

# JUSTICE OF THE PEACE COURT



## CHIEF MAGISTRATE ALAN G. DAVIS

Preparing to write this message is a yearly chore that is usually accomplished by reviewing the good works of this Court and then giving a rundown of the highlights of which we are most proud or that have had the most impact on Court operations. While this past fiscal year had its share of achievements that the Court has reason to tout, the events of the last four months of the fiscal year saw such tremendous impact, they overshadow the rest of the year. The good news is that the Justice of the Peace Court responded as it always does – with grit, determination, and a “can do” attitude.

March 16, 2020 marked the last day of normal operations in the various locations of the Justice of the Peace Court. With the issuance of the emergency orders of both the Governor and the Chief Justice, the Court was limited to functioning only through its 24-hour locations and when presented emergency petitions at civil locations. For all practical purposes, the Justice of the Peace Court was the only public facing portion of the Delaware Judiciary for over two and a half months. While our sister courts continued to function on some level, we persisted as the only “open” facilities of the branch.



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**TOTAL JUSTICE OF THE PEACE COURT CIVIL  
CASES FILED BY COURT FY 2020**



Although the public was encouraged to contact the Court and handle matters from a distance, many matters were still handled in person. Decades of daily use of video-phone technology for interaction with the police became less of a smart use of resources and more of an essential method of keeping court staff, the police and the public socially distanced. Our staff in those open locations reported to work to staff the effort, and proved

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once and for all the meaning of the word essential. While many of them have had to labor through snow days, this quickly became the longest “storm” in the Court’s modern history.

Behind the scenes, other staff were fulfilling support roles, taking needed training and generally being available at a moment’s notice to fill needed gaps. The Court’s administrative staff convened in the early days on a daily basis, identifying new strategies for doing the work of the Court and seeking out the best methods for implementing those processes. All of these efforts were directed at the ultimate goal of reopening the Court’s many locations in a safe, orderly and efficient fashion, when given the go ahead by the Chief Justice.

In the meantime, the usual incoming work of the Court was also affected. Non-criminal police work ground essentially to a halt, with an over 85% reduction in traffic offenses written year-over-year for the last two weeks of March, though it began to steadily creep up after that. The Governor modified the emergency order to prohibit the filing of landlord-tenant actions. While the first development represented a helpful reprieve from creating an overwhelming backlog for the Court’s criminal locations, the second created a general sense of unease that the civil locations of the Court would be hit with an avalanche of filings once the limitation was lifted.

On June 4<sup>th</sup>, the judiciary reopened for limited business. The Justice of the Peace Court loca-

**Justice of the Peace Court Civil & Criminal/Traffic Filings and Dispositions by Fiscal Year\***



\*Criminal filings and disposition information is by defendant

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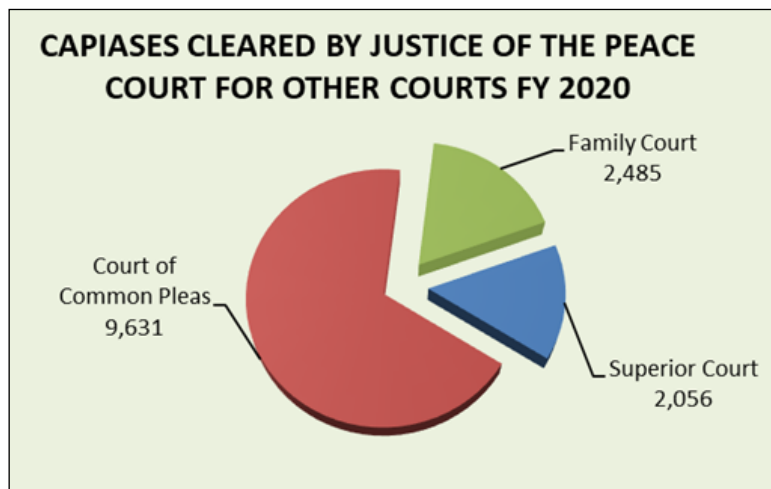
tions that had been reduced to emergency matters began to return to a new normal. The locations that had been open during the shutdown saw lifting of some restrictions. Everyone began absorbing the new ways that business was going to need to be done – virtual hearings, limited people in lobbies, the creation of “walk-in” courtrooms, for people without technology to allow for them to appear distantly. We all also started to see the limitations of this new way of doing business – lack of appropriate contact information for defendants on the criminal side and litigants on the civil severely limits the effectiveness of attempting to move to virtual proceedings.

Still, through all of those changes, our staff put every ounce of effort they could into serving the



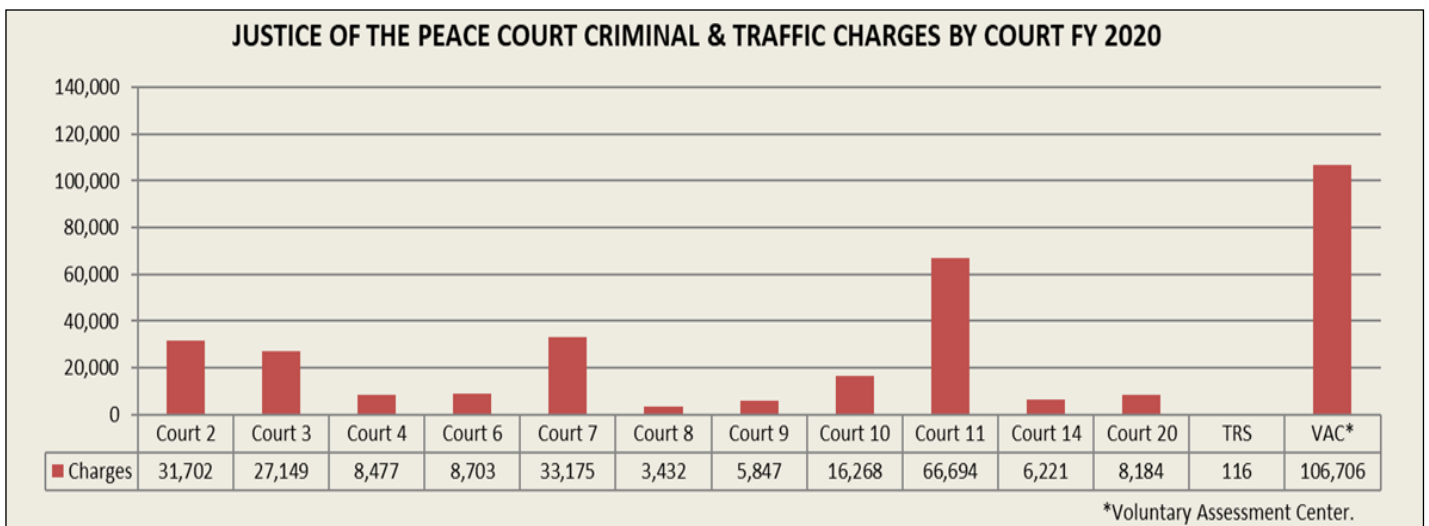
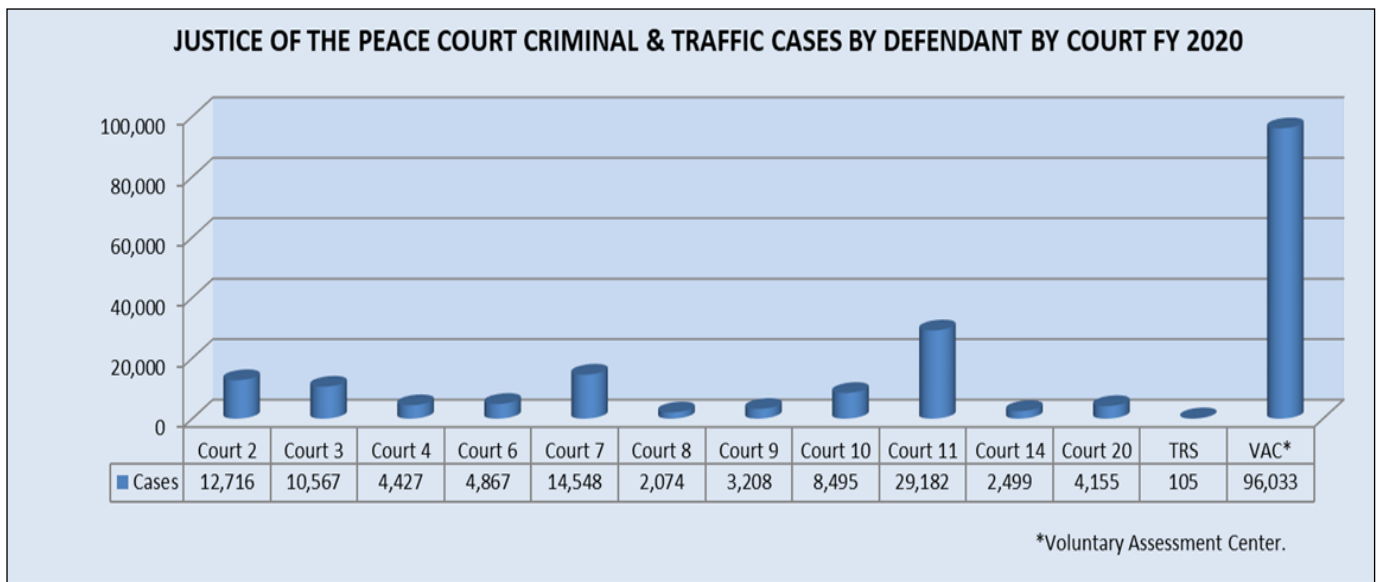
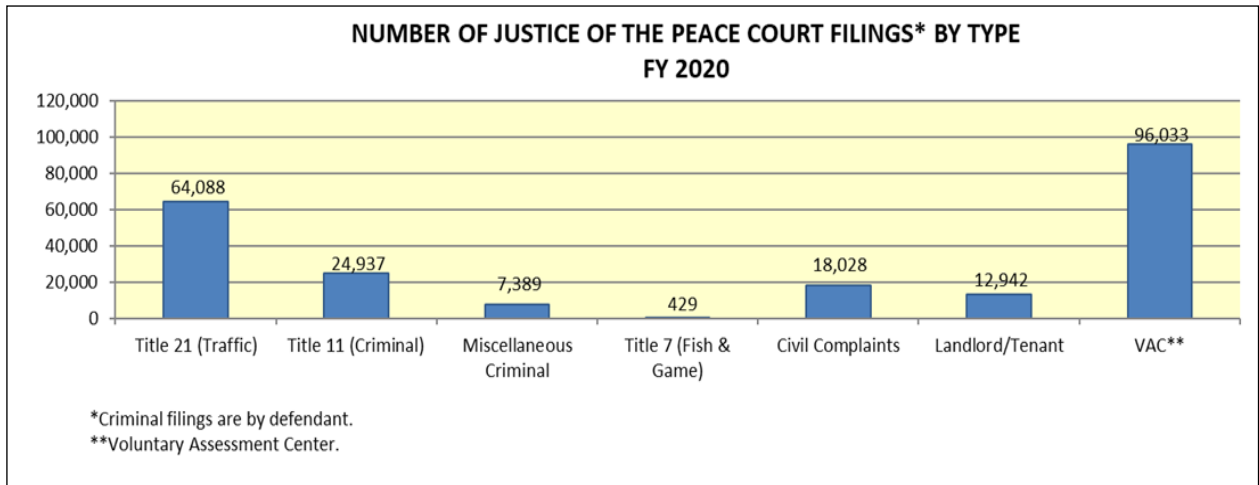
public, ensuring justice still moved forward. They did so despite not having all of the tools that we would like, having to learn new processes what felt like every single day, and still having health, childcare and oth-

er personal concerns of their own. Our staff and judges have proven they can take anything that is thrown at them. As we begin a new fiscal year, no one knows what the future holds. However, I am confident the individuals that make up the Justice of the Peace Court of the State of Delaware will be up to whatever challenge, whatever change, whatever responsibility that awaits. They will do so with the knowledge that the work they do matters, that they are essential, and that their efforts will not be overlooked. ♦



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## NEW CASTLE COUNTY JUDGES



***Top row (left to right):***

Nina Bawa; Shameka Booker; Peter Burcat; Bracy Dixon, Jr.; Shanaya Eyong; Emily Ferrell;

***Middle row (left to right):***

Beatrice Freel; James R. Hanby, Sr.; Bobby Hoof; Thomas M. Kenney; Vincent Kowal; Roberto Lopez;

***Back row (left to right):***

Shelley Losito; Cheryl McCabe-Stroman; Sean McCormick; Amanda Moyer; Mary Ellen Naugle; Walter Newton.

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## NEW CASTLE COUNTY JUDGES



***Top row (left to right):***

Marie Page; Maria Perez-Chambers; Alex Peterson, III; Christopher Portante; John Potts; Gerald Ross, III;

***Bottom row (left to right):***

Katharine B. Ross; David R. Skelley; Kerry Taylor; Susan Ufberg; Rodney Vodery.

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## KENT COUNTY JUDGES



***Top row, (left to right):***

Nicole Alston-Jackson; D. Kenneth Cox; Dwight Dillard; Wallace G. Edmanson II;

***Middle row (left to right):***

Jamie Hicks; Cathleen Hutchinson; Alexander Montano; James A. Murray;

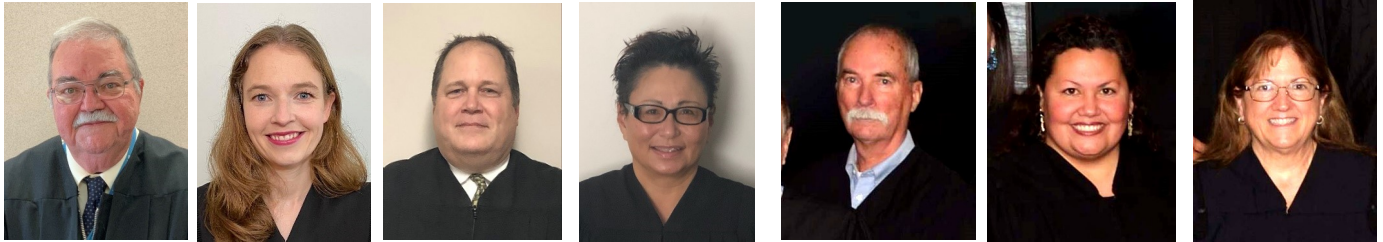
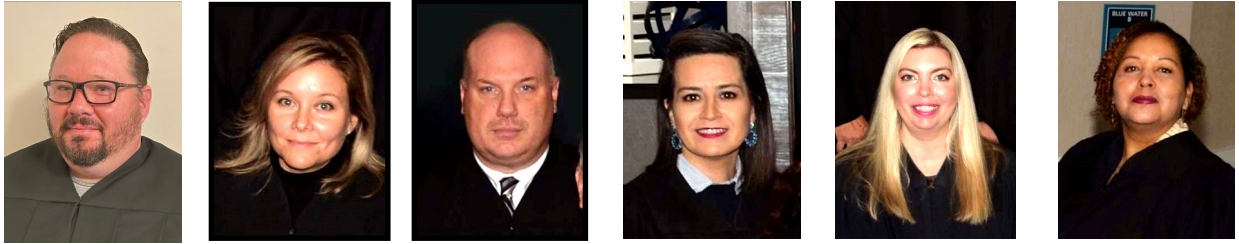
***Bottom row (left to right):***

Michael P. Sherlock; Judy Smith; Dana Tracy; Kevin Wilson.

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## SUSSEX COUNTY JUDGES



***Top row (left to right):***

John J. Adams; Stephani Adams; Christopher A. Bradley; Maria Castro; Leah Chandler; Mirta Collazo;

***Middle row (left to right):***

Richard D. Comly; Bethany Fiske; Brett Graves; Catherine Hester; John R. Hudson; Michelle Jewell; Deputy Chief Magistrate Deborah Keenan;

***Bottom row (left to right):***

John D. McKenzie; Nicholas Mirro; Jennifer Sammons; Candace Whitelock; Scott Willey; William Patrick Wood.