



COLUMBIANA COUNTY

Board of County Commissioners

Mike Halleck, President
Roy Paparodis
Tim Weigle

Testimony House Bill 613

Proponent
May 30, 2022

Chairman Hillyer, Vice-Chair Grendel, Ranking Member Galonski, and members of the House Civil Justice Committee. Thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony as a proponent to House Bill 613 to abolish the East Municipal Court in Columbiana County.

I am Tim Weigle Columbiana County Commissioner serving in my tenth year, and prior to that I served 23 years as Unity Township Trustee in the county.

I'm here today representing my Board in supporting the amendment to HB-613 to abolish the East Liverpool Municipal Court system. Our Board of Commissioners understands that change can be difficult and we are sensitive to the possible loss of a few jobs with the abolishment of the East Liverpool Municipal Court. However, we as leaders in the county know there are many employment opportunities within our communities and even in our county system.

Being a lifelong resident of Columbiana County I have memory of the Northwest, Southwest, and Eastern area municipal courts systems in addition to the East Liverpool court. As I remember, the Commissioners in the early 2000's had visions of consolidating all four of these courts into one court with the construction of a new Municipal Court centered in the county seat of Lisbon. In 2005 the consolidation of the NW, SW,

and Eastern area courts became the Columbiana County Municipal Court with now two full time Judges and the East Liverpool continue to operate as it was. This consolidation then through today has proven to work very successfully.

During my time as a Township Trustee I clearly remember East Liverpool as a busy city with steel mills close by and Homer Laughlin China supporting many jobs. The population back then was around 17,000 as they were clearly the largest city and enjoyed annually over a million dollars in Local Government Funding almost equal the county funding share. Over the years as the mills closed down and much of the pottery production moved out of the country, East Liverpool's population started a steady decline. The 2009 housing bubble burst had a devastating effect on the city and many homes fell into disrepair. Today our county land bank organization has demolished about 200 homes in the city and will likely take over several more properties this year.

The population in East Liverpool today is just under 10,000. This decline has put a real financial hardship on the city government in trying to provide service constituents expect. Mayor Bricker is doing everything he can in getting the city turned around and stops further loss in population and services. The East Liverpool Municipal Court cost the city about \$300,000.00 annually and with the abolishment of the court the city could realize well over a \$100,000.00 in savings annually.

Columbiana County will also realize a savings in transporting inmates to hearings by Sheriff's deputies, the Prosecutor's scheduling of staff, and cancellation of robust IT service connections to the Clerk of Courts. The Board of Commissioners understands some additional money may be required during the consolidation as we having the funding authority for the County Municipal Court.

The case load in the East Liverpool Court has decreased 60% over the years based on data from the Ohio Supreme Court's online Interactive Data Dashboard and it is expected to continue to decline.

Commissioners have spoken with both current Municipal Court Judges and have been assured the increase caseload from East Liverpool can be absorbed in the system. As you have heard in earlier testimony even with the increase in cases the County Municipal Court workload will be at the 36th percentile with the combined Civil, Criminal, and traffic cases. County Court Judge McNicol currently has a Specialized Drug Court and will be able to preserve East Liverpool's participants in the program. We as elected officials are often faced with tough decisions that aren't received well. This is one of those times; however we have to be good stewards of tax payer monies. We also have to consider grants that are taxpayer dollars that East Liverpool Court receives will discontinue. HB-613 amendment is the right thing to do at this time. Judge Frank's legacy will be remembered as the last to serve the East Liverpool Municipal Court. He will be remembered as a Law Enforcement officer, a long time esteemed Attorney, and Judge.

I along with my fellow Commissioners again convey to the committee our fullest support to House Bill 613. Thank You Chairman Hillyer for the privilege of your and the committee's time to present my testimony. I would be happy to answer questions from the committee.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Tom Weigle".

Columbiana County Commissioner