



**MELODY LORGE
CLERK OF CIRCUIT COURTS**

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February 24, 2017

To: The Honorable Members of the Sheboygan County Board of Supervisors
Adam N. Payne, County Administrator

Re: 2016 Annual Report

The Clerk of Courts Office was challenged in 2016 to continue to provide timely and efficient services. The overall case load increased in the number of cases filed, it was more challenging because of reduced staff due to several retirements. We are fortunate to have dedicated, trained staff who continue to get the job done.

In 2016, ordinance and forfeiture cases saw an increase of 1,244 citations for a total case load of 7,823. Felonies increased by 47 cases, and criminal traffic matters increased by 65 cases; however, misdemeanors decreased by 165 cases for a total criminal case load of 2,217 cases in 2016. In total, we received filings of 15,389 cases – a net increase of 1,013 over 2015. During 2016 the staff disposed of 15,795 cases. We processed 32 appeals and filed 95 liens and transcripts of judgment. We had a decrease of nine jury trials in 2016, a total of 33, and the average number of days per trial decreased taking 58 days to hear them. The total jury trial cost of \$46,632.82 is a decrease of 10% over 2015 and an average cost of \$804 per day, but a decrease when compared to \$830 per day last year.

The collections of fines, forfeitures and filing fees increased by \$56,678 of the \$689,000 budgeted; due to our daily collection efforts. Of the total dollars we collected, \$2,011,017 was forwarded to the State; \$43,341 was distributed to municipalities within the county. County departments were credited with \$910,841 which is an increase of over \$13,000 in County-retained revenue.

I look forward to meeting the challenges that continue to result from the County's and State's budgets while still fulfilling our responsibilities. As a department, we will continue to look for more ways to improve efficiency and reduce costs as we have done in the past. I also look forward to continuing the partnership with the County Administrator, the County Board of Supervisors and most specifically the Law Committee, in order to provide the resources our department needs to carry out our responsibilities for the courts and the community.

Respectfully submitted,

Melody Lorge
Clerk of Circuit Courts

CLERK OF CIRCUIT COURTS OFFICE 2016 ANNUAL REPORT

MISSION STATEMENT AND SUMMARY OF RESPONSIBILITIES

“To effectively and efficiently facilitate the administration of justice.”

The Clerk of Circuit Courts is a public official elected every four years, whose basic duties are enumerated in Sections 59.40 and 753.30 of the Wisconsin Statutes; myriad other responsibilities are scattered throughout the Statutes. The Clerk is the administrator of the Clerk of Circuit Courts Office and carries the responsibility of budgeting and administering trial court resources, developing effective policies and procedures, and maintaining competent staff.

Statutes require the Clerk of Circuit Courts Office to maintain a record of all documents filed with the courts, schedule all matters in court, keep a record of all court proceedings and collect the various filing fees, court costs, assessments, surcharges, fines and forfeitures ordered by the court or specified by statute through all means provided for by statute.

The Clerk also provides support personnel for each of the five Circuit Courts, as well as for the Court Commissioner and all outside judges who hear cases in Sheboygan County. The staff is responsible for scheduling court appearances, taking minutes in the courtroom and preparing all notices, judgments of conviction, jail and prison papers, driver's license suspensions, juvenile placement orders and all other documentation and orders as required by statute. The Clerk is also responsible for filing and maintaining the judgment and lien docket, as well as preparing reports to many other agencies of determinations made in the courts.

Jury management is another function of the Clerk of Circuit Courts Office. The Clerk's Office is responsible for qualifying, selecting and notifying potential jurors for service to the five Circuit Courts. Annually, in excess of 5,000 questionnaires are mailed to county residents, and from the responses four different jury pools are created for each of the thirteen four-week terms of service.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES ACHIEVED IN 2016

We went paperless as of August 1, 2016 in all case types (paper on demand) for all new case filings. We are no longer making court files or sending files to the judges' for court hearings as all documents received after August 1st are being scanned to the paperless court file.

Consolidated Court Automation Program (CCAP) provided us with printers in the courtrooms to begin in-court processing.

In 2016 there were two new Judges' appointed. Judge Kent Hoffmann was appointed to Branch 2 and Judge Daniel J. Borowski was appointed to Branch 5.

Due to two retirements in 2016 we have re-organized the office as a wealth of knowledge has left in the last several years. We are still training new employees and current staff learning new positions.

The Circuit Courts began a specialty court in July of 2016 with the opening of Drug and alcohol Treatment Court.

A capital outlay was approved for a much needed new sound system in all five courtrooms. This will replace the twenty five year old "life exhausted" system. Project will be completed in 2017.

BUDGET

In 2016, our revenues increased by \$78,700 from the budgeted amounts. We continue to face the challenge that our greatest expenditures outside personnel expense are for professional services, which are out of our control. The cost in 2016 to provide interpreters, psychologists, court appointed counsel and guardian's ad litem in criminal, juvenile and family matters was \$357,100. This is an increase of \$74,900 from our 2015 expense.

Thanks to stringent control over all items within our purview, our overall expenditures were more than \$30,000 below our budget of \$2,294,900 which includes our tax levy of \$832,234; the best we have done in a number of years. It is the increase of revenue that helped us, an increase of \$56,700 above our budgeted collections revenue of \$689,000. The combination of the two areas resulted in a \$109,532 positive change to the fund balance. We have now seen a positive change two years in a row which is an improvement. Prior to last year there had been no positive change in 12 years.

The 2016 budget included an approved capital outlay in the amount of \$175,000 for a much needed new sound system in all five courtrooms; replacing the twenty five year old "life exhausted" system. The project was not completed this year. A carryover of the remaining \$101,536 was approved and the project will be completed in 2017.

The 2017 budget of \$2,117,500 includes our tax levy of \$863,900; it contains a slight increase in the collections revenue. We have enforced all means of collection, which has resulted in an increase of revenue in 2016. We strive to continue to meet or exceed this goal in 2017. Aurora Health Physicians have not seen an increase in pay for well over ten years. Due to contract negotiations with Aurora Behavioral Health Physicians we had to increase our 2017 psychologist expense by \$33,000 from the prior year expense. With the increased property tax levy awarded us, we feel we are positioned to succeed in meeting our budget this year.

ISSUES AND CHALLENGES AHEAD

Our foremost concern in 2017 is staff allocation and training, since 2014 we have had nine retirements. These long term employees retired with an average of 35 years of service. While these positions have been filled except for the current retirement, there is always a long learning curve. This is affording us the opportunity to restructure part of the office; the time it takes to train competent personnel has placed a strain on remaining staff.

The number of pro se litigants continues to increase, creating more and more of a demand on the Clerk of Courts office for assistance in procuring forms, answering procedural questions and guiding court users through the process of litigation. Each self-represented litigant requires more staff resources than ever before, yet this is occurring at a time when we continue to operate with less staff.

Two new Circuit Court Judges' were appointed in 2016. New judges always create many challenges for the department.

Mandatory eFiling should be implemented sometime before year end. Even though we are a paperless county since August 2016 we will still face procedural challenges once eFiling is implemented in our county.

Meeting our budget will continue to be a source of concern; however, this year I believe we are once again positioned to succeed.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES FOR 2017

We are excited and looking forward to be mandatory eFiling by the end of 2017.

Determine and Implement a way for prospective jurors called to serve on a jury trial to view an informational video before the voir dire process begins.

Myself along with my Chief Deputy, plan on working together to achieve more efficiency and finding ways to improve increasing collections of our unpaid accounts. We will also continue to implement more cross training within the office.

We plan on eliminating our current phone tree to improve customer service.

We will update our required Language Assistance Plan with the state.

The Clerk of Courts website will be reviewed and revised.

The moving of the Register in Probate office is still in the planning process. This move would allow for additional cross training to assist the two-person division along with security concerns.

With these goals in mind, 2017 will be a challenging but rewarding year.

**2015 - 2016 STATISTICAL REVIEW
NEW CASES FILED WITH THE CLERK OF CIRCUIT COURTS OFFICE**

CASE TYPE	2015	2016	Increase	Decrease
Felony	754	801	47	
Misdemeanor	1,105	940		165
Ordinance	572	435		137
Criminal Traffic	411	476	65	
Traffic	6,007	7,388	1,381	
Civil	792	694		98
Small Claims	2,729	2,666		63
Family	609	599		10
Paternity	212	208		4
Juvenile	421	405		16
Adoption	26	25		1
CLERK OF COURTS CASELOAD	13,638	14,637	999	
Probate	257	239		18
Wills Filed	238	230		8
Guardianship	66	57		9
Mental	177	226	49	
REGISTER IN PROBATE CASELOAD	738	752		
TOTAL CASES FILED	14,376	15,389	1,013	

JURY TRIAL STATISTICS

	2015	2016	Increase	Decrease
JURY TRIALS	42	33		9
JURY TRIAL DAYS	63	58		5
PER DIEM, MEALS, MILEAGE	\$52,129.90	\$46,632.82		\$5,497.08

**FINES, FEES, SURCHARGES & ASSESSMENTS COLLECTED
COUNTY/CITY/MUNICIPALITIES/STATE DISTRIBUTION**

	2015	2016	Increase	Decrease
COUNTY OF SHEBOYGAN	\$897,686.78	\$910,841.60	\$13,154.82	
CITY OF SHEBOYGAN	\$46,565.90	\$35,723.96		\$10,841.94
OTHER MUNICIPALITIES	\$10,784.55	\$7,617.44		\$3,167.11
STATE OF WISCONSIN	\$2,042,553.36	\$2,011,017.33		\$31,536.03
TOTAL DISTRIBUTED	\$2,997,590.59	\$2,965,200.33		\$32,390.26

2015- 2016 FINANCIAL COMPARISON

RECEIPTS	2015	2016	Increase	Decrease
BAIL, FINES, FEES, TRUST, PROBATE	\$3,780,995.26	\$5,332,570.49	\$1,551,575.23	
ACCOUNTS RECEIVABLE	2015	2016	Increase	Decrease
FINES AND FORFEITURES	\$9,924,939.69	\$10,165,525.85	\$240,586.16	