

What is the Domestic Relations Division?

The Domestic Relations Court is the division of Common Pleas responsible for hearing all divorce, dissolution, legal separation, annulment and civil domestic violence cases for residents of Montgomery County. Parties may also return to the Court for post-decree resolution of matters including child or spousal support, allocation of parental rights and responsibilities (“custody”), parenting time or visitation, among other matters. In 2016, two Judges along with 45 staff served Montgomery County in this capacity.



2
JUDGES

45
COURT STAFF



The Domestic Relations Court provides a beacon of light and hope during very trying circumstances. Divorces, separations, domestic violence and other family issues demand the highest in professional skill and experience. Our county has an efficient, effective and user friendly court for all citizens; working hard to minimize conflict for children and families while maximizing resources. The court's dedicated staff consistently works above and beyond to ensure justice for all. It is with great pride that I serve our community as a member of this forward-thinking court.

Denise L. Cross, Administrative Judge
Montgomery County Domestic Relations Court

OUR MISSION

The *Montgomery County Domestic Relations Court* is dedicated to resolving family conflict by:

- Providing quality services to the public.
- Ensuring efficient case management by a professional and courteous staff.
- Offering easy access to the court for prompt problem resolution.

The Court will anticipate and meet the challenges presented by continuing social, legal, and technological changes.

ACCESS TO JUSTICE

EFFICIENT RESOLUTION



QUALITY SERVICE

Domestic Relations Division | Year in Review

A YEAR FOR COLLABORATION

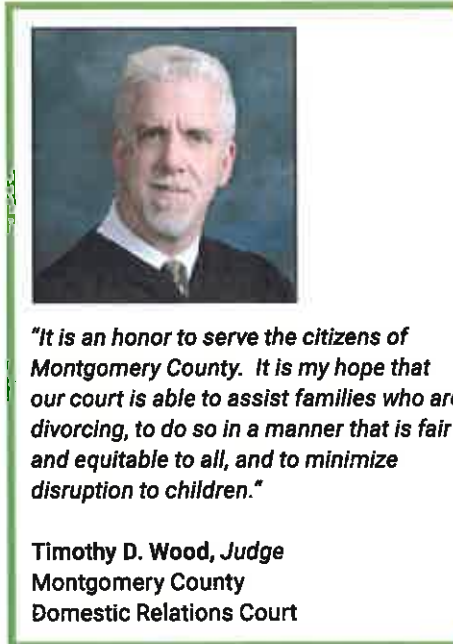
The Domestic Relations Court collaborates with many entities to coordinate service and minimize costs. The Court meets quarterly with stakeholders to gauge our progress in service delivery. This team of dedicated partners is invaluable for our continued enhancement.

This year the Court was awarded a Technology Grant from the Supreme Court of Ohio for a proposal that effectively enhanced 'process of service' through the Clerk of Courts. The Clerk's Office determined the scope of work with the computer development team. The Court gained approval from the Montgomery County Auditor's Office and our County Commissioner's to apply for the grant. Receiving this grant award saved Montgomery County taxpayers over \$18,000 in development costs.

TECHNOLOGY IMPROVEMENTS

The Court replaced outdated computers for all staff. This upgrade, originally projected to take three years to complete, was realized within months of the same budget cycle. These computers not only enhanced current workload efficiency, but they will also support e-filing processes in the near future. The staff computer replacement will allow us to provide computers for use by Self Represented litigants and will greatly aid litigants as we move to e-filing. They provide convenience and ease of use.

The Domestic Relations Court received new "Voice over Internet Phones" (VoIP). Domestic Relations was the first Court division to join the new phone system. These new phones provide enhancements such as recording any phone calls and forwarding as required to assure safety of all court personnel and participants.



GOING GREEN

April 22nd, Amy Brandl, Administrative Assistant to the Legal Director was awarded the grand prize for her "Green Idea" by the Dayton Regional Green Action Team. Amy's submission was a water bottle that could be brought to Dayton festivals, fairs, even Dragon's games and 'refilled' at a lower cost than bottled water / soda. Her idea to re-use the container will significantly reduce waste and is being considered for local development. Vendors may reward participants with lower prices to fill their containers.

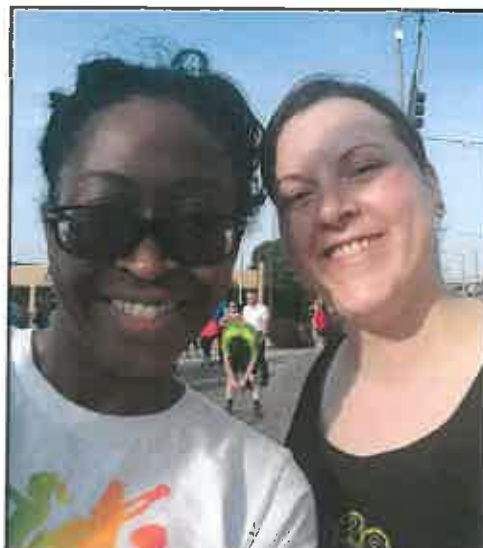
PHYSICAL PLANT UPGRADES

The Court collaborated with Facilities Management on a special soundproofing project. This project included adding insulation to walls as well as replacing ceiling tiles and fixtures with thicker materials and tighter finishing pieces. The project successfully resulted in less sound carrying from conference rooms and public waiting areas into Courtrooms and vice versa, assuring the privacy of all those doing business at the Court.

The Court is replacing its seating for public participants. This project began by replacing all chairs in the lobby areas. Public seating posed health concerns as bed bug and other insect infestation was noted. Other court areas were addressed by recovering and/or replacing seating.

COMMUNITY SERVANTS

Domestic Relations Court Judges and staff are public servants by virtue of their career choices. The service many offer to enrich their personal communities extends beyond their professional endeavours at the Court. We want to publicly recognize all the staff who participate in or volunteer selflessly at the food pantries, animal shelters, school clubs, Girl Scouts, walk events, employment / career development programs, churches and community action awareness groups. Our staff's volunteerism enriches the entire community.



RE-ORGANIZATION FOR MORE EFFECTIVE SERVICE

Administrative Judge Denise Cross continues to review caseload and function of each position in the Court. Over the years, the Court has restructured to meet the changing needs of the community it serves. The Court continues to see a dramatic increase in the number of participants entering the system without an attorney. The Self-Represented litigants result in increased time necessary to complete cases. Our Court is dedicated to ensuring meaningful access to the Courts by assisting, and keeping our Court open and easy to navigate.

Successfully navigating the justice system takes expertise that should never be limited by an inability to meet financial responsibilities. Because of this, the Court partnered with the Greater Dayton Volunteer Lawyers Project and numerous attorneys to offer a monthly clinic. The Clinic advises clients who would not afford or seek out counsel for their proceedings. The Clinic has been in place for over two years, and Attorneys volunteer their time to answer questions for Self-Represented litigants.

Electronic files are now prepared for the Magistrate dockets and assist the Legal Secretaries in performing their duties. The Court expanded its division of Court Reporters from two to three to support the Magistrates. By having Court Reporters available in more hearings, Magistrates are provided 'real-time' notes and parties have a shorter turn-around time for transcript preparation.

In addition to the Court's moving parts, staff continue to give input and develop the e-filing process. Judge Cross signed a Memorandum of Understanding with partners from General Division and the Clerk's Office to join Montgomery County E-filing system to provide continuity of service and a cost savings to the public. The Court is meeting with vendors in the spring of 2017, testing and training with stakeholders in the fall, and will have a working program available for all users by 2018.

IN THE COMMUNITY'S WORDS...

"Just a note to say thank you!... we appreciated the caring way in which you do your job!" —*Excerpt of thank you to staff from a self-represented litigant.*

"Thank you for your time and diligence. It must be a difficult job to do."
—*Opening lines of thank you from a filer after his paperwork had been reviewed.*

"Thank you so much for helping me during my time of need. It was nice to know that there still are people in this world that will go the extra mile." —*Party thanking staff after spousal support termination had been finalized.*

"Wonderful speaker. Kind, informed, compassionate." [and] "This seminar was very helpful and I wish I would have attended sooner. Thank you!!" —*Mothers' comments after attending their parent seminars.*

The most important / most helpful thing(s) I learned from the seminar (was): COMMUNICATION. I was pleasantly surprised... I like the class. —*Father experience after attending the class, "Helping Children Succeed After Divorce.*

...And the Montgomery County Domestic Relations Court staff is pleased to serve YOU.



Office Overview



Judges

Denise L. Cross has been serving as the elected Administrative Judge of Domestic Relations Court since 2001. In addition to hearing cases on her docket, as the Senior Judge, she is charged with assigning work throughout the division, hiring staff to carry out the specific functions and overseeing supervision of all personnel. She is also ultimately responsible for the budget, safety of all participants, providing access to justice and impartiality of the hired decision-makers.

Timothy D. Wood serves as Judge for the division. Judge Wood actively participates in Court business and decision development, in addition to hearing the cases assigned to his docket.

Each Judge appoints a personal staff consisting of a bailiff and a court reporter or judicial assistant. Lynice Stewart acts as bailiff and Linda Zell is Court Reporter for Judge Cross. Judge Wood's staff includes Teresa Griffith serving as bailiff and Jean Walther as Judicial Assistant.

Administrators

Two Administrators have the primary responsibility of overseeing Court departments and day-to-day functions. Duties are divided between court operations and legal matters. The Court Administrator primarily attends to public and staff relations, as well as safety and welfare of all participants in the Domestic Relations Court. This administrator assists in program development, payroll, budget and inventory control, contract oversight and manages staff directly related to the support of the courtrooms and daily operations. The Legal Administrator primarily oversees magistrates and legal support staff and maintains relations among the attorneys and legal community practicing in Domestic Relations Court. This administrator assists in maintaining the Court's Local Rules, providing legal training and assuring magistrates provide timely and consistent decisions. Administrators collaborate on case management and special projects.

Jennifer Petrella-Ahrens serves as Court Administrator with direct supervision of 5 Managers and 3 Staff. Keith Hall serves as Legal Administrator with direct supervision of the Magistrates, 2 Managers, Staff Attorneys and an Administrative Assistant.

Division of the Domestic Relations Court

MAGISTRATES

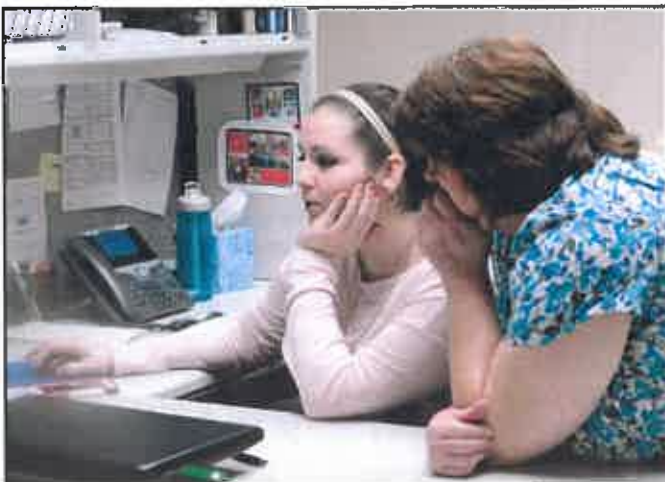
Magistrates are attorneys appointed by the Court to hear cases referred by the Judges. Magistrates hear and consider cases in the same manner as a Judge, but their decisions must be approved by the Judge to become final orders. Magistrates are available to answer procedural and other questions but may not discuss case specifics with either party (or their attorney) without the other party (and/or attorney) being present. Magistrates are regularly called upon to write articles for legal publications and make presentations at legal seminars.

There are currently 6 full-time Magistrates. Additionally, there are four part-time Magistrates supporting the Court's caseload. Three of these are assigned regular docket days.

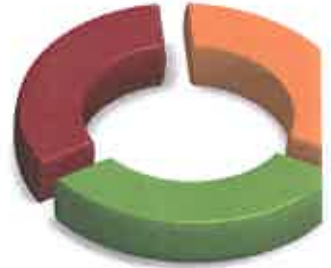
COURT REPORTERS

Staff of this department are designated the Official Court Reporters for the Court and are responsible for providing a verbatim record, or 'transcript' of legal proceedings. Transcripts are available in written or electronic format. Parties should note that they must request a written transcript be prepared whenever objections or appeals are filed. The cost for this service is dependent upon the number of pages in the transcript. The Court Reporters are also responsible for retaining custody of all exhibits admitted in proceedings, in accordance with applicable statutes.

There is currently one Judicial Court Reporter, and three Court Reporters support the Magistrate Dockets.

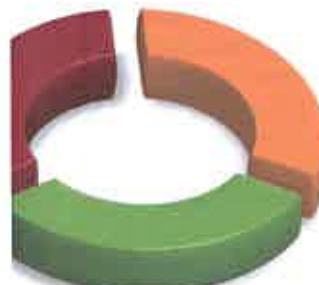


*In 2016,
Court staff reviewed
over 3,800 documents
prepared by
self-represented
litigants.*



LEGAL SECRETARIES

The Legal Secretary Department performs tasks in support of a Magistrate or Judge. Staff require considerable knowledge of office, secretarial and administrative practices and procedures. The legal secretaries prepare court orders, Domestic Violence Wallet Cards, reports, forms, memos, correspondence along with final decisions for the Magistrates and Judges. They receive, screen and refer telephone calls from the public and attorneys. Additional duties include searching and maintaining files for a variety of complex and confidential materials, as well as scanning documentation for the Court's internal files. There is one Manager and three (3) Legal Secretaries for the Court.



The Domestic Relations Court provides a "Wallet Card" to all protected persons who are granted full protection orders. It's a great tool for them to give law enforcement in case they find themselves in an emergency.

ASSIGNMENT OFFICE

The Assignment Office consists of a Manager and three (3) staff. Assignment Officers have the primary duties of assigning Magistrates to cases and scheduling initial hearings.

To perform these duties, Assignment Officers facilitate calendar coordination between the Court, attorneys and self-represented parties, collect and maintain files for matters pending before the Court, and complete case inventory. They also track cases monthly and complete mandated reporting to Supreme Court of Ohio along with any public record request.

In addition to the above, the department has two other positions with related functions that serve very specific roles. One of the staff has the responsibility to review records of individuals with Seek Work Orders, and payment history of overdue support obligations. This staff member determines if the party is in compliance with the order, monitors progress and prepares compliance reports for the Judges and Magistrates prior to contempt or imposition of sentence hearings.

The other staff member is the Public Coordinator for Domestic Violence. This Coordinator is responsible for providing paperwork and reviewing forms completed by parties in domestic violence cases. Working in conjunction with the Magistrates and Clerk's Office to assure parties get expedited hearings, the Coordinator prepares any necessary copies of temporary orders and reports LEADS information to law enforcement. Similar to other Assignment Office positions, the Public Coordinator acts as a point of contact for other courts, out of county police, victim witness advocates and the public.



COMPLIANCE OFFICE

The Compliance Office consists of a Manager and six (6) staff. Compliance Officers primarily prepare post-decree administrative orders regarding child support and / or spousal support. They also review the final decree, subsequent orders and any agreed orders submitted by attorneys and self-represented litigants. The role of the Compliance Officer is to assure administrative support matters are addressed in accordance with Ohio law and the Montgomery County Domestic Relations Court Local Rules. Some of the post-decree administrative orders this team prepares to the Judge include modifications, terminations and establishment of arrearage payments.

With similar but broader functions, the Public Coordinator for Self-Represented Parties is also located in Compliance. It is this team member's responsibility to review all documents prepared by self-represented parties prior to filing. This Coordinator answers questions in person or via phone calls, and prepares correspondence, instruction packets and other miscellaneous documents. Additionally, the Coordinator reviews final decrees drafted by the parties themselves, and assures that necessary addenda are included.



*Over 1,460 petitions
for Domestic Violence
were filed in 2016.*



MANAGEMENT OF INFORMATION SYSTEMS

The M.I.S. Department has the primary task of providing sound hardware options and software solutions to assure the entire staff of the Domestic Relations Court has the proper tools to complete their tasks effectively on behalf of Montgomery County citizens. The department administers and maintains data collection in the Court's case management system, assures regular back-up of stored information and provides protection for internal files and confidential communication. The department is responsible for virtually all technological resources provided the Court, from computers and printers to check-in kiosks, telephones and the Court website. M.I.S. is the point of contact for vendors, Clerk's Office and other county agencies and technology entities doing regular business with the Court. There is currently a Manager in Information Systems who works with other information technology personnel under contract with the Court.



FAMILY RELATIONS

The Family Relations Department provides investigative services and reports for the Court, in order to help resolve issues pertaining to allocation of parental rights and responsibilities and/or parenting time. While parties may request involvement of the Family Relations Department, all referrals come directly from the Magistrate or Judge assigned. The department provides family investigations and home studies, including home studies at the request of out-of-state courts or agencies. Family Investigators may also meet with parents needing assistance in creating a workable parenting time schedule and provide recommendations. The Family Relations Department consists of a Manager and four (4) staff, several of whom support the Court as mediators on cases they are not investigating.



Mediation services were provided in 197 cases, a 12% increase from 2015.

PARENT EDUCATION

The Parent Education Department consists of one Manager, a Parent Education Specialist and Parent Education Coordinator. The Manager and Specialist are responsible for conducting parent seminars held on a regular basis at Sinclair Community College. The seminar, entitled "Helping Children Succeed After Divorce", is a mandatory three-hour presentation for parents of children under eighteen (18). The presentation provides expert information regarding the effects of divorce and parental conflict on children, and the importance of regular and consistent child support payments, as well as regular and consistent parenting time. Parent Education staff regularly support the Court as mediators and the department also provides conciliation services for divorcing parties.



MEDIATION DEPARTMENT

Mediation is a process where parties resolve disputes outside the formal legal system. In Domestic Relations Court, mediation services are available for most cases, and all pre-decree cases are screened for mediation. If the parties agree to mediate, they will meet in a private setting with two Ohio Supreme Court certified, staff mediators. They assist the couple in identifying issues and developing options and solutions in the best interests of the children, but they will not decide the issues for the couple. Mediation is a confidential process and the mediators may not be subpoenaed into court. If the parties are able to reach an agreement, a "written agreement" is prepared, and signed by the parties, which, in turn, is given to the parties, the Court, and attorneys of record. There is one Manager and two dedicated staff to the Mediation Department, along with several staff throughout the court who also volunteer their services.

2016 NEW FILING STATISTICS

Divorces	1,130
Dissolutions	614
Legal Separations	17
Annulments	4
Domestic Violence Petitions	1,463

**2016 PRE & POST DECREE MOTIONS**

Custody	204
Parenting Time	103
Support	539
Property / Other	328

**2016 FINAL ORDERS**

Divorce Decrees	1,050
Dissolution Decrees	640
Annulment Decrees	9
Legal Separations Decrees	18
Motions Dismissed by Court	1,192

**OTHER SERVICES PROVIDED IN 2016**

Family Relations' Investigations	87
Mediations	197
Conciliation Counseling Participants	53
Parent Education Seminar Attendants	1,182
Documents Reviewed (Self Represented Parties)	3,813
Withholding Orders Prepared	1,135
Child Support Emancipation Entries	1,521
Interpreters Provided (for Court Events)	80



