

2024

*Annual Report*



GUERNSEY  
COUNTY

PROBATE/JUVENILE COURT &  
JUVENILE PROBATION

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2023, the Probate/Juvenile Court continued its goal of providing justice for our most vulnerable citizens, and giving direction for our local youth, while maintaining consequences for their actions.

The caseload of both the Juvenile and Probate Courts remain consistent with prior years, with the exception of the COVID pandemic year in 2020.

The Juvenile Court continues with its Sexting Education Awareness Diversion (S.E.A.D.) Program in the local middle and high schools. In addition, we continue to provide the Drug Education Awareness and Responsibility (D.E.A.R.) Program in our local schools in conjunction with the Guernsey County Prosecutor's Office. We are also continuing our Thinking for a Change Program and Smoking/Vaping Cessation Program for at-risk youth. The Court is making every effort to be proactive in the schools to lessen the chances of local youth being brought before the Court on delinquency or unruly charges. By having Court officials in the schools, it is my belief that we can identify children and families at-risk and assist them with referrals to other agencies for help.

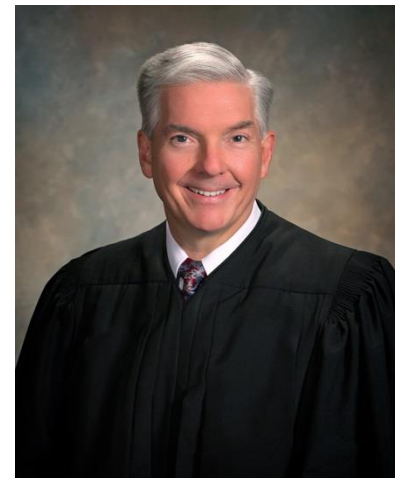
The CARTEENS Program continues to provide positive traffic law education for first time juvenile traffic offenders. We have received a great deal of positive feedback from the youth who complete the program.

The Juvenile Court is maintaining efficient and timely resolution to the cases that are brought before the Court, with only two cases pending at the end of the year beyond the Supreme Court of Ohio's timeframes.

The Probate Court also continues to be busy with a steady flow of guardianships, adoptions, and estate work. Total filings for 2023 were 555 cases. The Court continues to offer its Guardianship Training Program for families. In 2023, we trained 108 family members who are guardians of their loved ones.

There were a number of concerns during 2023 regarding the care of wards under guardianship by this Court. The Court continues to investigate ways to provide oversight of these wards to ensure that they are properly cared for, and can thrive in their current environment.

The Court continues to seek financial assistance from the Supreme Court of Ohio to complete the ongoing Online Index Books project. We were not successful in the last grant application cycle with the Supreme Court of Ohio; however, we have reapplied again this year for funding. This last phase of our



project will cost nearly \$200,000, and funding for these types of projects is highly competitive. Our effort continues.

Grant funding continues to remain important in offsetting costs to the County General Fund for operation of the Court. Since taking office in 2015, the Probate/Juvenile Court has received \$4,608,985.31 in grant monies from State and Federal sources. The Court will continue to research grant opportunities to assist the County in reducing the cost of operations.

During 2023, our Court staff remained largely intact, with the addition of Lisa Langley as a CASA Volunteer, and Allanna Decker formally leaving employment with the Probate Court for another opportunity.

During 2023, the Court hosted the Probate, Juvenile and Domestic Relations Judges Summer Conference at Salt Fork State Park. Over 130 Judges from around the State of Ohio, together with their families, enjoyed four days of education and activities. While the education was sponsored by the Supreme Court of Ohio Judicial College, my wonderful Court staff planned all other activities. The conference attendees and the Ohio Probate Judges Association paid for the cost of the conference. It was a tremendous amount of work for all involved. However, we received many positive comments, and were able to showcase Guernsey County to the rest of Ohio.

I have continued to maintain my statewide involvement with the Probate Law and Procedures Committee, Juvenile Law and Procedures Committee, Ohio Supreme Court Commission on the Rules of Superintendence, Ohio Judicial Conference Judicial Advisory Group, Board of Trustees of the Ohio Association of Juvenile Court Judges, and the Executive Committee of the Ohio Probate Judges Association, where I was elected Secretary/Historian in June of 2023. I was asked to join two subcommittees by the Ohio Supreme Court to completely rework the educational curriculum for Probate Judges, and to develop time standards for Probate cases in Ohio. My work on the State level is important because I am able to have input into any changes that the legislature or Supreme Court are considering for the Courts of Ohio.

The year 2023 was a productive and busy year for the Court. The year 2024 looks to be the same.

**JUDGE DAVID B. BENNETT**  
**GUERNSEY COUNTY PROBATE/JUVENILE COURT**

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## EMPLOYEES

### Magistrate

Peter Cultice

### Juvenile Court Division

Tim Welch, Court Director  
Amy Weaver, Deputy Clerk  
Debbie Bennington, Deputy Clerk  
Mary Caldwell, Deputy Clerk  
Veronica Mourer, Deputy Clerk/Court Reporter  
Megan Deutschman, Deputy Clerk  
Dale Lyons, Bailiff, Courthouse Security  
Tom Galbreath, Bailiff



### Juvenile Probation Division

Travis Stevens, Chief Probation Officer  
Kayla Wolfe, Probation Officer  
Josh Snyder, Probation Officer  
Noah Burris, Probation Officer  
Tiffany Lowry, Probation Clerk  
Kim Charlton, Multi-System Youth Coordinator  
Ashley Tyo, School Engagement Coordinator  
John Davis, Elementary School Truancy Prevention Officer  
Brenda Mourer, Grants Administrator

### Probate Court Division

Patricia Nichols, Court Administrator  
Deana Schick, Deputy Clerk  
Brenda Allen, Deputy Clerk

### Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA)

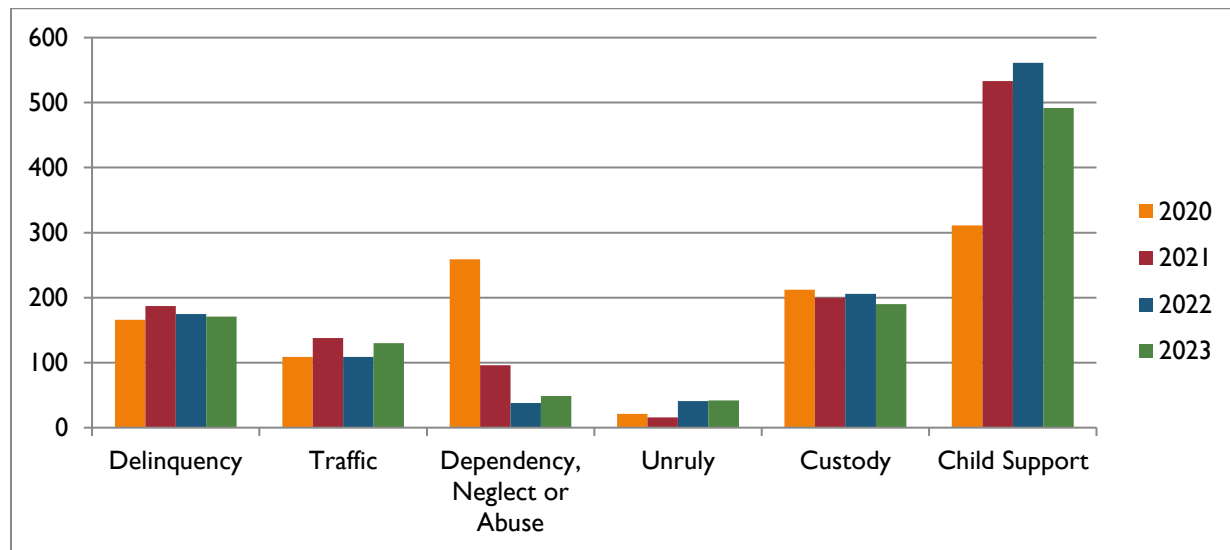
Kayla Wolfe, CASA Director  
Jaynie Vasko, Volunteer Coordinator  
B.J. Yates, Volunteer  
Cheryl Gadd, Volunteer  
Lisa Langley, Volunteer

## JUVENILE COURT

The Juvenile Court is a division of the Common Pleas Court of Guernsey County, and it is located on the second floor of the Courthouse.

Its purpose is to provide care, protection, and mental and physical development for the children in the Court’s jurisdiction; to protect the welfare of the community, and to protect the public interest by treating children as persons in need of supervision, care, and rehabilitation.

Among the duties of the Juvenile Court include: Delinquent/Unruly Children (Truancy); Dependent, Abused, Neglected Children (Guernsey County Children Services); Traffic Offenders; Custody, Visitation, Child Support, Paternity involving unmarried, and in some cases, married persons, who are living separate and apart; and Juvenile Civil Protection Orders.



### CASE TOTALS *THE SUPREME COURT OF OHIO REPORTS*

- 2023 – The total number of cases in all categories pending beginning of period, new cases filed, cases transferred in, reactivated or redesignated was 1,225.
- Highlighted areas include: Delinquency = 171; Traffic = 130; Dependency, Neglect or Abuse = 49; Unruly = 42; Custody = 190; and Child Support = 492.

**CASE TOTALS CONTINUED**  
***THE SUPREME COURT OF OHIO REPORTS***

- **2022** – The total number of cases in all categories pending beginning of period, new cases filed, cases transferred in, reactivated or redesignated was **1,314**.
- Highlighted areas include: Delinquency = 175; Traffic = 109; Dependency, Neglect or Abuse = 38; Unruly = 41; Custody = 206; and Child Support = 561.
  
- **2021** – The total number of cases in all categories pending beginning of period, new cases filed, cases transferred in, reactivated or redesignated was **1,356**.
- Highlighted areas include: Delinquency = 187; Traffic = 138; Dependency, Neglect or Abuse = 96; Unruly = 16; Custody = 200; and Child Support = 533.
  
- **2020** – The total number of cases in all categories pending beginning of period, new cases filed, cases transferred in, reactivated or redesignated was **1,123**.
- Highlighted areas include: Delinquency = 166; Traffic = 109; Dependency, Neglect or Abuse = 259; Unruly = 21; Custody = 212; and Child Support = 311.



## LOCAL CASA PROGRAM (COURT APPOINTED SPECIAL ADVOCATES)



The Court Appointed Special Advocates Program is affiliated with, and under the direction of, the Guernsey County Court of Common Pleas, Juvenile Division.

Its Mission is to speak for the best interests of the abused, neglected, and dependent children in the courtroom.

The Agency promotes and supports quality volunteer advocacy for children to provide each child with a safe, permanent, nurturing home.

The Volunteers serve as a fact finder for the Court by completely researching the background of child abuse, neglect and dependent cases.

They speak for the child in the courtroom, focusing exclusively on the child's best interests. A CASA Volunteer provides carefully researched information to help the Judge make decisions.

The Volunteers continue to monitor the child during the life of the case, helping to ensure that he or she will be raised in the best possible environment.

In 2023, the total number of children that were served by volunteers was 124. The total number of new children assigned to CASA/GAL volunteers or staff was 56, with the average length of time that the volunteer was assigned to a child at 19.9 months. The total number of children served whose cases were closed/discharged was 68, including 27 where reunification was achieved. In addition, 8 of the children in closed cases were adopted.

Among the requirements to become a CASA Volunteer, include:

- Must pass a criminal background investigation.
- Must be 21 years of age or older.
- Complete a face-to-face interview with the CASA Program Director.
- Pass all requirements.
- Complete 40-hours of training.

Established through the Guernsey County Juvenile Court in 1991, the local CASA Program had a Director, a Volunteer Coordinator, and 3 Volunteers during the 2023 calendar year.



## JUVENILE PROBATION

The Juvenile Probation Department is located on the ground floor of the Courthouse, and is responsible for performing many duties beyond the supervision of the juveniles on probation.

The Staff is involved in facilitating and participating in many programs to encourage the growth and support to the youth they encounter.

Everyday duties include: attending court hearings; completing risk assessments, providing referrals; making school, home, and community visits; attending trainings; informal hearings; and advocating for the juveniles they are involved with, as appropriate, to help ensure their success and well-being.

### Additional Important Facts:

- There are currently 3 Probation Officers and 1 Supervisor.
- There is a female (Kayla Wolfe) that deals with gender specific issues. She also handles the sexually aggressive youth.
- The Probation Officers meet with the youth a minimum of once a week, but usually 2 to 3 times per week, generally at school.
- There is an additional person (John Davis) who handles truancy and prevention/education issues in the elementary schools in the county.
- There is also one person (Ashley Tyo) who handles truancy issues in the Rolling Hills and East Guernsey Local School Districts (Middle School & High School).
- Finally, there is a single person (Kim Charlton) who provides educational outreach for juveniles and families in an effort to change the behaviors of the child, and assist the families in developing healthy relationships. She also teaches the Parent Project and Thinking for a Change Programs.

*On average, there are 100 juveniles on probation at any given time.*

### Drug Screens Administered to Youth

2023 – 468 Total screens administered - 258 Positive  
257 THC; 1 Ethanol; 1 Methamphetamine

2022 – 373 Total screens administered - 238 Positive  
228 THC; 1 Ethanol; 7 Amphetamines/Methamphetamines  
(2 Positives due to medication)

2021\* – 283 Total screens administered - 182 Positive  
173 THC; 2 Ethanol; 9 Amphetamines/Methamphetamines  
(Total 184 – 2 tested for both THC & Amphetamines/Methamphetamines)

\*Please note that the decrease in numbers is attributed to the COVID-19 Pandemic.

## CURRENT PROGRAMS OPERATING UNDER JUVENILE COURT & JUVENILE PROBATION

**Thinking For A Change** – This is an evidence-based program from the U.S. Department of Justice, National Institute of Corrections. It is an integrated cognitive behavioral change program, which focuses on social skills, cognitive self-change, and problem solving. The main goal is to teach individuals how to stop, think, and make better choices, which will lead to avoiding conflict and poor decision-making. It is currently being used with local high school and middle school students; however, several area counseling agencies also use it with adults. This program is provided through the Guernsey County Juvenile Probation Department.

**Parent Project** – The Parent Project is an evidence-based parenting program consisting of two different curriculums: Changing Destructive Teen Behavior, and Loving Solutions. Changing Destructive Teen Behavior is curriculum for parents of youth ages 12 to 21 who are out of control behaviorally, sexually active, violent, involved in gangs, or involved with drugs and/or alcohol. It provides parents with the tools and support to maintain consistency, structure, appropriate discipline techniques, and incorporate tough love. It also provides parents with information on how to connect with community services, such as mental health providers, law enforcement, and the court systems.

**Loving Solutions** – This curriculum is for parents of youth, ages 5 – 11. It is a more traditional parenting course, which teaches parents consistency, structure, and basic milestones for young children, such as how children of this age think, grow, and learn. It specifically covers appropriate discipline for this age group, and how it should be set-up, incorporated, and utilized in the home. It also provides parents with information on how to work with community supports, such as schools and mental health providers. These programs are provided through the Guernsey County Family and Children First Council.

**Sexting Education Awareness Diversion (S.E.A.D.)** – Places special emphasis on preventing sexting by minors, and to address the potential negative impact it can have on their legal, social, emotional, educational, and career goals. It is a 3 to 5-day program that is presented to middle school and high school classrooms within the county. The program is designed to approach the complex issues around sexting from an educational standpoint. In addition to sexting, the local program also discusses the topics of bullying, cyberbullying and harassment.

## CURRENT PROGRAMS CONTINUED

**Drug Screens** – Any juvenile placed on probation is subject to random drug and alcohol testing at any time as part of their probation terms. A juvenile on probation for a drug or alcohol offense is screened much more frequently. Probation uses instant 8-panel screens, as well as 10-panel screens that are sent to the lab for confirmation and levels.

**Detention** – The Guernsey County Juvenile Court contracts with the Sargus Juvenile Detention Center in St. Clairsville, Ohio, and the Muskingum County Juvenile Detention Center in Zanesville, Ohio. The Court has 3 contracted beds at Sargus, and 2 contracted beds with 1 floater bed at Muskingum JDC. Juveniles can be sentenced to detention for up to 90-days.

**Electronic Monitoring** – Guernsey County Juvenile Probation uses Track Group Services for EMHA. The units used will monitor the juveniles through a GPS system. The juveniles that are placed on EMHA have certain zones set-up, which determines where they can be. Probation Officers are able to monitor those youth who are placed on EMHA through their work computers, and also through an APP on their cell phones.

**Oakview Juvenile Residential Center** – Oakview is a facility that the Guernsey County Juvenile Court uses for males that have been adjudicated on a felony charge. They are placed there for a minimum of 6-months, or until they complete the program. While they are there, the juveniles will have a mental health assessment, drug and alcohol assessment, and attend individual, group and family counseling appointments. They also have in-house schooling, as well as community service work and assigned duties inside the facility. This is usually the last option for the Court before having to send a juvenile to the Ohio Department of Youth Services.

**Court Foster & Residential Placement** – The Juvenile Court will work with Guernsey County Children Services, and other agencies and resources to find solutions for youth. The Court uses several residential placements, depending on the needs of the child. The most common used by the Court is Allwell Behavioral Health Services Residential, Cornell Abraxas (substance abuse), The Village Network, and Gender Specific (females). The Court will utilize a residential placement if there are several concerns with a child's behavioral or mental health issues that cannot be addressed appropriately by the family.

## CURRENT PROGRAMS CONTINUED

**Department of Youth Services** – DYS is the juvenile corrections system for the State of Ohio. DYS is statutorily mandated to confine felony offenders, ages 10 to 21, who have been adjudicated and committed by the Juvenile Court. During their stay, youth are engaged in programming that is designed to address their criminological and behavioral needs. Each of the facilities also operates a year-round school that offers general curriculum, as well as vocation opportunities.

**Smoking/Vaping Cessation Program** – The purpose of this activity is for the Multi-Systems Youth Coordinator to provide education and awareness to the dangers of smoking and vaping, and to educate families how Ohio tobacco law can apply to their child. The program is designed to divert these cases from being filed with the Court. The program is also made available to youth that are currently on probation and have been cited for a tobacco/vaping incident.

**Drug Education Awareness & Responsibility (D.E.A.R.) Program** – The purpose of this activity is for the Multi-System Youth Coordinator/Prosecutors Office to provide education and awareness to school age youth on the effects of drugs and alcohol use. By completing this program, students will gain a thorough understanding of the short-term and long-term health impacts of the most commonly abused drugs. In addition, students will have a better understanding of the potential legal ramifications for someone that uses/abuses drugs.

**CARTEENS Program** – First time juvenile traffic offenders are now required to complete the 4-H CARTEENS Program. This is a joint effort between the Ohio State University Extension Office and the Guernsey County Juvenile Court. The program is conducted by 4-H professionals, teen leaders, and their program partners. The purpose of the program is to offer traffic safety education with a goal of reducing the number of repeat offenders and increase awareness of Ohio traffic laws.

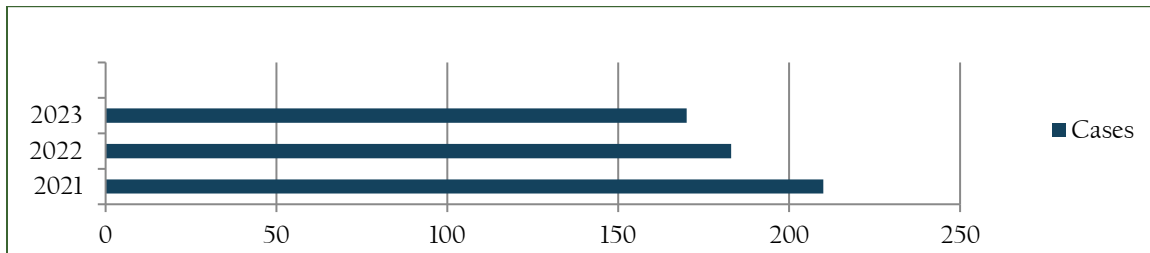


## ALTERNATIVES TO ADJUDICATION

**Grade K – 6 Prevention** – The Prevention Officer receives referrals from schools within the county on students and/or families that have been red flagged for attendance or behaviors within the school. The Prevention Officer makes contact with the family and child. They address the problems and concerns in a meeting with the school to establish conditions in order to correct the issues. All parties will then sign an informal contract that states the recommendations in order to alleviate the filing of charges with the Juvenile Court.

2023 – Worked with **170** different cases.

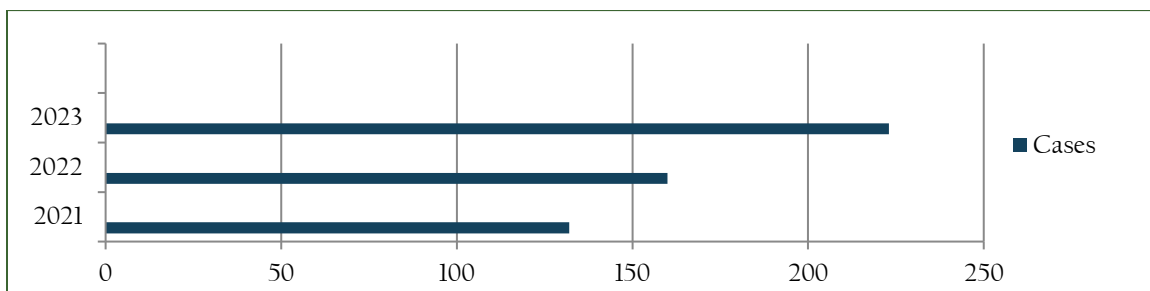
2022 – Worked with **183** different cases.      2021 – Worked with **210** different cases.



**Grade 7 – 12 Truancy** – The Truancy/Engagement Coordinator receives referrals from schools on students who have been red flagged by the school for their attendance. The Truancy/Engagement Coordinator will meet one-on-one with the child to try to determine the reason for the absences from school. The Coordinator will also conduct meetings with the child and parent(s), where informal contracts will be signed which outline the issues and the recommendations to correct the problems that are presented.

2023 – Worked with **223** different cases.

2022 – Worked with **160** different cases.      2021 – Worked with **132** different cases.



There were a total of 393 different cases of children placed in alternatives to adjudication in 2023. There were a total of 2 filings, all of which were disposed.

## PROBATE COURT

The Probate Court is located on the second floor of the Courthouse, and has over 200 separate duties that it is charged with by the Ohio Revised Code.

Each of Ohio's 88 counties has a Probate Division of its Court of Common Pleas, and their duties range from the issuing of marriage licenses to overseeing testamentary trusts valued at millions of dollars.

The duties of the Probate Court include the following:

- Marriage Licenses
- Administering Estates
- Guardianships
- Conservatorships
- Mental Illness
- Adoption
- Correction of Birth Certificates
- Change in Name
- Testamentary & Inter Vivos Trusts
- Appoint to Boards & Commissions

Case Types	TOTALS FOR 2023		TOTALS FOR 2022		TOTALS FOR 2021	
	Number of Cases Opened	Cases Pending at the End of the Year	Number of Cases Opened	Cases Pending at the End of the Year	Number of Cases Opened	Cases Pending at the End of the Year
Adoptions	16	5	23	7	36	12
Birth Correction/Registration	2	0	4	0	12	0
Probate Civil	10	4	4	0	10	6
Conservatorship	0	0	0	0	0	0
Estates	231	199	270	197	225	178
Guardianship of a Minor	4	13	4	10	0	11
Guardianship of an Incompetent	28	253	27	258	23	256
Guardianship Emergency	18	0	12	0	8	0
Marriage License	216	0	243	0	276	0
Minors Settlement	0	22	4	23	1	20
Name Change	24	0	27	0	27	0
Trust	6	15	0	12	0	14

## LOCAL GUARDIANSHIP PROGRAM

The Probate Court is the superior guardian of those placed in guardianships and is responsible for monitoring guardians to make sure that they fulfill their duties.

Guardianship is one of the more restrictive protective services available under Ohio law and is only necessary when individuals are unable to care for their basic needs, finances, or medical issues and when a less-restrictive alternative is not feasible.

People placed in guardianship are especially vulnerable, and there is a great need for willing volunteers, family members, and attorneys to act on their behalf. In many cases, every decision affecting those individuals is in another person's hands. That is why it is so important for guardians to carry out their duties responsibly.

A Guardian holds a unique role with respect to the ward and the Guardian has an obligation to obtain an understanding of the fundamentals of that relationship. Formalized training is one means to gain that competency.

In 2016, the Probate Court adopted Local Rule 66, which requires family guardians to attend a shortened local version of the Supreme Court of Ohio's Guardian Fundamentals Training Program.

This program was developed in conjunction with the Guernsey County Board of Developmental Disabilities, Mental Health and Recovery Services Board, and the Area Agency on Aging Region 9.

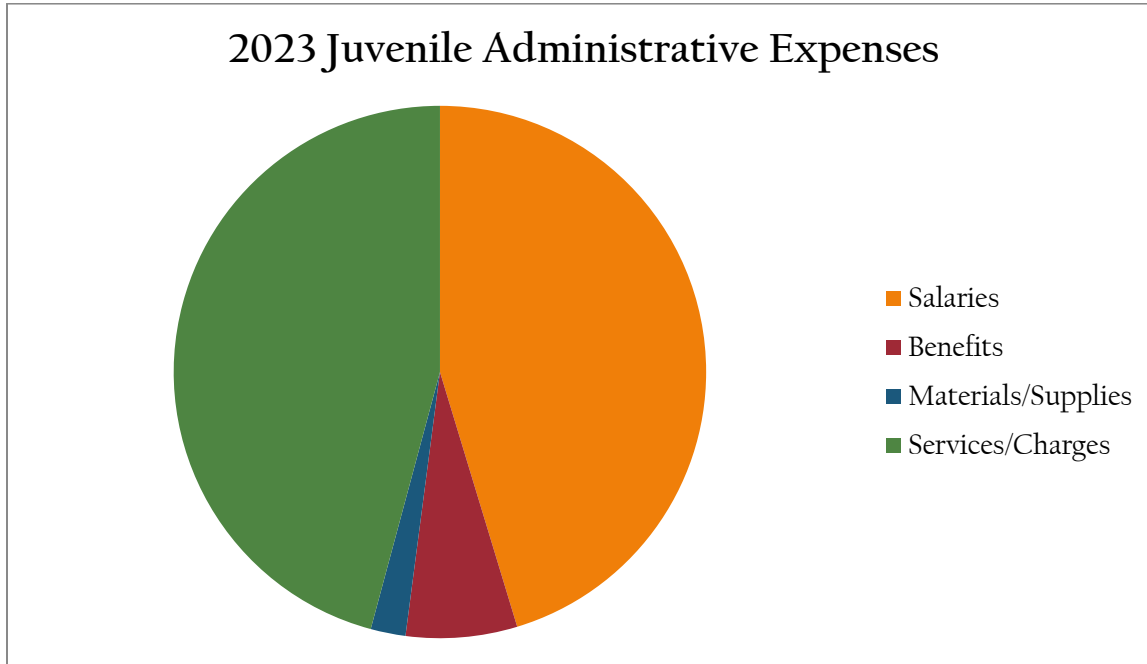
The training sessions are offered 4 times per year at various times, and all family guardians must attend this program once during the year.

In addition to the initial basic course titled "Responsibilities and Duties of Guardians," several other courses are held with topics of interest to guardians, which were created from suggestions and questionnaires that were completed at previous trainings. In 2023, those topics included: Caregiver Stress; Internet Safety; Payee vs. Guardian of Estate; and Seasonal Stress and Loss Over the Holidays.

This program assists the guardians in complying with the law, as well as helping them learn about the different resources that may be available to them for the benefit of their ward.

FISCAL REPORT

Funding for the Guernsey County Probate/Juvenile Court and Juvenile Probation is received from a variety of sources, with the majority coming from the County’s General Fund, and some programs being supplemented with several grants.



2023

Salaries	\$375,605.95
Benefits	\$ 56,000.94
Materials/Supplies	\$ 17,573.42
Services/Charges	<u>\$379,739.75</u>
Total Appropriation	\$828,920.06

2022

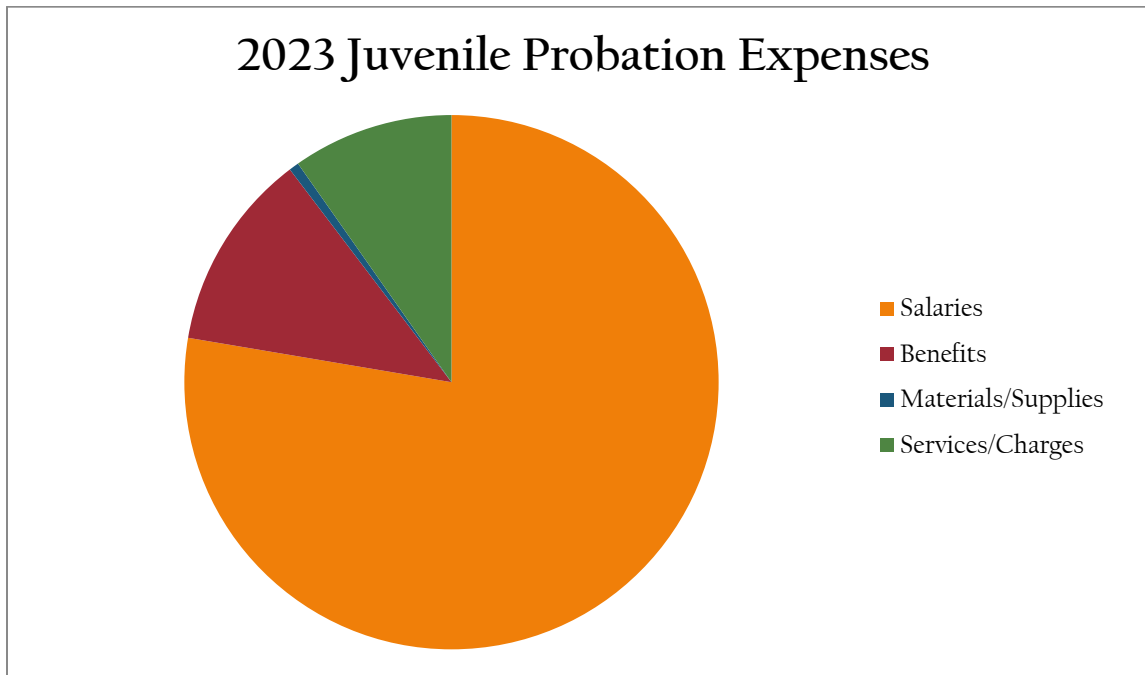
Salaries	\$348,107.50
Benefits	\$ 53,782.73
Materials/Supplies	\$ 14,172.98
Services/Charges	<u>\$373,621.68</u>
Total Appropriation	\$789,684.89

2021

Salaries	\$337,060.30
Benefits	\$ 51,285.67
Materials/Supplies	\$ 14,464.88
Services/Charges	<u>\$329,515.97</u>
Total Appropriation	\$732,326.82



FISCAL REPORT CONTINUED

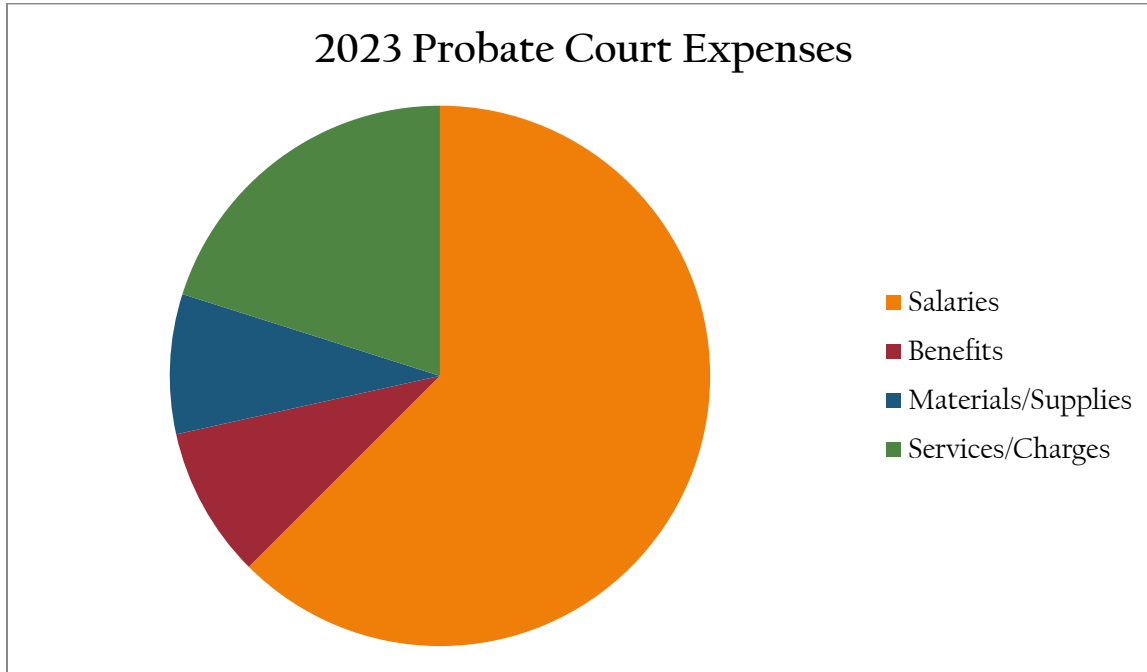


<u>2023</u>	
Salaries	\$329,581.04
Benefits	\$ 50,925.72
Materials/Supplies	\$ 2,533.94
Services/Charges	\$ 41,356.40
<b>Total Appropriation</b>	<b>\$424,397.10</b>

<u>2022</u>	
Salaries	\$318,493.46
Benefits	\$ 49,215.37
Materials/Supplies	\$ 41,166.60
Services/Charges	\$ 39,759.55
<b>Total Appropriation</b>	<b>\$448,634.98</b>

<u>2021</u>	
Salaries	\$310,705.60
Benefits	\$ 48,024.74
Materials/Supplies	\$ 1,255.78
Services/Charges	\$ 31,433.54
<b>Total Appropriation</b>	<b>\$391,419.66</b>

FISCAL REPORT CONTINUED



<u>2023</u>	
Salaries	\$160,394.38
Benefits	\$ 23,152.87
Materials/Supplies	\$ 21,466.70
Services/Charges	\$ <u>51,594.22</u>
Total Appropriation	\$256,608.17

<u>2022</u>	
Salaries	\$149,000.08
Benefits	\$ 22,134.19
Materials/Supplies	\$ 16,507.72
Services/Charges	\$ <u>55,890.40</u>
Total Appropriation	\$243,532.39

<u>2021</u>	
Salaries	\$142,991.76
Benefits	\$ 21,190.80
Materials/Supplies	\$ 14,823.43
Services/Charges	\$ <u>41,950.43</u>
Total Appropriation	\$220,956.42

## CONTACT INFORMATION



Guernsey County Courthouse  
801 East Wheeling Avenue  
Cambridge, Ohio 43725

Juvenile Court – (740) 432-9266  
Probate Court – (740) 432-9262  
Juvenile Probation – (740) 432-9229  
CASA Program – (740) 439-5697

[www.guernseycounty.org](http://www.guernseycounty.org)

Monday – Friday  
8:30 A.M. to 12:00 P.M. & 1:00 P.M. to 4:00 P.M.