



Lucas County Court of Common Pleas

700 Adams Street
Toledo, Ohio 43604

Judge Michael R. Goulding

Telephone: (419) 213-4538

August 17, 2026

Commissioner Lisa A. Sobecki
Commissioner Pete Gerken
Commissioner Anita Lopez

One Government Center, Suite 800
Toledo, Ohio 43604

Re: Lucas County Common Pleas Court General Division 2027 Budget

Honorable Commissioners:

On behalf of the Judges of the Lucas County Court of Common Pleas General Division, I am pleased to timely submit the Court's 2027 budget. This budget reflects the reasonable and necessary funding that is required for the Court to fulfill its constitutional and statutory obligations in the coming year. As with past years, the Court's budget submission complies with the Commissioners' request for a detailed and extensive explanation of all funding items, ensuring our commitment to transparency and accountability. And once again, our budget will be available for public scrutiny via our updated and renovated website.

We are appreciative of Commissioner Sobecki's efforts to meet with the courts and departments to communicate the budgetary challenges the county is facing. These meetings have assisted the Court with our commitment to sound fiscal management. Nevertheless, the Judges of the General Division and I were taken aback by the lack of planning and awareness on the part of the Commissioners with regard to some of the current economic problems. Back in May of this year, we were certainly shocked by the Commissioners' unexpected announcement of a catastrophic deficit in the healthcare fund, a fund that is the sole responsibility of the Commissioners to viably manage. Our shock was further intensified by the declaration that this deficit would result in the immediate (within 2 days) imposition of significant additional charges to various budgets, including the Court's. Ultimately, it left the Court, along with every other department in the county, with little to no recourse. During that May meeting, it was represented to us that while unexpected, this problem was not indefinite. Essentially, we were told that the Commissioners were working on a plan that would resolve this crisis by March of 2027. As a result of this situation, we are currently projected to absorb \$322,548 in unbudgeted expenses in 2026.

The Court is ever mindful of the need to appropriately manage the limited resources available. To that end, we were prepared to submit a considerably reduced 2027 budget in recognition of our obligations and these limitations. Unfortunately, the unexpected expenditure of \$322,548 in 2026 has additional ongoing implications for the Court's 2027 budget and regrettably limits more sizeable reduction options. The healthcare crisis disproportionately impacted non-general funds, i.e., the Court's grants and special revenue funds. The grants in particular are on a fiscal cycle, which means that in July of 2026 we began spending portions of the grants' budgets that were needed to sustain the Court's operations through June of 2027. Because of the lack of warning and the immediate imposition of nonbudgeted expenses, the Court's grants and special revenue funds are operating at a budget deficit. This is not sustainable. This dilemma was further compounded by the Commissioners' most recent communication. Just days ago, it was revealed that not only is there no solution to the healthcare deficit, but the problem is much more protracted, with no resolution likely before March of 2028.

While the Court was still reeling from this recent revelation, the Commissioners delivered an even more troubling edict: all departments, as well as the Courts, which are co-equal branches of government, must submit a budget reduced by 13% for 2027. Specifically, the Commissioners have asked the General Division to reduce its budget by \$1,808,597. We would note that we were provided less than 30 days to accomplish this. As part of the justification for these budgetary reductions, the Commissioners once again identified the unbalanced healthcare fund as a contributing factor. Nevertheless, we retain independent responsibility and authority over our own budget. As can be expected, the Court has its own issues and challenges to resolve. The Court is, however, prepared to do so in a prudent and fiscally responsible manner. The 2027 budget submitted by the Court is \$13,493,695. This sum is not only reasonable and necessary, but is over 3% below our 2026 appropriation. This represents a savings of \$418,586 to the general fund. This achievement is not without consequence. As is detailed further herein, several operations and staff will be reduced to affect this outcome.

In 2025, the Court began weekend drug testing. Through this process, the Court was able to secure timely and meaningful information that allowed us to provide more immediate interventions with criminal defendants. One of the positive outcomes of earlier intervention is an overall reduction in costs across the entire criminal justice system. As nothing is ever free, this program added to the Court's personnel and supply costs. Fortunately, we were able to absorb these expenses through various grants. Unfortunately, the increased financial burden from the ongoing healthcare predicament means that these grants can no longer sustain this program, which will result in its termination.

The primary means by which the Court fulfills its obligations is through our staff. Staffing costs represent more than 93% of our operating expenses. This is particularly difficult when the public's needs and expectations have not diminished. Furthermore, unlike with the Commissioners, nearly all of the Court's responsibilities are obligated by law. Nevertheless, for 2027, the Court plans to eliminate the following six (6) positions which will affect services across the Court's entire operation: Deputy Chief of Court Security, Sergeant, Drug Testing Unit Manager, Drug Testing Monitor, Pretrial Assessment Officer, and Receptionist.

While staffing reductions embody the single largest potential in budgetary reductions, the Court is always vigilant to achieve efficiencies in whatever way possible. Though the weekend drug testing program will come to an end, the Court will be enhancing its overall drug testing procedure. I am gratified to report that this enhancement will still be accomplished at a cost

reduction. The Court currently provides drug testing services for Common Pleas defendants, as well as multiple Lucas County agencies and Municipal Courts. These services are performed on equipment locally, which is leased through a third party. The Court is prepared to move forward with a new method of drug testing that will completely outsource drug analysis. Not only will this process be cheaper, but the level of analysis and responsiveness promises to surpass our current operations. This new program is projected to save the general fund \$133,135 in 2027. Additionally, the Court's Administration has been in discussions with the County Administrator over a proposal that could net significantly more savings. By consolidating the Court's operations into a single facility, the Court anticipates the County could save more than \$1,000,000 annually.

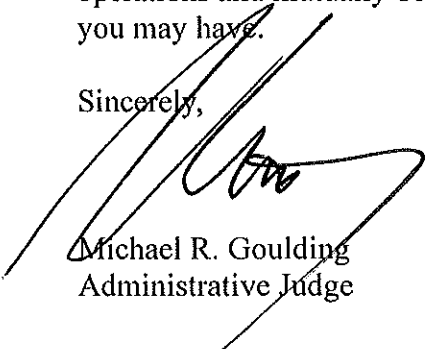
The Court is also attentive to preserving the resources already at our disposal. For example, individuals placed on electronic monitoring (EM) frequently remove and attempt to dispose of the tracking devices. Each unit, including the base and monitor, costs nearly \$2,000. During the first six (6) months of 2026, the Court, through its concerted efforts, has recovered more than \$31,000 in EM equipment. And while some might suggest that these individuals should just be held at the county jail, as the Commissioners know, jail space is not only limited, but very expensive. At approximately \$18.37 a day, the cost of EM supervision is far less than incarceration.

Cost reductions are only one component of good fiscal management. Where possible, the Court also seeks revenue enhancement. The drug testing services that the Court provides for other county agencies and Courts are but one of many regional services that the Court delivers, which also include jury services and electronic monitoring. Not only does this economy of scale allow us to operate at reduced costs, but some services bring in additional revenue. The Court anticipates that 2027 will continue our trend of revenue expansion. The Court's Administrative staff and the Clerk of Court's finance staff should also be credited for their collaborative efforts in improving the collection of fines, fees, and costs, which all contribute to the bottom line.

It is well understood that the Court does not choose which individuals seek justice before it. Quite often, there is a strong correlation between the turmoil of society and the workload of the Court. Foreclosure and collection cases are on the rise, and the news is replete with stories of violence and mayhem. Currently pending before the Court is a death penalty case, something which we have not experienced for more than 10 years. We are required to provide a multitude of services regardless of an individual's ability to pay. The scope of services is quite vast and includes interpreters, psychological assessments, and the provision of legal counsel, to name but a few. Some of these expenses are relatively minor while others can run hundreds of thousands of dollars for a single case. The previously mentioned capital case is a good example. This case alone has already cost more than a quarter of a million dollars (\$250,000), with many thousands more in expenses likely before the end of the year. It is certainly permissible for the Court to request additional funding to cover these unanticipated expenses, particularly ones outside of our control. Thus far, we have not done so. The Court's current Administration has been exemplary in managing our budget despite the myriad of challenges we constantly face.

In formulating our budget, the Court gave due consideration to the economic conditions present in Lucas County. The budget required by the Court is not excessive. Furthermore, it is reasonable and essential to the fulfillment of our obligations as an independent Judiciary. The Court looks forward to a continuation of the effective collaboration between our respective administrations. I believe this cooperation has been extremely helpful to efficient government operations and mutually beneficial. The Court remains open to addressing any questions that you may have.

Sincerely,



Michael R. Goulding
Administrative Judge