

# JUSTICE OF THE PEACE COURT



## CHIEF MAGISTRATE ALAN G. DAVIS

As the Justice of the Peace Court marks the first full year without significant COVID-related restrictions, the primary effort has been to continue to adapt to the changing landscape and move forward with reducing pandemic related backlogs. We were not unique in the challenge of attracting and retaining quality employees during an unprecedented earthquake in the labor market. While turnover rates have been somewhat better than in 2021, hiring remains difficult and keeping good employees requires new approaches. The inevitable need for enhanced training takes time away from addressing some operational needs. Still the wheels of justice are turning in this court. We would like to highlight just a couple of things we have done to both support our

staff and to press forward with innovative ideas.

### Investing Time and Energy in Our Employees

Investing in justice involves much more than just dollars and cents. It is also about making the judiciary a place where our own employees believe spending time at work is a good investment. As the Justice of the Peace Court began the process of moving out of pandemic mode, staffing concerns were on the forefront of the court's agenda. Specifically, because of the very large number of new employees resulting from heavy turnover, the court focused on improving communication among all levels and areas of our court. We have done this through several avenues.

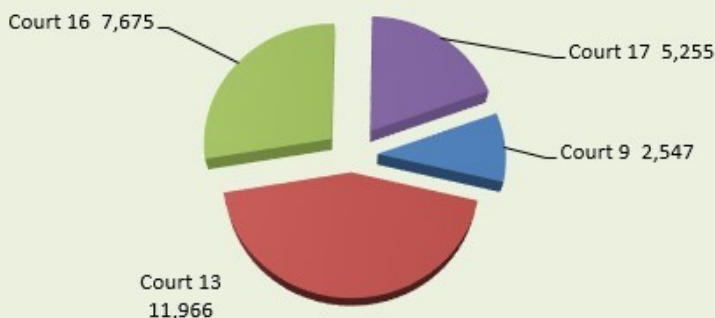
First, we continued two pandemic era communication vehicles – the JP Court Employee Spotlight in which employees are given the opportunity to be interviewed – on a voluntary basis – virtually to talk about their work. The video then is shared with the rest of the court as part of periodic virtual town hall meetings, designed to

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JUSTICE OF THE PEACE COURT

**TOTAL JUSTICE OF THE PEACE CIVIL CASES FILED  
BY COURT FISCAL YEAR 2022**



# JUSTICE OF THE PEACE COURT

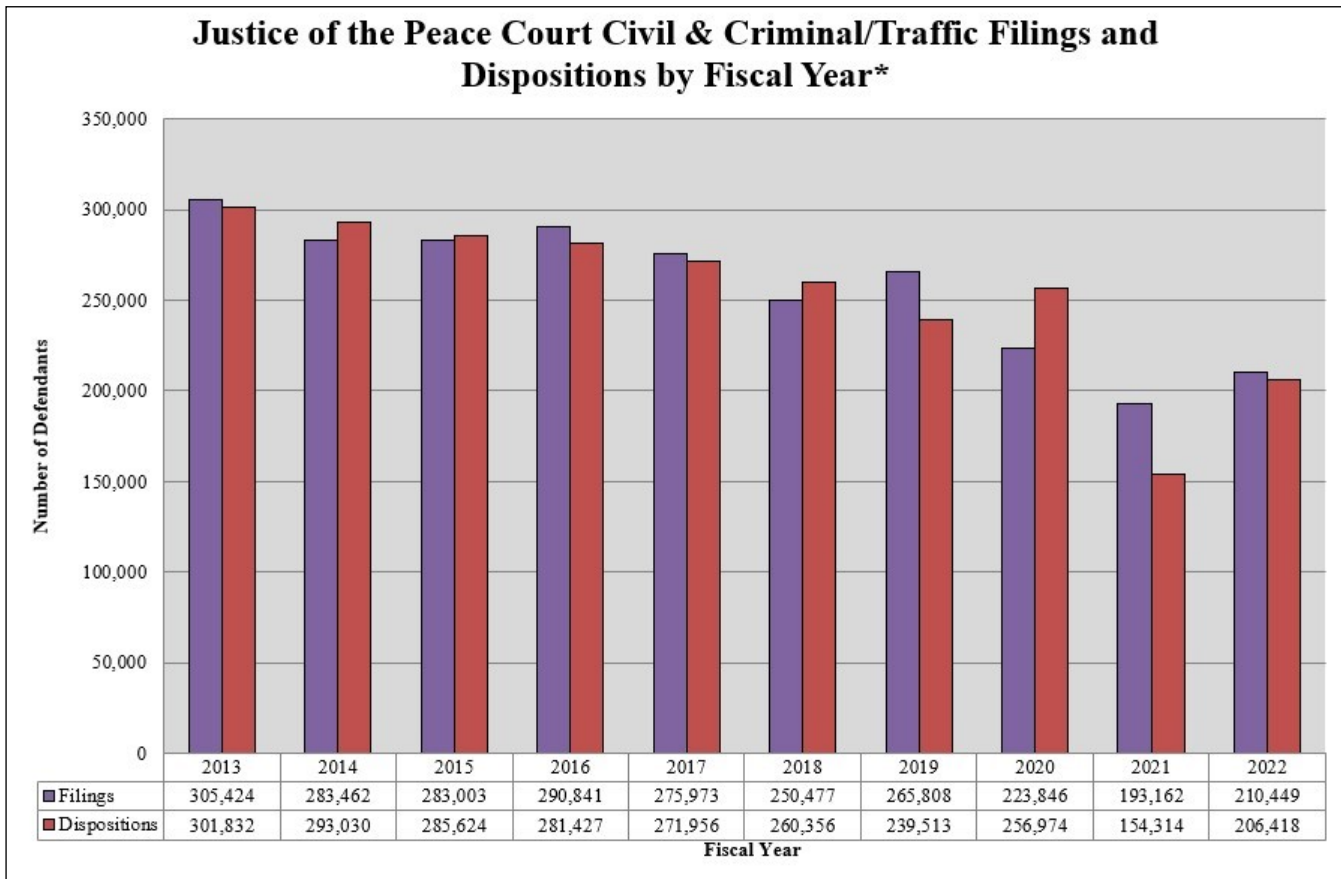
update staff on leadership initiatives, public health status, and other issues of interest.

Second, we have held two sessions of a JP Leadership Summit that was intended to build trust and communication between levels of supervision in our court. The sessions focused on communication skills and teambuilding and will be repeated annually.

The third prong of our enhanced communication plan was the creation of JP Court Staff Symposiums. We held four such events in 2022 and plan to continue this as a quarterly event. The Staff Symposiums are designed to give the frontline employees in our court information and updates on the work that is going on behind the scenes by court leadership as well as providing training in need-based areas.

## Piloting Success

The Justice of the Peace Court participated in several pilot programs this past year including two significant joint efforts to enhance public safety. In the first, the court's staff worked with the Red Clay School District in New Castle County on a program that uses school bus safety cameras to issue civil violations to drivers who illegally overtake and pass a school bus. This program, as outlined in House Bill 202, allows for cameras to be placed on the exterior of school buses in the district to capture recorded images used to identify an illegally passing motor vehicle. The purpose of this program is to protect students. Revenue from violations pays for the program and provides funds to spread public awareness of the dangers of illegally passing a school bus while it is loading and unloading school children.



\*Criminal filings and disposition information is by defendant  
JP Court 1, 12 and 19 closed prior to this Fiscal Year. As a result they have been removed from any charts.

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# JUSTICE OF THE PEACE COURT

Since this program went “live” on April 4, 2022, 113 violations were issued through July 31<sup>st</sup>, with only three cases appealed to the Justice of the Peace Court. While the numbers are not large at this point, this program is worth watching to see how successful it is in helping to reduce incidents and protect students. As the program moves into its first full school year, the Red Clay School District and the court will be monitoring any impact for future recommendations on whether this should become a statewide program.

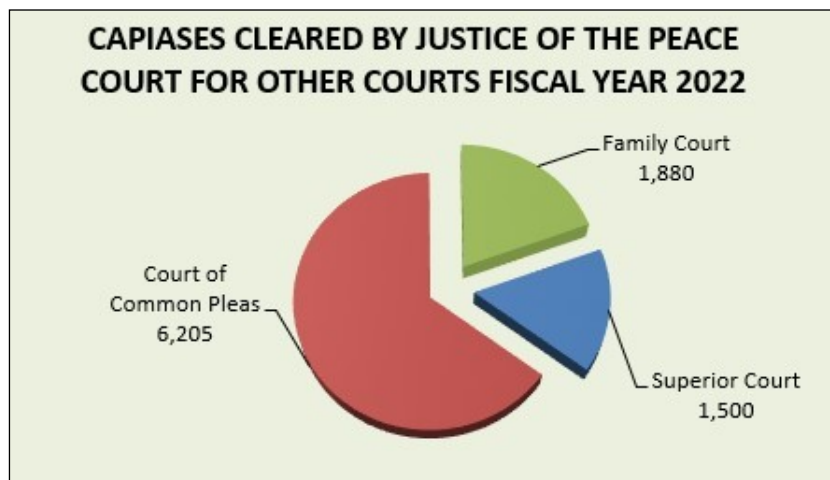
The second pilot is an effort to address the number of unserved Protection From Abuse Orders (“PFAs”) issued by Family Court. Often, because a PFA has been obtained through a hearing where the subject of the order does not appear, individuals are unaware that they have the pending order. Further, certain actions to ensure the safety of the PFA petitioner cannot take place until the PFA is served. Because our court sees a large volume of individuals come through our doors each year and many of them have pending matters in our sister courts, we initiated a pilot program at our busiest location to provide service of pending PFAs.

All individuals who appear at the court location are screened at check in and identified if there is an outstanding unserved PFA. Through a non-confrontational process involving clerical and security staff and the judge on duty, the PFA is served on the individual and Family Court is notified of the

completed service. In just the first few months of the program, eleven PFAs have been served, and the Court is planning to expand the program to other court locations.

Justice of the Peace Court also participated in a third pilot effort – one aimed at making courts more accessible for the public by allowing individuals to bring their cell phones and other personal electronic devices into court. The early part of the pilot effort focused on Justice of the Peace Court and Family Court to test allowing members of the public to bring their cell phones into court as both courts have a large number of litigants who represent themselves and therefore may need to have access to their devices for not only personal needs, but also to help present their case. Justice of the Peace Court 3 and 17 (Georgetown) and Court 11 (New Castle) were involved in the year-long program. The pilot effort recognizes that cell phones have become an important part of modern life and the expectation is that the pilot program may be expanded in the future to allow cell phones in other courts as well.

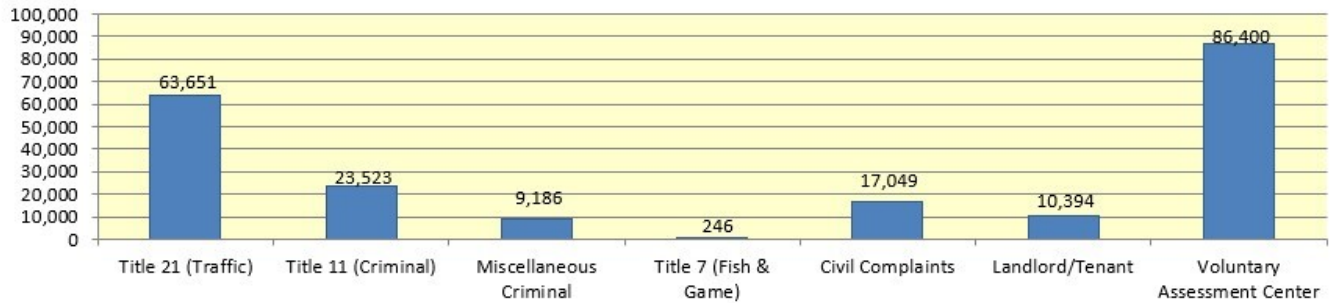
These are but a few efforts the court has undertaken to both make this a good place to work and to advance the interests of justice. As we continue to gather momentum, using lessons learned during the pandemic and its aftermath, we forge ahead with a renewed purpose, new tools to do our jobs, and a refreshed sense of what it means to provide justice to the people of Delaware. ♦



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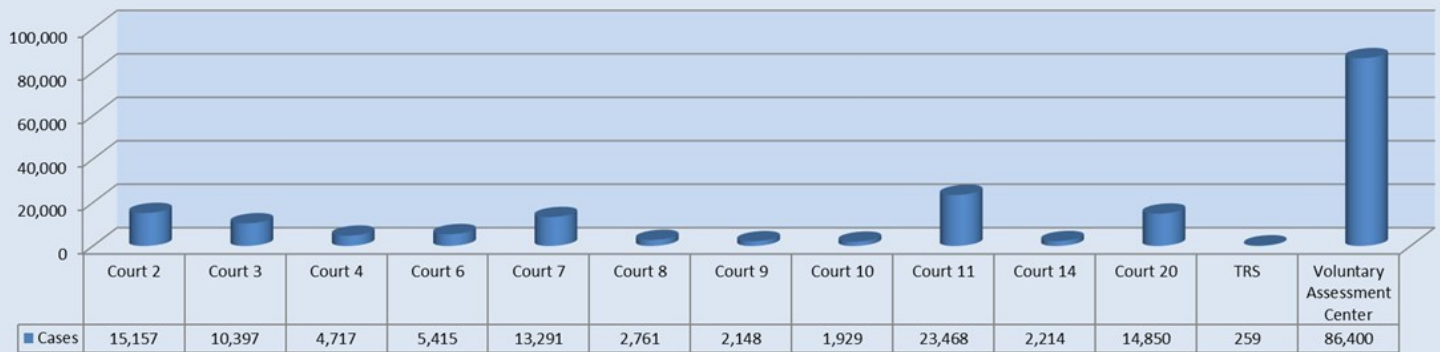
# JUSTICE OF THE PEACE COURT

**NUMBER OF JUSTICE OF THE PEACE COURT FILINGS\* BY TYPE  
FISCAL YEAR 2022**

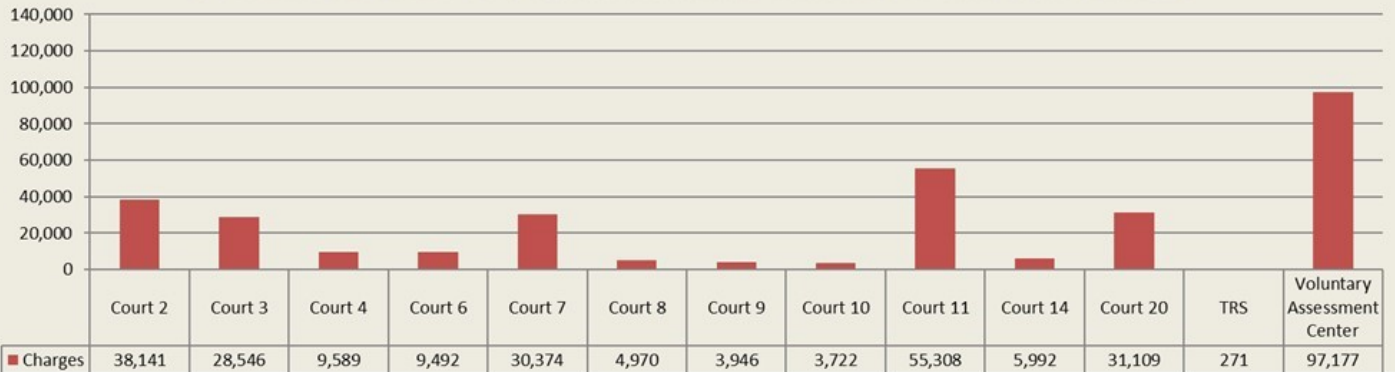


\*Criminal filings are by defendant.

**JUSTICE OF THE PEACE COURT CRIMINAL & TRAFFIC CASES BY DEFENDANT BY COURT FISCAL YEAR 2022**



**JUSTICE OF THE PEACE COURT CRIMINAL & TRAFFIC CHARGES BY COURT FISCAL YEAR 2022**





# JUSTICE OF THE PEACE COURT

## NEW CASTLE COUNTY JUDGES



**Back Row (left to right):** Christopher Portante, Mary Ellen Naugle, Thomas Kenney, David Skelley, Earl MacFarlane, Michelle Michini-Adam, Alex Peterson III, John Potts, Bobby Hoof, Susan Ufberg, Walter Newton, Nicholas Brock.

**Front Row (left to right):** Kerry Kowal, Shelley Losito, Amanda Moyer, Maria Perez-Chambers, Marie Page, Shameka Booker, Cheryl McCabe-Stroman.

**Not Pictured:** Nina Bawa, Peter Burcat, Bracy Dixon Jr., Shanaya Eyong, James Hanby Sr., Sean McCormick (DCM), Gerald Ross III, Katharine Ross, Rodney Vodery.

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# JUSTICE OF THE PEACE COURT

## KENT COUNTY JUDGES



***Back Row (left to right):*** D. Ken Cox, Alexander Montano, James Murray, Michael Green.

***Front Row (left to right):*** Nicole Alston-Jackson, Kevin Wilson (DCM), Dana Tracy, Jamie Hicks, Judy Smith.

***Not Pictured:*** Dwight Dillard, W.G. Edmanson II, Michael Sherlock.

# JUSTICE OF THE PEACE COURT

## SUSSEX COUNTY JUDGES



***Back Row (left to right):*** Christopher Bradley, Scott Willey, John Hudson, Brett Graves, Maria Castro, Kristine Kellenbenz, Matthew Tingle, Richard Comly, William Patrick Wood.

***Front Row (left to right):*** Candace Whitelock, Terri Davis, Deborah Keenan (DCM), Catherine Hester, Stephani Adams, Leah Chandler.

***Not Pictured:*** John Adams, Mirta Collazo, Bethany Crowley, Jennifer Sammons.

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# JUSTICE OF THE PEACE COURT

## IN MEMORIAM MARK E. HITCH



The Delaware Judiciary was saddened by the passing of Justice of the Peace Court Administrator Mark E. Hitch at the end of 2022.

Hitch had been battling cancer and his colleagues at the court showed their support for his fight, and his sense of humor, by wearing gray “Fight like a Hitch” wristbands.

“No words can adequately convey the heartbreak I feel about Mark’s passing,” said Justice of the Peace Court Chief Magistrate Alan Davis. “Mark was more than a dedicated employee of this court; he was as loyal and devoted a person as you could find. De-

spite the time and energy he needed to fight cancer over the past year, he continued to make significant contributions to the court. In his entire career with the Justice of the Peace Court, he had a hand in countless outstanding improvements, but his crowning achievement was the personal relationships he forged and the caring, professional environment he fostered.”

Hitch joined the Court in 2013 and served as Operations Manager for eight years before being promoted to Court Administrator in August 2021.

Prior to joining the Justice of the Peace Court, Hitch was a 24-year veteran of the New Castle County Police Department. Hitch began his career as a patrol officer in 1988 and worked his way up through the ranks to detective, sergeant, lieutenant, captain, and ultimately departed the department as a major in 2012.

Hitch received his BA in criminal justice from the University of Delaware and received training at the Federal Bureau of Investigation’s National Academy in Quantico, VA, and the JFK School of Government at Harvard University.

Hitch is the son of Eugene Hitch, Faye Littleton and stepfather, Lee Littleton. He is survived by his wife – Joelle; son – Cortlan and fiancé, Meghan O’Brien; daughters – Jordan and Jaycie, and Jaycie’s boyfriend, Michael DiNardo; brother – Michael Littleton; and sister – Kathy and her husband, Brian Kunkowski, their son – Scott and his wife, Megan. ♦