



MELODY LORGE
CLERK OF CIRCUIT COURTS

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The Honorable Members of the Sheboygan County Board of Supervisors
Adam Payne, County Administrator

The Clerk of Courts Office was challenged in 2017 to continue to provide timely and efficient services. Despite the fact that overall case load increased in the number of cases filed, it was challenging because of reduced staff due to another retirement and an employee accepting a position outside of the county. We are fortunate to have dedicated, trained staff who continue to accomplish this.

In 2017, ordinance and forfeiture cases saw a decrease of 120 citations for a total case load of 7,703. Felonies increased by 31 cases, criminal traffic matters decreased by 11 cases, misdemeanors decreased by 47 cases for a total criminal case load of 2,190 cases in 2017. In total, we received filings of 15,395 cases – a net increase of 6 over 2016. During 2017 the staff disposed of 15,353 cases. We processed 48 appeals and filed 101 liens and transcripts of judgment. We had an increase of 12 jury trials in 2017, a total of 45, and the average number of days per trial increased taking 96 days to hear them. The total jury trial cost of \$72,413 is an increase of 35% over 2016 and an average cost of \$754 per day, but a decrease when compared to \$830 per day last year.

The collections of fines, forfeitures and filing fees increased by \$160,788 of the \$694,000 budgeted; due to our daily collection efforts, copies and bond forfeitures. Of the total dollars we collected, \$2,168,977 was forwarded to the State and \$46,425 was distributed to municipalities within the county. County departments were credited with \$1,030,481 which is an increase of over \$119,000 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

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 2017

We began voluntarily eFiling on April 17, 2017 for civil, family and small claims cases. This proved to be very beneficial and helpful for when the mandatory eFiling was implemented on July 5, 2017 for all case types except juvenile, probate, mental commitments, judgments and liens. I also believe due to opting to go paperless since August 1, 2016 our transition went very smoothly.

All Attorneys are required by state statute to eFile. Self represented litigants are not therefore we are still accepting paper documents and scanning them into the system. High volume agents filing on behalf of a business or corporation who file ten or more small claims cases per year and landlords who are an LLC are also required to eFile. The new mandatory eFiling rule does not apply to people representing themselves.

Probate began voluntarily eFiling July 5, 2017 for formal and informal case types. On March 1, 2018 they will begin mandatory eFiling for these case types as well.

We updated our Language Assistance Plan with the State of Wisconsin.

Due to another retirement in 2017 we continue to re-organize 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.

We were given permission to hire one of our retirees back as an LTE (limited term employee). This has really proven to have helped us immensely in keeping us balanced and on track when preparing for eFiling. It also helped with keeping the strain off other employees on a daily basis due to all the staffing changes and training within the office.

The much needed new sound system was installed in all five courtrooms. This replaced the twenty five year old "life exhausted" system. Phase two of the project adding the videoconferencing equipment will begin in 2018. The project will hopefully be completed in 2018 depending on the cost and the remaining funds available.

BUDGET

In 2017, our revenues increased by \$192,417 from the budgeted amounts the majority due to bond forfeitures and our daily collection efforts. 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 2017 to provide interpreters, psychologists, court appointed counsel and guardian's ad litem in criminal, juvenile and family matters was \$483,800. This is an increase of \$126,600 from our 2016 expense. Our jury expense also saw an increase of over \$25,000 from the prior year.

Once again it was our state mandated expenses that we have no control over that hurt us the most. Our expenditures were more than \$137,000 over our budget of \$2,219,000. It is the increase of revenue that helped us, an increase of \$160,788 above our budgeted collections revenue of \$694,000. The combination of the two areas resulted in a \$54,721 positive change to the fund balance. We have now seen a positive change three years in a row which continues to be an improvement. Prior to the last three years there had been no positive change in 12 years.

The 2017 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 sound system was installed in all five courtrooms. We are now in phase two of the project which is adding the videoconferencing equipment. A carryover of the remaining \$46,737 was approved and the project will be completed in 2018. We are hoping to have enough money to cover the cost of the equipment. If not, we will be asking for additional funding in 2019 to complete the project.

The 2018 budget of \$2,179,744 includes our tax levy of \$888,515; 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 2017. We strive to continue to meet or exceed this goal in 2018. Our greatest challenge will be our expenses for professional services, which continue to be out of our control. 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 2018 is staff allocation and training, since 2014 we have had ten retirements. These long term employees retired with an average of 35 years of service. While these positions have been filled except for a retirement occurring on March 1, 2018, 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.

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

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES FOR 2018

Complete phase two of the sound system project, which is adding the videoconferencing equipment in all five courtrooms. We were recently informed by AT&T that due to the age of our videoconferencing equipment in our B-10/Court Commissioners courtroom, they will no longer honor a maintenance contract on this equipment. Therefore, we will need to look at replacing this equipment. We may need to ask for additional funding in 2019 in order to accomplish this.

On March 1, 2018 Probate will begin mandatory eFiling for informal and formal case types.

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.

When the new phone system is implemented we plan on eliminating our current phone tree to improve customer service.

The Clerk of Courts website will be reviewed and revised.

With these goals in mind, 2018 will be a challenging but rewarding year.