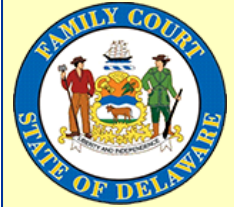


# FAMILY COURT



## CHIEF JUDGE MICHAEL K. NEWELL



# FAMILY COURT

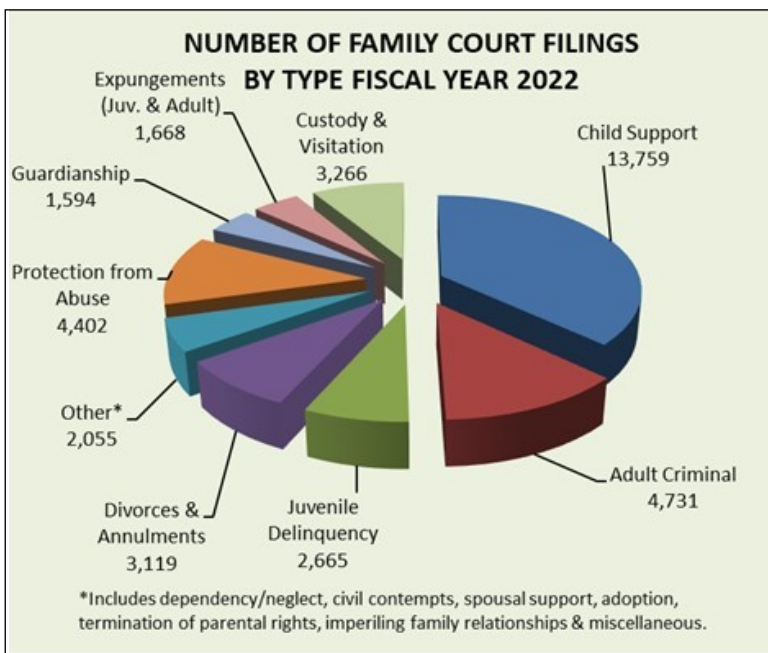
Family Court continues to be guided by its mission: to provide equal access to justice for the families and children under its jurisdiction in a manner that is fair and efficient and that maintains the public's trust and confidence in an independent and accountable judiciary. We strive each day to build an atmosphere that ensures all members of the public are treated with courtesy, dignity, and respect.

In Fiscal Year 2022, the court processed 37,259 filings, a slight decrease of 0.8% from last year, but with noticeable filing trends in several case types. The court's total civil filings decreased by 3.5%, while its adult criminal filings increased by 8.3%, and juvenile delinquency filings increased by 18.4%. Within the civil filings there was a significant shift in that child support filings, which has tradition-

ally represented the highest volume of filings for Family Court, decreased 12.6% following a decrease of 9.6% in FY 21, and 20.4% in FY 20. This trend was consistent in all three counties with child support decreasing 11.5% in New Castle County, 15.9% in Kent County, and 11.8% in Sussex County.

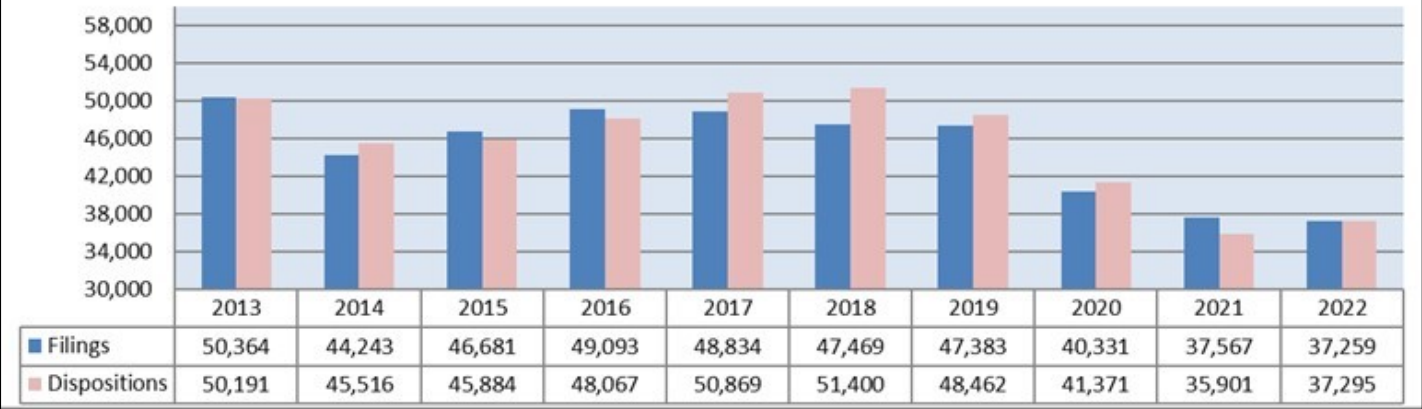
Although child support filings decreased significantly, all other civil filings, which are grouped

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# FAMILY COURT

## FAMILY COURT CIVIL & CRIMINAL FILINGS & DISPOSITIONS BY FISCAL YEAR



together as non-support civil filings, increased by 5.9% to 16,104 petitions filed in FY 22. While custody, visitation, and divorce filings saw a decrease from the previous year, dependency/neglect filings were up 39.8% statewide, termination of parental rights filings increased by 8%, and guardianship filings increased by 19.6% statewide. Protection from Abuse petitions increased 13.6%, and expungement filings increased by 29.3%.

In the criminal and delinquency area, there was an increase of 11.7%. The most noticeable increase was in juvenile misdemeanor filings with an increase of 45% from the previous fiscal year.

The court continued to utilize technology to improve the way litigants access the court. In addition to our Call Center, litigants can now access a representative via Live Chat through the website, and a Virtual Assistant is available to answer frequently asked



*Chief Judge Michael K. Newell with the ceremonial groundbreaking shovel for the Sussex County Family Court building on June 28, 2022.*

questions anytime of day or night. Additionally, legal notices are now published on the court’s webpage, which reduces the cost of newspaper publication for litigants.

Family Court has continued to receive technical assistance and training from the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges (“NCJFCJ”) as an Implementation Site in an effort to enhance our Court Improvement Project (“CIP”) work, improve outcomes for children and families, and support our ever-evolving child welfare practices. This year, the court implemented a new data management system that enables further collaboration with child welfare stakeholders. Additionally, workgroups are engaged in an effort to set statewide benchmarks for hearing timeliness and improve kinship and guardianship placements. Quality legal representation remains a focus of CIP with continued efforts to develop a multidisciplinary approach for parent representation. The court continues its efforts to expand

# FAMILY COURT

the teaming of social workers with parent attorneys and adding peer parent advocates to the multidisciplinary team.

Family Court recently changed the name of its mental health treatment court to Youth Wellness Court to better identify the goal of the program and reduce the stigma of being part of it. The court continues to work to bolster all of the treatment court programs to meet the changing needs of Delaware families. Finally, Family Court continues to lead staff workgroups on vicarious trauma both within Family Court and within the wider Judicial Branch in an effort to improve workplace culture and staff wellbeing.

Family Court also continues its work to sustain the efforts of the Family Court Enhancement Project (FCEP). The project has focused on improving practices in domestic violence, custody, and visitation matters. One recommendation from the project included holding compliance calendars for respondents ordered to domestic violence treatment (also known as Batterers Intervention Programs, or BIP). This year, through an OVW (Office of Violence Against Women) grant and a mentor court program facilitated by the Center for Court Innovation, Family Court has received technical assistance from St. Louis County's Domestic Violence Court and will pilot a compliance calendar in New Castle County. The Domestic Violence Coordinator has also partnered with the Justice of the Peace Court to serve default and ex parte emergency Protection From Abuse orders on respondents who appear in JP

Court on other matters, and coordinated domestic violence training for the Magistrates at their fall judicial conference. The court also collaborated with the AOC to facilitate a training for court staff, and the Delaware Coalition Against Domestic Violence to create a web-based module domestic violence training that will be used in the onboarding of all

new Family Court staff beginning in early 2023. The Family Court continued the tradition of celebrating its successes and providing stakeholders with updates during Domestic Violence Awareness Month at a FCEP follow up "round table" discussion followed by the Governor signing the 2022 Domestic Violence Awareness Month Proclamation.

Family Court's efforts to construct new Family Court buildings in Kent

and Sussex Counties were advanced this past year with groundbreaking ceremonies in Dover and Georgetown. The first event was held on June 28, 2022 for the Sussex County facility, followed closely by the groundbreaking for Kent County on September 22, 2022. Demolition at both locations is nearly complete and construction will begin in the upcoming fiscal year. The current buildings are undersized, undignified, and unsafe. These projects are critical to providing Family Court and the citizens of Delaware with adequate, secure, and dignified facilities.

On October 31, 2021, the Honorable Kenneth M. Millman retired after more than 35 years as a Family Court Judge in Sussex County. The Honorable The-



*Family Court Commissioner Kelly Hicks Sheridan (left) takes the Oath of Office, administered by Family Court Chief Judge Michael K. Newell (center) as her husband Joseph (right) holds the Bible on Sept. 16, 2022.*

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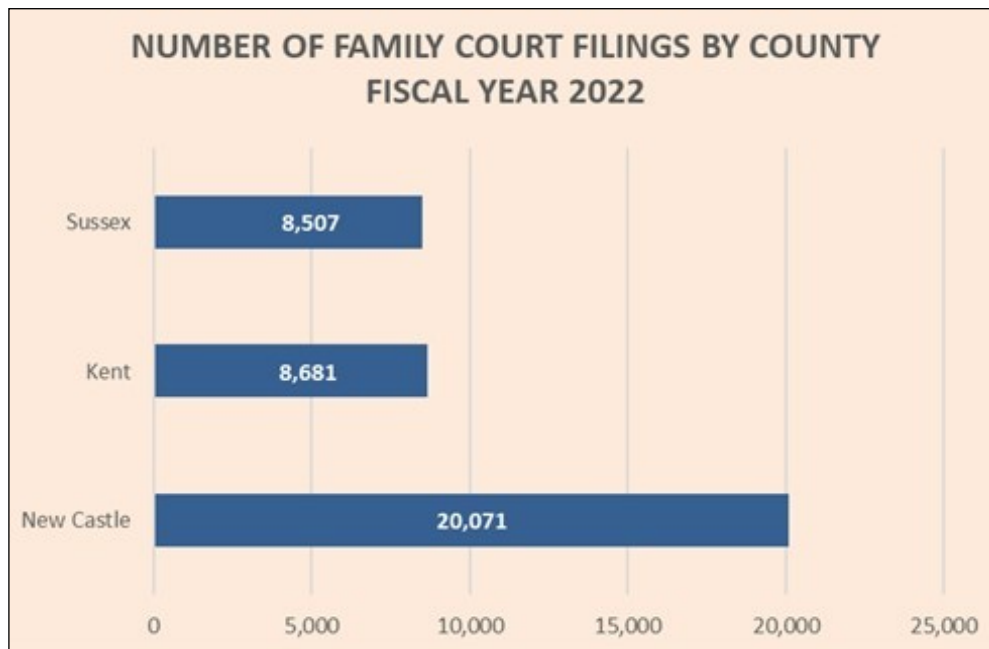
# FAMILY COURT

resa M. Hayes was sworn in to replace Judge Millman in November. In June of this year, the Honorable Kelly H. Sheridan was confirmed as a Commissioner in New Castle County. In October, the Honorable Peter B. Jones was reappointed to a third term as a Judge in Sussex County, and the Honorable Emily A. Farley was reappointed to a second term as a Commissioner in Kent County.

Family Court’s Council on Racial Equity (“C.O.R.E.”) continued its work to “eliminate systemic and institutional racism that serves as a barrier to accessing and achieving justice for litigants of color, and to promote a supportive and inclusive environment for employees that is dedicated to celebrating diversity by removing any social, cultural or other inequities that stifle professional development.” CORE prepared a report this fiscal year

that included the recommendations of its various committees, and that report will serve as a path forward in reforming our practices and improving the culture to create a more welcoming and inclusive Family Court.

The Family Court is privileged to serve all citizens of Delaware, particularly its most vulnerable citizens, its children. The court has a large caseload and hears some of the most intimate and sensitive issues that affect families, parents, and children. Our Judges, Commissioners, administration, and staff strive to ensure equal access to justice for our citizens and are dedicated to the court’s mission. We are proud of what we have accomplished in our court system during the past fiscal year and look forward to doing even more in the year ahead. ♦



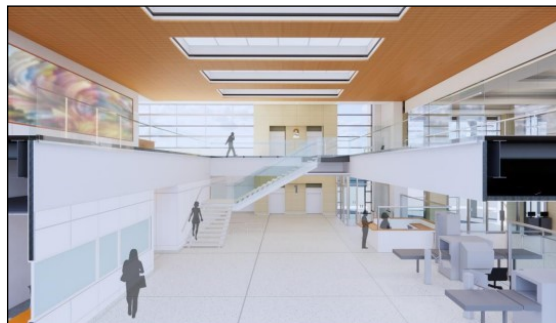
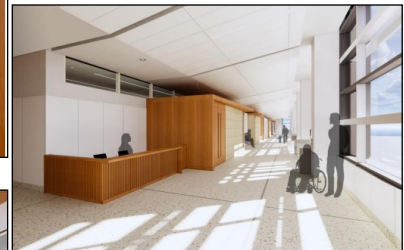
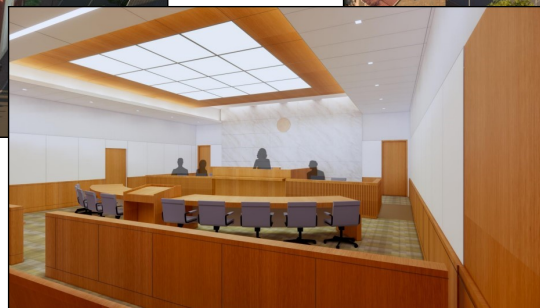
# FAMILY COURT

Architect's renderings of the new downstate Family Court facilities

All images courtesy TEVEBAUGH Architecture

## Sussex County

## Kent County



**From top to bottom:** Renderings of the Sussex County Family Court building and parking garage and an interior hallway.  
**In the middle:** Renderings of a courtroom and lobby design for both buildings.

**From top to bottom:** Renderings of the Kent County Family Court building, and parking garage and a courtroom corridor.

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# FAMILY COURT



## FAMILY COURT JUDGES

***Back Row (left to right):*** Judge Joelle P. Hitch, Judge Peter B. Jones, Judge Theresa M. Hayes, Chief Judge Michael K. Newell, Judge Mary S. Much, Judge Michael W. Arrington, Judge Janell S. Ostroski, Judge Mardi F. Pyott.

***Front Row (left to right):*** Judge Felice G. Kerr, Judge Louann Vari, Judge Natalie J. Haskins, Judge James G. McGiffin, Jr., Judge Jennifer B. Ranji, Judge Mark D. Buckworth, Judge Paula T. Ryan, Judge Arlene Minus Coppadge.

***Not Pictured:*** Judge Robert B. Coonin.

# FAMILY COURT



## FAMILY COURT COMMISSIONERS

***Back Row (left to right):*** Commissioner Gretchen C. Gilchrist, Commissioner David W. Jones, Commissioner Jennifer Mayo, Chief Judge Michael K. Newell, Commissioner Francis E. Mieczkowski, III, Commissioner M. DeSales Haley, Commissioner James Maxwell.

***Front Row (left to right):*** Commissioner Danielle S. Blount, Commissioner Loretta Young, Commissioner Andrew K. Southmayd, Commissioner Kelly Hicks Sheridan, Commissioner Craig R. Fitzgerald, Commissioner Sonja T. Wilson, Commissioner Para K. Wolcott, Commissioner Theresa A. Sedivec.

***Not Pictured:*** Commissioner Emily A. Farley, Commissioner Kim DeBonte.