



Lucas County Common Pleas Court

700 Adams Street
Toledo, Ohio 43604

Michael R. Goulding
Judge

August 26, 2025

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Commissioner Lisa A. Sobecki
Commissioner Pete Gerken
Commissioner Anita Lopez
One Government Center, Suite 800
Toledo, OH 43604

Re: Lucas County Court of Common Pleas 2026 Budget

Honorable Commissioners:

On behalf of the Judges of the Lucas County Common Pleas General Division, I am pleased to submit the Court's 2026 budget. This budget reflects the reasonable and necessary funding that is essential for the Court to fulfill its constitutional and statutory obligations in the coming year. I would note that not only was the Court's budget prepared and submitted prior to the deadline established by the Commissioners, but it was completed more than a week early. The Court certainly understands that there are significant challenges with managing the budget for all of Lucas County, and we are glad to assist where we can.

As a result of our shared desire for collegiality, professionalism, and openness, I, along with the members of the Court's administrative staff, appreciate the opportunity to meet regularly with Commissioner Sobecki and County Administrator Ford to discuss our respective concerns. From those meetings, the Court is mindful of the many issues that could potentially impact Lucas County's finances. As such, the Court's budgetary submission is restrained, yet incorporates the Court's independent assessment of what is essential to fulfilling our judicial function. Utilizing the budgetary system (PBCS) specified by the Commissioners, the Court has presented an extensive and detailed narrative that accounts for all fiscal expenditures. The Court remains open to addressing any questions that you may have. As I detail further in this letter, the Court continues to explore new and innovative ways to fulfil our obligations in the most efficient and effective way possible, and I welcome the opportunity to continue our collaboration.

The Court understands the challenges the Commissioners must address in countywide budgeting. Nevertheless, the Court has its own independent responsibility for prudent fiscal management in

an uncertain and unpredictable environment. As you are aware, the Court does not choose which individuals seek justice before it. The variance among those who appear before the Court can have a drastic impact on the expenses the Court must incur. For example, if a single criminal defendant has mental health issues, the Court will likely expend thousands of dollars on psychological evaluations and assessments, something the Court is compelled to do. Additionally, many individuals who appear before the Court do not speak English; in such situations, the Court is required to provide interpretative services, which can be quite expensive. In the last couple of years, there has been a marked increase in the requested use of jury views. These situations require the Court to charter a bus and incur significant staffing overtime to facilitate a jury's view of various crime scene locations. These are just a few basic examples of the many complex situations that impact the Court's budget.

I am pleased to note that not all events result in an increased expense to the general fund. For example, commencing in 2025, the Court began weekend drug testing. This program is quite beneficial, but there are personnel and supply costs incurred. Through the creative efforts of the Court's staff, the bulk of these expenses have been successfully absorbed through grants.

The Court's staffing remains one of its most significant expenditures, and it is only through its employees that the Court can accomplish its job. The value of competent, capable staff cannot be underestimated. The issues before the Court are multifaceted and generally not subject to easy resolution. Acquiring and retaining skilled Court staff is absolutely essential to meeting the Court's mandate. It is for these reasons that the Court has determined that a 2.8% COLA is reasonable and necessary. The Consumer Price Index (CPI) at the time the Court submitted its budget was 2.8% (CPI has since increased to 2.9%). Because of additional cost savings and efficiencies, which will be described further herein, this results in only a 1.98% increase over the Court's 2025 budget. This increase totals only \$270,368, which is de minimis when considered against the Court's nearly 14-million-dollar operating budget.

The Court continuously assesses its operations to determine if functions can be performed more efficiently. Of course, this must be balanced against the need to remain effective. Among the recent cost savings the Court has been able to achieve are the elimination of an Administrative Clerk, reduction of senior command staff in the Court Deputies department, movement of three staff positions from the general fund to grant and special revenue accounts, and reduction of one full-time Court reporter to a part-time position.

Towards the end of 2024 and early 2025, the Court undertook an extensive examination of how various costs, fines, and sanctions were being imposed and collected in criminal cases. While complex, this large-scale, comprehensive review revealed significant discrepancies in how these assessments were handled. Commencing in the spring of 2025, the Court, with the assistance of the Clerk of Court's office, instituted significant changes in this process. To date, more than \$700,000 in assessments have been transmitted to the Clerk of Court for collection. Because of these transformations, the Court expects meaningful increases in the sums collected by the Clerk's office and returned to the general fund.

The Court's Administrative staff continues to work closely with the Commissioner's Office of Management and Budget (OMB), which appreciably benefits each of our organizations. Because

of these productive communications, OMB is able to project fiscal outcomes timelier, with less effort, and greater accuracy. Furthermore, the competency and professionalism of our respective staff assisted in the resolution of the intricate issues associated with the Commissioner's new fund transfer policy.

Our entire budget will be posted on our newly redesigned website, as will this synopsis, in order to provide complete transparency and accountability. The Court reaffirms its commitment to working with you in the coming year, and our door remains open to discussions about how we can better serve the citizens of Lucas County in our respective roles.

Sincerely,



Michael R. Goulding
Administrative Judge