissolved During Year 2024	00
Trusteeships Pending December 31, 2024	01

ESCROW PROCEEDINGS

Escrows Filed During Year 2024	00
Escrows Dissolved During Year 2024	00
Escrows Pending December 31, 2024	00