

November 4, 2021

To Whom It May Concern:

I'm writing in support of the proposal to establish a countywide municipal court in Fulton County to be served by a full-time judge and to replace the two existing county courts. I provided all the information which I believe the Court needs to render a recommendation.

I must admit to some confusion as I have received what appears to be a recommendation already. I was just informed the Fulton County Commissioners have already contacted their State Legislators to begin the process of establishing this Court. The Commissioners have already been contacted by Legislative Counsel regarding certain issues. Regardless, as previously instructed, I am providing the information previously requested.

If I can be of any further service or should the Court have any further questions or comments, please feel free to contact me.

1. Incoming caseload statistics, including factors contributing to their historical and projected trends:

	Western District Court	Eastern District Court
	<b><u>2016</u></b>	
Traffic –	3813	3479
Criminal –	518	305
Civil –	573	485

**2017**

Traffic –	4349	5170
Criminal –	553	416
Civil –	569	636

**2018**

Traffic –	4510	5046
Criminal –	542	481
Civil –	788	680

**2019**

Traffic –	3750	5419
Criminal –	533	416
Civil –	846	716

**2020 \***

Traffic –	2309	2282
Criminal –	362	360
Civil –	731	452

\* The cases for 2020 are reduced from the previous years' experience. Both judges agree that COVID reduced the number of people driving and also restricted the number of filings of eviction cases and other collection matters.

2. Case management performance statistics focusing on the courts performance in achieving case processing time standards:
  - a. Both judges of indicated they have received no notices from the Supreme Court indicating violations of time standards established by that body.

3. The current and projected population served by the Court along with economic factors and other conditions impacting population growth;
  - a. From 2015 through 2020 industrial and construction businesses in Fulton County, Ohio has made significant investments projecting opportunities for growth in their industry and market segments. The Fulton County Economic Development Corporation, over the previous five years, has supported the efforts of 27 businesses in the industrial, construction and transportation/logistics industries to invest in new construction, machinery and equipment and technology. These investments have led to more than 1,000 new employment opportunities within these businesses and companies have committed more than \$1.2 billion in new investment in order to carry forward their projects.
  - b. Many businesses within the retail and services industries have expanded and increased labor to meet the demand of the manufacturing and construction sectors. Thanks to enhanced crop prices recently, the Agricultural industry is also providing opportunities for retail and service businesses to grow in our communities.
  - c. The United States Census calculated that the population of Fulton County was 42,698 in 2010. The U.S. Census estimates that the population in 2019 of Fulton County was 42,126, a 1.3% decrease over the nine-year span. We believe that the 2020 census data will show that Fulton County has actually increased in population over the ten-year term by a small percentage. Likely, the municipalities of Wauseon, Archbold and Delta are experiences growth, while rural areas and smaller communities may be experiencing a decrease in population.
  - d. Business development will likely lead to future growth. During the late 1990's and early 2000's Fulton County experienced a 3% population growth thanks to the attraction of North Star BlueScope Steel, Worthington Industries and other manufacturing businesses.
  - e. Median Household Income in Fulton County (\$63,092) continues to outpace Ohio (\$56,602) and the United States (\$62,843) according to U.S. Census Data.
  - f. 66% of Fulton County citizens over the age of 16 are in the Civilian Labor Force compared to 63.2% of Ohio citizens and 63% of U.S. citizens. Demographics information suggests that the labor force participation rate in Fulton County will decrease at a faster pace than Ohio and the United States due to a larger percentage of the population in Fulton County entering retirement age sooner than the aforementioned comparable

demographics. The COVID pandemic may change this projection, however, because younger people in other areas outside of Fulton County may leave the workforce completely at the end of the pandemic for a variety of reasons at greater rates than younger people in Fulton County.

- g. Business growth, residential growth and likely population growth in the past decade in Fulton County has centered around the geographic areas in the middle of the county (the City of Wauseon and Village of Delta). We expect that this growth will continue and that both of these communities will continue to experience growth over the next decade.
- 4. Territorial jurisdiction and geographic features impacting the ability of the public to access the court and its services.
    - a. The proposed County Municipal Court would encompass the boundaries of Fulton County. There are no geographic features impacting the ability to public to access the court or its services. Wauseon is the county seat and currently houses the Western District Court of Fulton County. The current location for the Western District Court of Fulton County is adjacent to the Fulton County sheriff's office (it's actually in the same building). The facility is also located adjacent to both the Common Pleas Courts in the area referred to as the Courthouse square.
  - 5. Current judicial officer staffing levels including the Court's use of Magistrates, acting Judges, and assigned Judges;
    - a. Both Eastern and Western District Courts are served by separate elected part-time judges. Neither court utilizes magistrates. Acting judges are employed occasionally when one of the judges is unavailable. Typically, one of the elected judges will sit by assignment for the other if a conflict exists. Assigned judges have only been used on rare occasions – typically not more than 3 times per year.
    - b. Eastern district court employees 3 full-time clerks and a part-time probation officer and a part-time bailiff. Western District Court employees five full-time clerks and a part-time probation officer. In Western District, one of the clerks who is a retired State Highway patrolman also doubles as the courts bailiff.
  - 6. Unusual or changing demand for services that the proposal is intended to address;
    - a. Eastern district court is located in Swanton Ohio approximately 12 miles

from the city of Wauseon. The County utilizes a regional correction facility to house its prisoners. Frequently, the County sheriff is called upon to transport prisoners. The centralization of the court would alleviate the transportation as the CCNO bus delivers and accepts prisoners at the sheriff's office.

- b. Additionally, the Ohio Turnpike runs through the County. Those individuals living outside of the Fulton County area are frequently confused about which court they are to attend (even though it's written on the citation).
  - c. Some confusion also exists with respect as to where civil actions are to be filed. It is sometimes difficult to determine in which jurisdiction a civil defendant may reside – especially if they have a rural address. A Municipal Court would simplify that process.
  - d. The number of attorneys who live within the County and who are also well-qualified to serve as judge is diminishing with time. Many of the attorneys who practice on a regular basis before the county courts reside outside of the county. Many of the attorneys who have offices within Fulton County reside outside of the county. Many of the local firms are finding it difficult to recruit highly qualified personnel because this is a rural community.
7. The support and interest of the Court's local justice partners;
- a. The County commissioners who pay the salaries of both the Eastern and Western District Court judges and staff and will be responsible for payment of a full-time County Municipal Court judge are fully supportive of the efforts to create a countywide Municipal Court. The Fulton County sheriff's office is also fully supportive. The Common Pleas judge who is working in conjunction with the commissioners is fully supportive of this effort. The local bar association has also endorsed this proposal.
8. The impact of the proposed change on the budgets of all applicable funding authorities;
- a. The establishment of a countywide Municipal Court and a full-time judge to operate that court would result in the savings of significant sums of money to the County. Both of the part-time county court judges are currently earning \$80,000 per year plus benefits at a total cost of approximately \$105,000.00 x 2 judges or \$210,000.00. A full-time County Municipal Court judge would have a salary of approximately \$140,000 plus benefits at a cost of approximately \$175,000.00. Obviously, these savings are shared by both the state and the County. Additionally, the current thoughts are to employ all of the current staff members from Eastern and Western District Courts. It is believed that certain economies of scale exist and that those numbers through attrition can be reduced. It is projected the court could operate with 6 full-time clerks thus saving the County

approximately \$100,000.00 per year in salary and benefits.

- b. Although it is thought that the current facility which houses the Western District Court would require some expansion, there is currently over \$850,000 and the special projects and computer funds from both courts which could be utilized to complete that expansion.
- c. Further, the probation Departments from both courts could be united to provide for more efficient use of the probation officer's time and cooperation between the part-time probation officers and fulfilling their duties.

Respectfully submitted,

Jeffrey L. Robinson, Judge