



Ottawa County Municipal Court

Louis P. Wargo III
Judge

David R. Boldt, Magistrate/
Court Administrator
Gail Miller, Clerk of Court

To the Families and Citizens of Ottawa County

With everything the people of our County have faced over the last six (6) months, many of you have found both the time and energy in your busy schedules to post and compliment the Court on the handling of Court matters during these difficult times. First of all I would like to “Thank you” for your commitment to your Court; secondly, I felt an update was in order for all of you.

Let me start by saying that the transition from Judge Hany’s administration of the court on January 1, 2020, the date I first assumed office, was exceedingly smooth. A very heartfelt thanks to Judge Hany, the Court staff, and the County Commissioners is certainly in order, well-deserved, and, warranted. From all standpoints, you may be assured that the Court operations could not have been transferred and continued in any more efficient manner, and I offer my sincere “Thanks” to all.

That having been said, COVID-19, while causing serious changes to everyone’s personal lives, has also necessitated changes to be made in the Court’s operations and requires constant and continued review, monitoring, and updates, including Ohio Supreme Court and Judicial Conference Seminars for the Court. While Courts have always strived for 20/20 vision, 2020 requires an even stronger perception to visualize not only Court operations, but on a more basic level, what the Courts do with their buildings to combat COVID-19.

As to Court operations, the Judicial Branch (Ohio Courts) has always been exempt from Governor Dewine’s orders. Additionally, while the State and Counties have faced, and continue to face, budgeting shortfalls, the Courts must maintain operations insuring protection to the public, while safeguarding defendants’ as well as victims’ constitutionally guaranteed rights and freedoms. While you’ve likely seen in the news that some courts have literally shut down operations during the COVID-19 crisis, I am very pleased to report that your Municipal Court, with many procedural and physical modifications, has been able to very capably continue operations. Recognizing County budget reduction issues facing the Commissioners, this Court has been able to tighten its expenditures and, with the help and cooperation of the Court’s entire staff, effectively use personal furloughs and administrative leaves to help reduce the projected budget shortfall. Additional measures are being taken to reduce salary demands without necessitating personnel layoffs or salary reductions. A “restructuring” of the office is assisting in this regard.

Safety of the staff and public is also of extreme importance and everything plausible is being done in this regard. Masking, hand sanitizing, daily temperature checks, social distancing, frequent daily sanitizing wipe downs, restricted seating in the courtroom, telephonic and video hearings where and when appropriate, installation of plexiglass barriers and an air purifying machine, and other continuing updates and measures to name a few. Working together with the attorneys, local law enforcement agencies, especially the Prosecutor's office and Sheriff department's detention facility operations, the Court has been able to continue its operations. With Courts across the state "opening up" and facing extreme caseload backlogs, I am happy to report that your Court is current with its civil as well as criminal dockets. Please review the posted photos to visualize the physical changes.

Safety of criminal defendants has also been of heightened concern for the Court. Both pre-trial and post-conviction detentions have been altered using GPS monitoring and in house arrest, scam monitors, interlock devices, and other programs and reporting requirements. Ensuring their safety, while still imposing sentences and protecting the public, is being continually addressed.

While assuring the public that personal protections are in place, also of extreme importance, is assuring prospective jurors who are being called upon to perform their civic duty in these difficult and stressful times. Also posted herein is a letter being sent to all prospected jurors, outlining the Courts safeguarding efforts to help alleviate as much as possible, their anxiety and concerns. Please take the time to review the letter, as well as one of the Court's recent Administrative Orders specifying the modified courtroom protocols.

Even with all of the measures taken, sadly, the Court cannot 100% guarantee everyone's safety, and I apologize in this regard. Please rest assured, however, that the time and effort expended by the Court to protect and safeguard everyone who comes into contact with the Court, will continue, and increase as necessary, while at the same time maintaining Court operations during our current COVID-19 pandemic and crisis.

Our lives are in a state of flux and certainly everything we encounter and attempt to address will impact many families and their lives. It is truly unknown as to when we can expect matters to return to "normal". Everything that I've shared may not be totally comforting, but unfortunately, is the reality in which we all must currently function and no one knows what lies ahead. As the Ottawa County community, however, you may rest assured of the Court's continued commitment to all of the families, citizens and visitors we encounter.

/s/ Louis P. Wargo III —

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1860 East Perry Street, Port Clinton, OH 43452
Phone 419-734-4143
Fax 419-732-2862