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Aviation and Aerospace
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Sarah Fowler Arthur
State Representative

Chairman Hillyer, Vice-Chair Matthews, Ranking Member Isaacsohn, and Members of the House Civil Justice Committee,

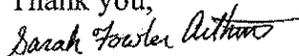
Thank you for the opportunity to testify on HB 413 this afternoon.

HB 413 is straight-forward: it would replace two part-time judgeships in the Ashtabula County County Court with one full-time judge and would include the village of North Kingsville and the townships of Kingsville, Monroe, and Sheffield within the territorial jurisdiction of the Conneaut Municipal Court¹. (Please see the attached Wikipedia map for reference.) This is in line with the Ohio Supreme Court's recommendations to move part-time judgeships to full-time judgeships in accordance with caseload studies and cost saving opportunities.

This change is in response to a court system review conducted by the Ohio Supreme Court in July of last year and their summary is attached². The desire to consolidate was brought to my attention by the Ashtabula County Commissioners and our current Judges, who have been in discussion for nearly two years about the caseload trends and respective judicial needs of Ashtabula County. ***It is estimated by the County Commissioners that this transition will save the county at least \$267k annually.*** There have been several open forums for the general public with no opposition to the consolidation. The letter of support, requesting this legislation, from the Ashtabula County Commissioners is attached as well³.

Finally, the bill clarifies the transition plan with the existing terms of the judges and upcoming elections as we move from two part-time county judges to one full-time county judge. Please pass this common-sense, tax-dollar saving legislation expeditiously!

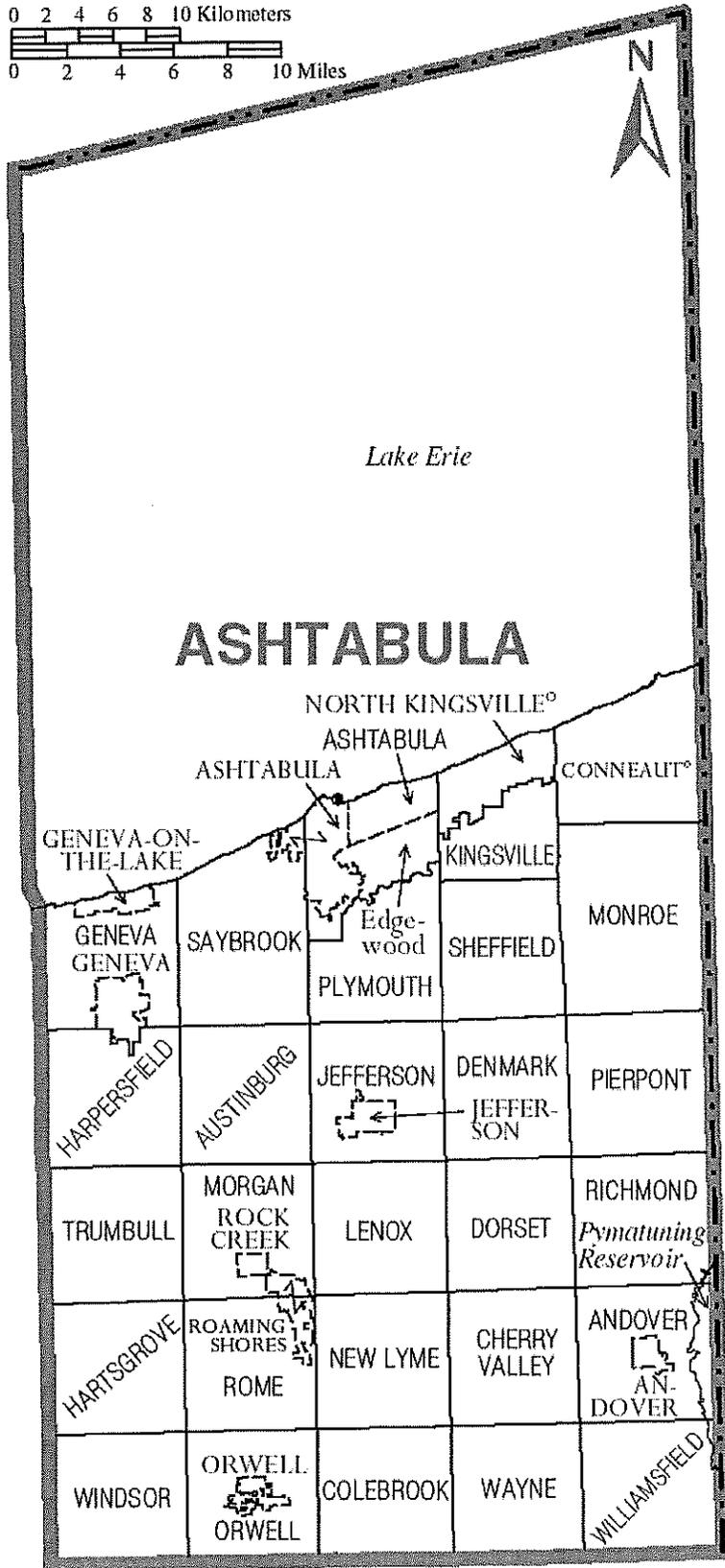
Thank you,



State Representative Sarah Fowler Arthur
District 99

- 1 – Wikipedia Map of Ashtabula County Townships and Villages for reference
- 2 – Ohio Supreme Court Analysis, 07-24-2023
- 3 – Ashtabula County Commissioners Letter of Support, 2-9-2024

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 0 2 4 6 8 10 Miles



The Supreme Court of Ohio

OFFICE OF THE ADMINISTRATIVE DIRECTOR
65 SOUTH FRONT STREET, COLUMBUS, OH 43215-3451

JUSTICE
RON L. KENNEDY

ADMINISTRATIVE DIRECTOR
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July 24, 2023

Commissioner Casey R. Kozlowski, President
Ashtabula County Board of Commissioners
25 W. Jefferson Street
Jefferson, OH 44047-1092

Re: Request for a Study of the Caseloads and Judgeships in Ashtabula County

Dear Commissioner Kozlowski:

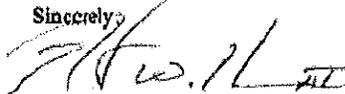
I write in response to your letter to the Supreme Court of Ohio dated January 19, 2023, in which the Ashtabula County Board of Commissioners requested the Supreme Court to undertake a study of the caseloads and judgeships in the Ashtabula County Court and Conneaut Municipal Court. I know that you have been corresponding with Stephanie Hess (who was serving as our Interim Administrative Director) and I would like to introduce myself as the new Administrative Director, effective July 10. Stephanie is still part of my leadership team and she and I have discussed the response to your inquiry.

We appreciate the preliminary work that the Board of Commissioners has undertaken concerning reorganization ideas and for providing us with copies of the letters in support of the study from Judge Harold Specht and Judge Casey O'Brien of the Ashtabula County Court, and Judge Nicholas Iarocci from Conneaut Municipal Court. In addition, Colleen O'Toole, Ashtabula County Prosecuting Attorney, sent a letter to Supreme Court staff expressing her support and the support of April Daniels, Ashtabula County Clerk of Courts, for the study.

In the enclosed report, we compare the incoming caseloads in the limited jurisdiction trial courts in Ashtabula County and compare those caseloads with statewide metrics in order to provide a foundation for understanding the county's judicial resource needs.

We look forward to your feedback and stand ready to assist the Ashtabula County Board of Commissioners, Ashtabula County's judiciary, and their justice partners with any further reorganizational planning discussions.

Sincerely,



Robert W. Horner, III
Administrative Director

cc: Judge Laura DiGiacomo
Judge Nicholas Iarocci
Judge Harold Specht, Jr.
Judge Casey O'Brien

Enclosure



**THE SUPREME COURT of OHIO
COURT SERVICES**

**Analysis of Proposed Reorganization of the
Limited Jurisdiction Trial Courts in Ashtabula County**

This report has been prepared in response to a request from the Board of Commissioners of Ashtabula County for the Supreme Court of Ohio’s assistance in evaluating organizational alternatives in the county’s limited jurisdiction trial courts.

In the board’s letter to the Supreme Court dated January 19, 2023, the members requested a study of the caseloads and judgeship needs in the Ashtabula County Court and also raised the idea of altering the territorial jurisdiction of Conneaut Municipal Court. In support of its request, the board provided copies of letters from Judge Harold Specht and Judge Casey O’Brien of the Ashtabula County Court in which both indicated their general support of the study. In addition, the board provided a copy of a letter from Judge Nicholas Iarocci of Conneaut Municipal Court in which he proposes the reorganization study include the possible expansion of his court’s territorial jurisdiction. Colleen O’Toole, Ashtabula County Prosecuting Attorney, sent a letter to Supreme Court staff expressing her support of the board’s request for the study.

Courts and Judgeships

Statutes currently provide for three limited jurisdiction trial courts in Ashtabula County with a total of four judgeships. See Table 1. The two judges in the Ashtabula County Court have opted under R.C. 1907.15 to create areas of separate jurisdiction. Judge Specht sits in the court’s Eastern District and Judge O’Brien sits in the court’s Western District. None of the limited jurisdiction trial court judges in Ashtabula County are precluded under the Ohio Constitution’s age limit for judges from running for an additional term.

Table 1. Limited Jurisdiction Courts and Judgeships

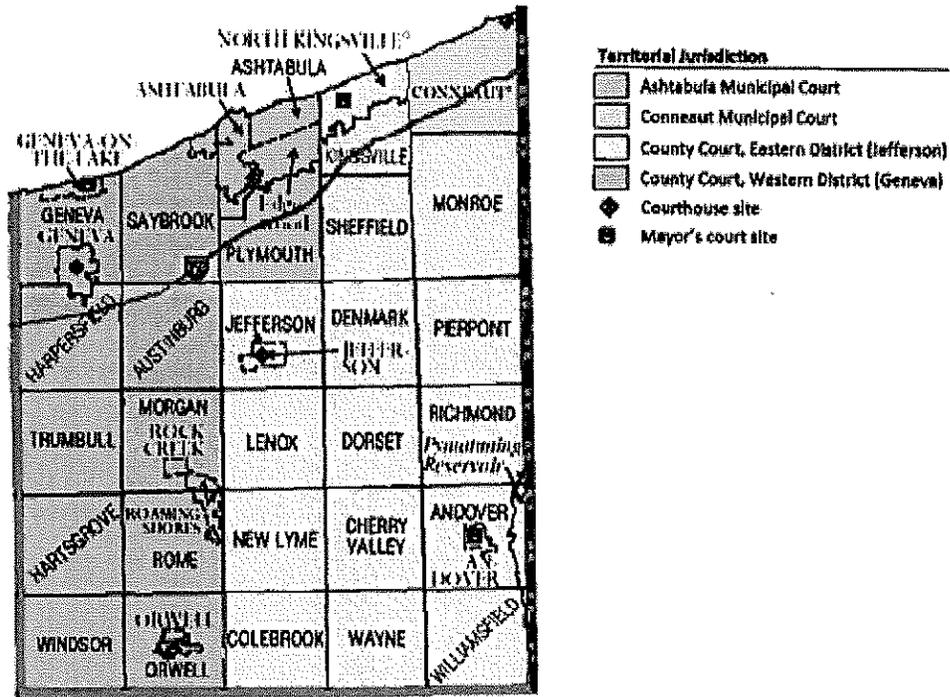
Court	Judge	Service Start	Term End	Age at Next
				Term Start
Ashtabula County Court, Eastern District	Specht, Harold E.	01/01/19	12/31/24	66
Ashtabula County Court, Western District	O’Brien, Casey	01/01/23	12/31/28	53
Ashtabula Municipal Court	DiGiacomo, Laura	02/27/15	12/31/25	58
Conneaut Municipal Court	Iarocci, Nicholas	01/01/20	12/31/25	62

Territorial Jurisdiction

Shown below in Figure 1 is a map showing the territorial boundaries of the limited jurisdiction trial courts in Ashtabula County. As noted above, the district of the Ashtabula County Court has been divided into two areas of separate jurisdiction, with the Eastern District hearing cases arising out of an area covering roughly the eastern three-fifths of the county not otherwise under the jurisdiction of Ashtabula County Municipal Court or Conneaut Municipal Court. Its courthouse is located in the centrally located village of Jefferson. The Western District area court,

hearing cases arising out of the western two-fifths of the county, has its courthouse located in the city of Geneva.

Figure 1. Limited Jurisdiction Trial Court Territorial Jurisdiction



Population Served

According to the 2020 U.S. Census, Ashtabula County's total population was 97,574 people, a decline of 3.9% from the 2010 U.S. Census, and a 5.0% decline from the 2000 U.S. Census. The total population figures along with the court-level breakdowns are shown below in Table 2.

Table 2. Population Served

Court	2000	2010	2020 over		2000
			2020	2010	
Ashtabula County Court	54,872	55,881	54,032	-3.3%	-1.5%
Ashtabula Municipal Court	35,371	32,775	31,224	-4.7%	-11.7%
Conneaut Municipal Court	12,485	12,841	12,318	-4.1%	-1.3%
Total	102,728	101,497	97,574	-3.9%	-5.0%

Incoming Caseloads

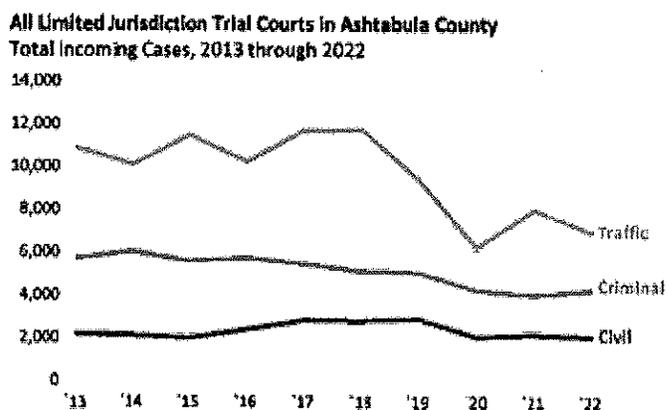
Table 3, below, shows the number of incoming cases (new filings plus reactivations and transfers in) across the three major case type categories in each of the limited jurisdiction courts in Ashtabula County. Included in the table are the averages between 2013 and 2019, and the percentage difference between 2022 over the 2013 to 2019 averages. Due to anomalies in incoming caseloads in 2020 and 2021, those years have been excluded from the long term averages.

With the exception of Ashtabula County Court's civil caseload in the Eastern District area court, incoming caseloads across the board for all of the courts in Ashtabula County have experienced considerable declines. See Figure 2 for a chart showing countywide trends.

Table 3. Incoming Caseloads, 2013 through 2022

Court	Case Type	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	AVG	
												2013 to 2019	'13 to '19 AVG
Ashtabula CC, E	Civil	413	454	384	387	534	525	607	437	451	481	472	+1.9%
	Criminal	746	860	783	858	755	748	662	579	533	634	773	-18.0%
	Traffic	2,561	1,889	2,183	1,953	2,341	2,556	2,061	1,363	1,728	1,236	2,221	-44.3%
	All Case Types	3,720	3,203	3,350	3,198	3,630	3,829	3,330	2,379	2,712	2,351	3,466	-32.2%
Ashtabula CC, W	Civil	547	809	514	582	681	670	709	554	614	517	602	-14.1%
	Criminal	1,281	1,231	1,150	1,278	1,209	1,178	1,001	607	538	745	1,150	-37.4%
	Traffic	2,123	2,510	2,856	2,300	2,682	3,014	2,118	1,381	1,436	1,280	2,515	-49.1%
	All Case Types	3,951	4,250	4,520	4,160	4,572	4,862	3,828	2,542	2,588	2,542	4,306	-41.0%
Ashtabula CC (Countywide)	Civil	960	963	898	969	1,215	1,195	1,316	991	1,065	998	1,074	-7.1%
	Criminal	2,027	2,091	1,933	2,136	1,964	1,926	1,663	1,186	1,071	1,379	1,963	-29.7%
	Traffic	4,694	4,399	5,039	4,253	5,023	5,570	4,179	2,744	3,164	2,516	4,735	-46.9%
	All Case Types	7,671	7,453	7,870	7,358	8,202	8,693	7,158	4,921	5,300	4,893	7,772	-37.0%
Ashtabula MC	Civil	966	840	849	1,052	1,242	1,220	1,182	888	887	866	1,050	-17.5%
	Criminal	2,714	2,857	2,811	2,897	2,821	2,640	2,774	2,393	2,423	2,254	2,788	-19.1%
	Traffic	4,090	3,838	4,625	4,320	4,905	4,472	3,956	2,700	3,989	3,553	4,315	-17.7%
	All Case Types	7,770	7,535	8,285	8,269	8,968	8,332	7,912	5,981	7,299	6,673	8,153	-18.2%
Conneaut MC	Civil	254	309	274	342	315	339	337	192	229	213	310	-31.3%
	Criminal	959	1,049	839	674	654	552	605	640	538	617	762	-19.0%
	Traffic	2,083	1,834	1,782	1,628	1,732	1,669	1,224	757	818	862	1,707	-49.5%
	All Case Types	3,296	3,192	2,895	2,644	2,701	2,560	2,166	1,589	1,585	1,692	2,779	-39.1%
Countywide	Civil	2,180	2,112	2,021	2,363	2,772	2,754	2,835	2,071	2,181	2,077	2,434	-14.7%
	Criminal	5,700	5,997	5,583	5,707	5,439	5,118	5,042	4,219	4,032	4,250	5,512	-22.9%
	Traffic	10,857	10,071	11,446	10,201	11,660	11,711	9,359	6,201	7,971	6,931	10,758	-35.6%
	All Case Types	18,737	18,180	19,050	18,271	19,871	19,583	17,236	12,491	14,184	13,258	18,704	-29.1%

Figure 2. Incoming Caseloads, 2013 through 2022



Caseload Comparisons

When assessing the size of a municipal or county court’s caseload in order to determine its likely judgeship needs, we typically compare the court’s per judge caseload to the per judge caseloads across all municipal courts statewide that have full-time judgeships. Table 4, below, shows the range of incoming cases (new filings plus reactivations and transfers) in 2022 under the three major case type categories heard in municipal and county courts.

Table 4. Incoming Cases Per Judge in 2022 in All Municipal Courts Statewide with Full-Time Judgeships

	Civil	Criminal	Traffic	All Cases
Maximum	3,967	6,351	10,148	14,804
75th Percentile	1,592	2,042	5,906	9,246
Median	1,101	1,482	4,406	7,030
25th Percentile	768	1,019	3,064	5,046
Minimum	181	241	430	1,400

In 2022, among all municipal courts with full-time judgeships, the median number of incoming cases per judge was 7,030 cases (1,101 civil; 1,482 criminal; and 4,406 traffic). Against these per judge ranges, we can compare the volume of incoming cases per judge of the limited jurisdiction trial courts in Ashtabula County.

Shown in Table 5, below, are the number of incoming cases per judge in 2022 in each of the courts in Ashtabula County and how they compare—on a percentile basis—with the statewide ranges shown above in Table 4. On a per judge basis, Conneaut Municipal Court and Ashtabula County Court have low volumes on incoming cases. Both courts are ranked well within the bottom quartile of the baseline municipal court caseloads seen across the state.

Table 5. Comparison of Incoming Cases Per Judge in 2022 between Ashtabula County's Limited Jurisdiction Courts and all Municipal Courts Statewide with Full-Time Judgeships

Court	Civil		Criminal		Traffic		All Cases	
	Cases	Percentile	Cases	Percentile	Cases	Percentile	Cases	Percentile
Ashtabula MC (one judge)	866	32nd	2,254	79th	3,553	34th	6,673	42nd
Conneaut MC (one judge)	213	2nd	617	8th	862	1st	1,692	1st
Ashtabula CC (two judges)	499	11th	690	11th	1,258	4th	2,447	4th

Possible Expansion of Conneaut Municipal Court's Territorial Jurisdiction

Judge Iarocci of Conneaut Municipal Court has expressed his support, and the support of the Conneaut City Council, for the possible expansion of his court's territory. In particular, he suggests consideration of expanding the court's territory to include the village of North Kingsville along with the townships of Kingsville, Monroe, and Sheffield. If Conneaut Municipal Court's territory were expanded in this manner, the courts in Ashtabula County would instead serve the populations shown in Table 6, below.

Table 6. Comparison of Incoming Cases Per Judge in 2022

Court	2020	2020	Change from
	Current	Alternative	Current
Ashtabula County Court	54,032	46,004	-14.9%
Ashtabula Municipal Court	31,224	31,224	0.0%
Conneaut Municipal Court	12,318	20,346	+65.2%
Total	97,574	97,574	0.0%

Adding the populations of the village of North Kingsville and the townships of Kingsville, Monroe, and Sheffield to Conneaut Municipal Court's territory and subtracting those populations from territory of the Ashtabula County Court produces a 65.2% increase in Conneaut Municipal Court's territory and a 14.9% reduction in Ashtabula County Court's territory.

We are unable to ascertain the proportions of a municipal or county court's total caseload that originate out of the individual municipalities and townships in its territory. Unfortunately, the caseload statistics the Supreme Court collects from courts under Sup.R. 37 are not broken down in that manner. However, we do know the populations of each municipality and township that are within a municipal or county court's territory. If we assume population size and caseload size are generally comparable, we can use the populations of those various municipalities and townships as proxies for caseload.

If Conneaut Municipal Court's incoming caseload in 2022 had been enlarged by 65.2% (the increase in population served), it would still be ranked relatively very low compared to statewide baselines. The court would be near the low end of the range in civil, traffic, and total caseload. The court's incoming criminal caseload would be raised a non-trivial amount, placing it at the 25th percentile. See Table 7, below.

**Table 7. Projected Incoming Cases Per Judge in 2022 with Altered Territories
and a Judgeship Reduction in Ashtabula County Court**

Court	Civil		Criminal		Traffic		All Cases	
	Cases	Percentile	Cases	Percentile	Cases	Percentile	Cases	Percentile
Conneaut MC (one judge; expanded territory)	352	6th	1,019	25th	1,424	5th	2,795	5th
Ashtabula CC (one judge; reduced territory)	850	31st	1,174	35th	2,142	12th	4,166	13th
Ashtabula CC (one judge; no change in territory)	998	43rd	1,379	45th	2,516	18th	4,893	23rd

Table 7 also shows the impact of the territorial changes upon Ashtabula County Court—if the court were also to be comprised of a single judgeship. If Ashtabula County Court had a 14.9% reduction in its population served *and* consisted of a single judgeship, it would be projected to have civil and criminal caseloads in the second quartile compared to statewide ranges and have traffic and total caseloads in the bottom quartile.

Conclusion

Based on the foregoing analyses, the current caseload in Ashtabula County Court—with or without a reduction in its territorial jurisdiction—should not present any challenges for a single full-time judge to manage effectively. From a judicial resource needs perspective, the proposed expansion of Conneaut Municipal Court’s territory is sensible and should also not present any challenges for a single full-time judge to manage effectively. The General Assembly and Supreme Court staff have long been supportive of a full-time judiciary and the consequent elimination of part-time judgeships.

Supreme Court staff encourages the Board of Commissioners of Ashtabula County and the entire Ashtabula County judiciary to consider examining options for a countywide reorganization of the county’s limited jurisdiction trial courts. The ongoing monitoring of incoming caseload trends will be essential to understanding Ashtabula County’s needs for sufficient judicial and court resources to ensure the public’s ability to access justice in the most reasonably cost-efficient and effective manner.

ASHTABULA COUNTY
COMMISSIONERS
Kathryn L. Whittington
J. P. Ducro IV
Casey R. Kozlowski



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Fax: (440) 576-2344
commissioners@ashtabulacounty.us

February 9, 2024

Ohio State Representative Fowler Arthur
77 South High Street
Floor 12
Columbus, OH 43215

Dear Honorable Sarah Fowler Arthur:

We are writing to you today in full support of moving forward with legislation that benefits Ashtabula County. For the past few years, the Commissioners have been involved in efforts to consider the consolidation of the Eastern and Western County Courts and modify the territorial jurisdiction of the lower courts. The Commissioners have consulted with the lower court Judges, solicited a survey from the Ohio Supreme Court and conducted a public hearing on this matter. This proposal is widely applauded locally as an effort that will modernize the court operations, make it more efficient and lead to taxpayer savings.

This legislation which you have assisted us with in drafting will consolidate the Ashtabula County Eastern and Western County Courts effective January 1, 2031 and also modify the jurisdiction of the Conneaut Municipal Court effective January 1, 2025. The Ashtabula County Commissioners because of this legislation will then take the necessary actions to determine the location of the new unified court following a public discussion on the matter.

We respectfully request that you move forward with introducing this legislation and taking the actions necessary to have this bill signed into law. We welcome the opportunity to speak on behalf of this bill during any relevant committee hearings or public forums. We are prepared to provide additional insights, data, and perspectives that may assist in the understanding and support of this proposed legislation.

We firmly believe that this bill has the potential to make a positive impact on our county. Your support in introducing this bill and providing a platform for discussion would be greatly appreciated.

Thank you for considering our request. We look forward to working together to address this important issue through legislative action.

Sincerely,

Ashtabula County Board of Commissioners

Kathryn Whittington, President

J. P. Ducro IV, Vice President

Casey Kozlowski, Commissioner