

SIDNEY PROGRESS REPORT
SHELBY COUNTY COMMON PLEAS COURT
JANUARY 2022

The last year has seen the court continue to face numerous challenges because of the COVID pandemic. It has also given the court new opportunities. For almost six months in 2020 the court schedule was stopped because of COVID 19. In 2021, cases delayed in 2020 were back on the active schedule and the court managed new 2021 case filings.

Faced with the continuing pandemic, the court continued to use technology as many court hearing and conferences were conducted remotely with video conferencing playing an increasing role in court proceedings. Although not necessarily the preferred method, it did allow the court to continue to operate and conduct necessary business. Additionally it created opportunities for court proceedings without the requirement of transportation of jail and prison inmates to the courthouse. This certainly saved Shelby County the time and expense of transportation.

Even with the reduction of traffic because of the use of electronic hearings and conferences, the courthouse continues to be a busy place. Forty four thousand scans (persons walking through the security scan) took place in 2021. Security officers seized 121 knives, 59 maces, 2 spiked bracelets and 1 taser from individuals entering the courthouse.

The court's caseload continues to increase. In this court's general division, there were 679 new filings in 2021 compared to 581 new filings in 2020. Sixty three per cent of new case filings were criminal. Heroin and fentanyl continue to be prevalent in the community and many of the criminal cases were drug related either directly or indirectly. Directly related is defined as persons charged with drug trafficking or drug possession. Indirectly is defined as cases in which defendants were charged with offenses committed while under the influence of drugs or crimes committed to fund a drug habit.

The court's domestic relations division, primarily the responsibility of Magistrate Kristina Morris, was also busy. There were 340 new cases filed in the domestic relations division. There were 85 divorces (43 with children) and 77 dissolutions (26 with children). Most troubling is that there were 110 civil protection orders filed. Civil protection orders are issued upon evidence presented to the court of acts of domestic violence.

Most noteworthy of the cases in 2021 was the case of State of Ohio v Allen Romell Harris. The Harris case was what is referred to as a "cold case." The crime took place in 2006 and remained unsolved for 14 years until new DNA evidence came to light resulting in Harris' indictment for Murder in 2020 After lengthy court proceedings and only a few weeks before a scheduled trial, the case was resolved in September, 2021 with a plea by the defendant to

Attempted Murder. Harris was sentenced to 9 years mandatory prison. Mandatory meaning that he is not eligible for any early release; he will serve the 9 years.

In summary, the court is extremely busy. We continue to serve the needs of the community and work to resolve cases in a fair and just manner.