

# LAKWOOD MUNICIPAL COURT

## 2025 ANNUAL REPORT



### Judge Tess Neff

12650 Detroit Avenue  
Lakewood, Ohio 44107  
216-529-6700

[www.lakewoodcourtoh.gov](http://www.lakewoodcourtoh.gov)

Court Administrator  
and Clerk of Court  
Maria Russo



## LAKWOOD MUNICIPAL COURT

12650 DETROIT AVENUE • LAKEWOOD, OHIO 44107  
PHONE: (216) 529-6700 • FAX: (216) 529-7687

TESS NEFF  
JUDGE

March 23, 2026

Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Ohio, Sharon Kennedy  
Cuyahoga County Executive, Christopher Ronayne  
Cuyahoga County Council  
Mayor of Lakewood, Meghan George  
Lakewood City Council

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Year 2025 had the court basking in its many successes in technology advancements. It is this year that the court can truly identify itself as modernized. It increased access and streamlined processes. The tireless work of court staff and its partners have proven fruitful.

February 2025 started the year with a boom. The court met its goal to implement and “Go-live” with the new case management system (CMS). Now that the system has been in operation for just over a year, the staff is proficient. The days of laborious and time-consuming data input and search queries and pen and paper processes are in the past. If this were the only goal the court met it would have been a win for the year. But Lakewood Municipal Court continued working to meet several other technology related goals that will mark 2025 as a truly special year.

The court’s new CMS paved the way for the court to integrate its refurbished website with the system. The integration allowed the court to incorporate Lexis Nexis on its website. This significantly improved how the court accepts payment for citations and payment plans. Integration affords individuals the ability to pay directly online. Individuals can pay the fine and court costs seven days a week, 24 hours a day. The online payment process is made convenient for users, so they do not have to take time off from work, find childcare or transportation to appear personally at the court. The process has significantly reduced the number of phone calls to the Clerk’s Office, which previously routinely processed payments over the phone. Staff no longer take phone payments and individuals are transferred to the call center or the website. Lakewood is a high-volume court, and the new payment method frees staff time to concentrate on more efficient case input and processing to be in real time.

Digitizing cases has been a court priority. All closed civil cases through 2018 were scanned and digitized by a professional service which increased storage space on premises. More importantly, a digital file is quickly located without expending staff time looking in large storage units for individual files. The court plans to tackle the tens of thousands of traffic and criminal papers and binder clad cases and continue the digitization efforts if the budget allows.

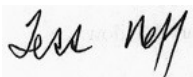
Improved technology is enormously important, and it is critical to safeguard the court's accomplishments. The court purchased two new network switches to strengthen its IT infrastructure. The switches serve as the backbone of the court's network, providing reliable connectivity for staff computers, the case management system, kiosks and the essential services. In addition, they deliver Power over Ethernet (PoE) to the court's phones, ensuring both data and power are supplied through a single connection which simplifies management and increases system reliability.

On June 2, 2025, the court began receiving e-citations for traffic cases. This efficient and greatly improved way of writing and processing citations was made possible through a collaboration with the Lakewood Police Department, the Lakewood City IT Department, the Ohio Department of Public Safety, and the new CMS. Previously, court staff would manually input all the information from the paper citation multiple times a day into the CMS. The time commitment previously required to enter tickets manually has been resoundingly reduced by the e-citation process.

The court ended the summer of 2025 by establishing a strategic partnership with the Ohio Attorney General's Office to enhance its collections process. Through this partnership, the court now leverages the AG's resources and expertise to pursue outstanding fines, fees, and court costs more effectively. The relationship has streamlined enforcement efforts, improved recovery rates, and reinforced the court's commitment to fiscal responsibility and accountability.

Overall, 2025 was an incredibly successful year for the court. Its consistent vision and strategic plan to enhance and improve technological processes to better serve the community and court users will carry into 2026. Every one of the court's achievements was a direct result of the dedication from staff and partners that believe in public service to the community. I am forever grateful to my court members who show up every day to perform the often-thankless tasks that are so very vital to efficient justice, fairness, and access. Much appreciation is extended to Mayor Meghan George and her administration and to Lakewood City Council for the continued open dialogue and support for the court. The work of the court never gets mundane or unexciting, and I am enthusiastic to see what the future brings our way and how the court can continue to progress.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tess Neff". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Tess Neff  
Administrative and Presiding Judge  
Lakewood Municipal Court

## **Mission Statement**

The Lakewood Municipal Court is committed to administering fair, efficient and impartial justice, promoting public safety for the citizens of Lakewood, and rehabilitating individuals who enter the court system. We strive to treat individuals with dignity and respect, operate with transparency to ensure public trust and deliver confidence in the judicial process.

## **Lakewood Municipal Court**

Lakewood Municipal Court is a single jurisdiction court that serves the City of Lakewood. The Court is located at 12650 Detroit Avenue in Lakewood, Ohio.

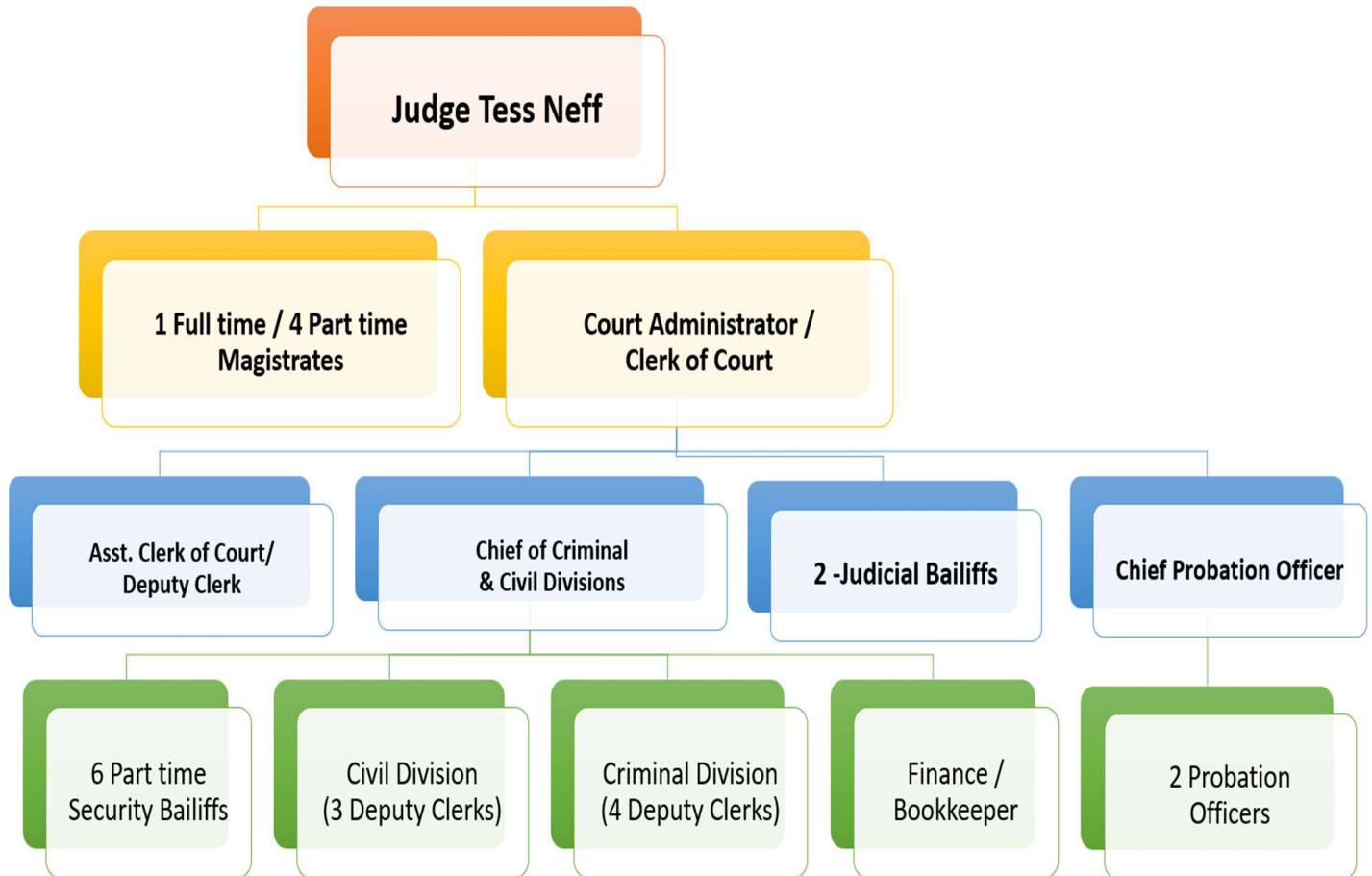
The Administrative/Presiding Judge Tess Neff is the only judge for this court.

The Lakewood Municipal Court staff includes the following positions: Court Administrator and Clerk of Court, Assistant Clerk of Court, two Judicial Bailiffs, Criminal/Civil Chief, seven Deputy Clerks, Bookkeeper, one full-time and four part-time Magistrates, Chief Probation Officer, two Probation Officers, six part-time Court Security Bailiffs, and one part-time Law Clerk.

Lakewood Municipal Court has two divisions:

- Civil/Small Claims/Housing Division consists of civil actions with the statutory monetary limit of \$15,000 for civil cases and a statutory monetary limit of \$6,000 for small claims cases.
- Criminal/Traffic Division consists of criminal misdemeanor cases (which includes building code violations), initial appearance hearings for felony cases, traffic citations issued by the Lakewood Police Department, Ohio State Patrol, Cleveland Metroparks Police Department, and Cuyahoga County Sheriff's Department.

# Lakewood Municipal Court



## **COURT FINANCES, REVENUES & EXPENDITURES**

A Court has no funds of its own and it does not function to generate revenue. Court fines, costs and fees help defray the expense of the operation of the court. While the court generates revenue by collecting money, the funds are an incidental benefit to the court's primary function of the administration of justice.

Fines are imposed to correct inappropriate behavior and to maintain a standard of conduct. Both civil and criminal cases include court costs. Fines are limited to traffic and criminal cases and may only be assessed if a person is found guilty of an offense.

The court collected net revenue of over \$2,150,000 in 2025, an increase from the previous year. Additional funds were dispersed to the Cleveland Metroparks, Cuyahoga County, and the State of Ohio, in accordance with the law. Lakewood Municipal Court is audited on a yearly basis by the State of Ohio to ensure compliance.

## **COURT COSTS**

State law requires court costs be assessed in all civil, traffic and criminal cases. These costs help to cover the cost of operating the court. The State of Ohio imposes costs on municipal court cases to support the costs of state sponsored projects. This money supports special revenue projects managed by and for the State of Ohio and is not kept by Lakewood Municipal Court or the City of Lakewood for court operations. The court sets its costs and retains a portion after the balance is transferred to the State of Ohio.

## **SPECIAL PROJECT COURT FUNDS**

The Ohio General Assembly grants statutory authority to municipal courts to create and maintain special funds from court costs. These funds are not included in the operating budget and are controlled solely by the court. The funds allow the court to make improvements and maintain court programs without seeking additional funds from the City of Lakewood. Use of these funds is restricted by law.

The Computer Maintenance Fund provides for the installation and upgrade of the court's computer system and related projects. Ohio Rev. Code 1901.261(B). This fund is also used to purchase software upgrades and computer supplies as well as consulting and maintenance contracts. The fund accrued \$71,269.50 in 2025 with a balance at the end of the year of \$217,623.76.

The Special Projects Fund accrued \$213,411.00 in 2025 with a balance at the end of the year of \$207,381.10. The special projects fund permits the Court to update equipment with no additional funding from the City of Lakewood's general fund.

The Probation Supervision Fund exists from fees that are only assessed to criminal defendants who are placed on active community control supervision.

The probation fund provides resources for the Probation Department which were not funded by the Court's operating budget. In 2025, this money will be paid for drug screening tests, professional psychiatric evaluations, and other expenses to operate the mental health court program. The fund accrued \$22,405.57 in 2025 with an ending balance of \$174,002.39.

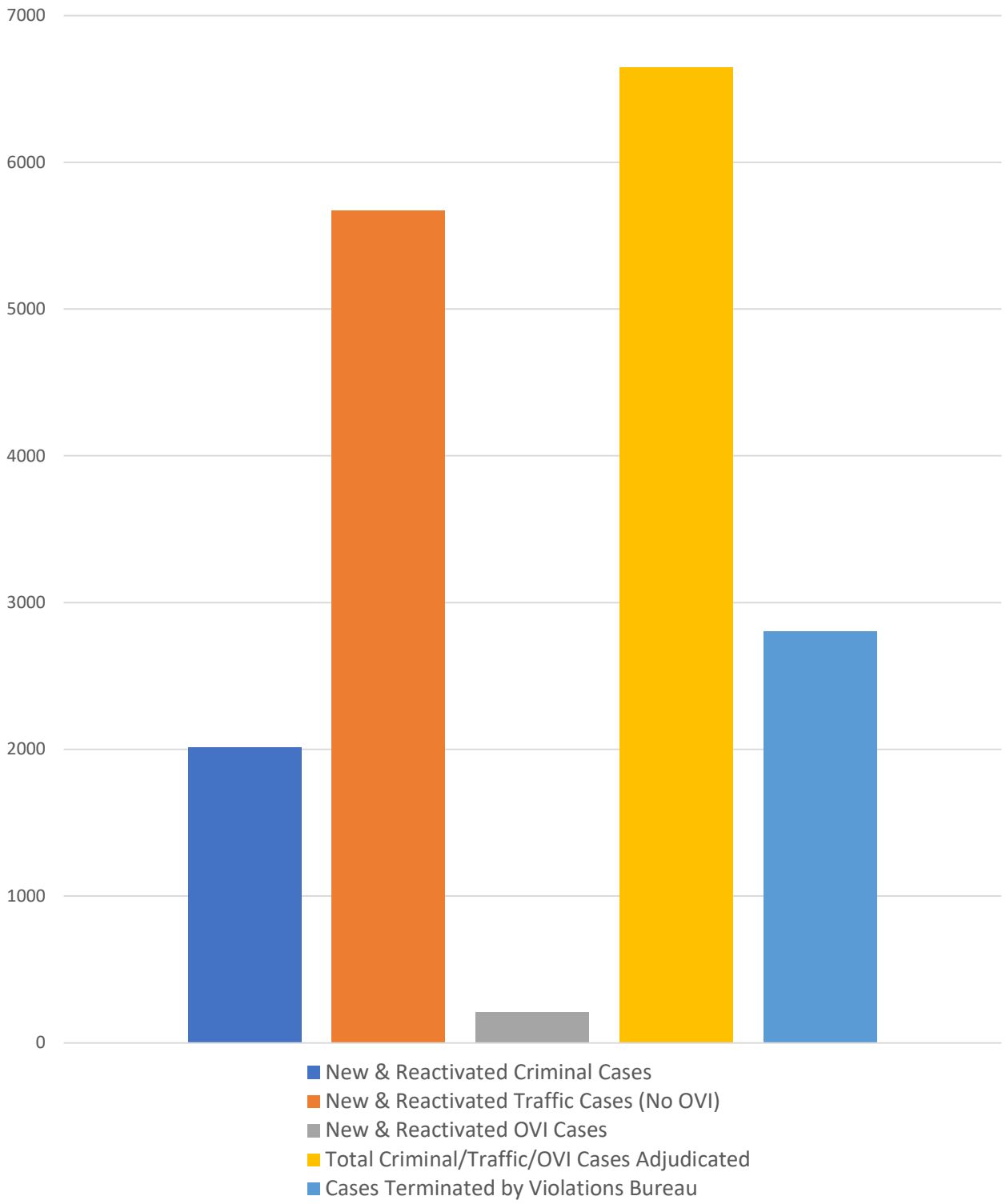
Indigent Drivers Alcohol Treatment Fund (IDAT) money comes from a portion of fines collected in OVI convictions and driver's license reinstatement fees distributed by the Ohio Department of Public Safety for OVI defendants. The fund is restricted to providing alcohol, drug and/or mental health services to indigent defendants. In 2025, the fund accrued \$3,728.85 with an ending balance of \$185,892.91. The State of Ohio has given courts more discretion to also use IDAT funds for substance abuse assessments, outpatient, and in-patient treatment programs.

Indigent Drivers Interlock and Alcohol Monitoring Fund (IDAM) is funded by a portion of fines collected for OVI convictions. IDAM collected \$11,178.54 in 2025 and is restricted to pay for ignition interlock and other alcohol monitoring devices for indigent defendants. The court has discretion to declare any surplus to be used for other rehabilitative services.

## 2025 Criminal/Traffic Revenue and Distribution

<u>City of Lakewood</u>		<u>Cuyahoga County</u>		<u>State of Ohio</u>	
Local Costs	645,301.34	Jury	0.00	VOC	52,140.00
Computer Improvement	71,269.50	Witness	0.00	Indigent	160,068.80
Special Projects	213,411.00	Expungement	1,680.00	Drug Enforcement	12,210.50
Fines	528,521.30	Public Defender	8,319.00	Seatbelt	7,414.00
Building Fines	11,706.69	Reg FI	2,113.00	Highway Patrol	285.00
Health Fines	100.00	Unif Fine	9,930.00	Expungement	160.00
Drug Fines	3,899.00	Crim Fine	17,161.40	STPF	115.00
10% Bond	15,783.00	Dog Fine	127.70		
Witness	48.00	OSP Fine	49.00		
Jury	1,625.00	OSP Other	8.00		
IDAT	3,728.85	OVI Housing	50.00		
LEA	890.00	CRIS	24,721.50		
Diversion	13,738.45	Crime Stoppers	886.00		
Expungement	1,020.00	Law Library	823.91		
Probation	22,405.57				
IDAM	11,178.54				
Interest	965.85				
NSF	205.00				
 <b><u>Other</u></b>					
Capital Recovery Collections					13,182.40
Metropark					1,015.00
Restitution					48,292.87
Brd of Parm					1,375.00
ODNR					50.00
RTA					300.00

# Summary of Criminal/Traffic Cases 2025



**CRIMINAL DIVISION  
SUMMARY OF CITY BOND RECEIPTS**

**2025 Deposits and Receipts**

2024 Bond Carry Over	\$37,126.00
2025 Bond Receipts	<u>\$227,906.00</u>
<b>Total Bond Receipts</b>	<b>\$265,032.00</b>

**2025 EXPENDITURES  
TOTAL BONDS REFUNDED AND TRANSFERRED**

Total New Bond Receipts	\$ 227,906.00
Bonds Refunded and Transferred	\$212,992.00
Carry Over to 2026	\$ 38,860.00

## TRAFFIC/CRIMINAL DIVISION – STATISTICAL DATA

<u>Individual Charge Filings</u>	<u>2024</u>	<u>2025</u>
Traffic Violations	7,838	7,277
Criminal Violations	2,140	2,062
<u>Case Terminations (AJ &amp; IJ)*</u>		
(Processed Through Open Court or Violations Bureau)		
Traffic, OVI, and Criminal Cases Terminated	10,313	10,080

\*Computed From Supreme Court Superintendence Report Year-End Figures.

### 2025 CRIMINAL/TRAFFIC/OVI CHARGES BY GOVERNMENTAL AGENCY

Lakewood Police Department (local ordinance)	8,260
Lakewood Police Department (state code)	1,003
Building Department	34
Dog Warden	1
Cleveland Metroparks – Includes Traffic	10
Ohio Dept. of Public Safety	5
Ohio Dept. of Natural Resources	2
Ohio Dept. of Taxation	2
Ohio State Patrol – Includes Traffic	21
RTA	1

**CRIMINAL DIVISION – STATISTICAL DATA  
CRIMINAL OFFENSE DESCRIPTIONS  
STATE STATUTE OFFENSES – FELONY INDIVIDUAL FILINGS**

<u>Ohio Revised Code Statute</u>	<u>Description</u>	<u>Number of Filings – 2025</u>
2903.02	Murder	1
2903.08	Aggravated Vehicular Assault/Vehicular Assault	2
2903.11	Felonious Assault	10
2903.13	Assault	6
2903.21	Aggravated Menacing	1
2907.02	Rape	1
2907.04	Unlawful Sex/Minor	1
2907.05	Gross Sexual Imposition	1
2907.21	Compelling Prostitution	1
2909.02	Aggravated Arson	4
2909.05	Vandalism	1
2911.11	Aggravated Burglary	1
2911.12	Burglary	6
2911.13	Breaking & Entering	1
2913.02	Theft	10
2913.31	Forgery	1
2913.42	Tampering w/Records	1
2913.51	Receiving Stolen Property	11
2917.21	Telephone Harassment	1
2917.31	Inducing Panic	1
2917.32	Making False Alarms	1
2919.25	Domestic Violence	4
2919.27	Violation of Protection Order	1
2921.12	Tampering w/Evidence	3
2921.33	Resisting Arrest	2
2921.36	Illegal Conveyance (weapons/drugs)	1
2921.38	Harassment by Inmate	8
2923.13	Weapons Under Disability	14
2925.03	Aggravated Trafficking/Trafficking in Drugs	9
2925.11	Possession of Controlled Substances	6
2933.16 (now 2933.21)	Peace Warrants/Search Warrants	2
4511.19	Felony OVI	3

## **CIVIL DIVISION**

Civil cases arise between private parties, unlike traffic or criminal charges, which originate with the government. Civil cases are usually filed to recoup monetary damages, return property, or restore rental premises in eviction proceedings. The financial maximum for civil cases filed in Lakewood Municipal Court is \$15,000. Cases with higher financial damages claims must be filed in Common Pleas Court.

Civil cases are divided into three (3) sections: general civil cases, small claims, and eviction proceedings. The total number of new civil cases filed and reactivated in 2025 was 2,051.

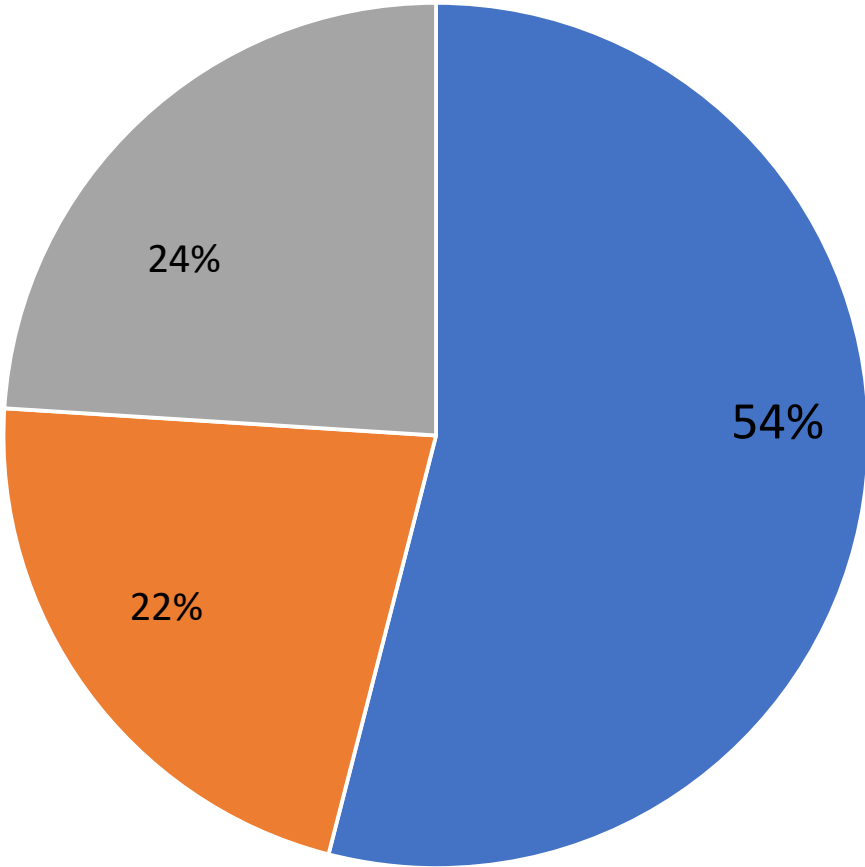
### **Small Claims Cases**

New small claims cases decreased by 16 cases, from 472 cases in 2024 to 456 in 2025. Small claims cases are limited to civil cases involving up to \$6,000.

### **Landlord/Tenant Cases**

New eviction cases in 2025 increased by 44 cases, to 488 cases in 2025 from 444 cases in 2024. The cases included a landlord's claims for possession of rental property. Any claim for damages to the premises and unpaid rent requires a separate Small Claim or Civil filing and a separate filing fee. Tenants seeking the return of security deposits or depositing rent into escrow with the Clerk of Court do not fall under Eviction proceedings. These cases are filed as small claims cases or rent in escrow cases.

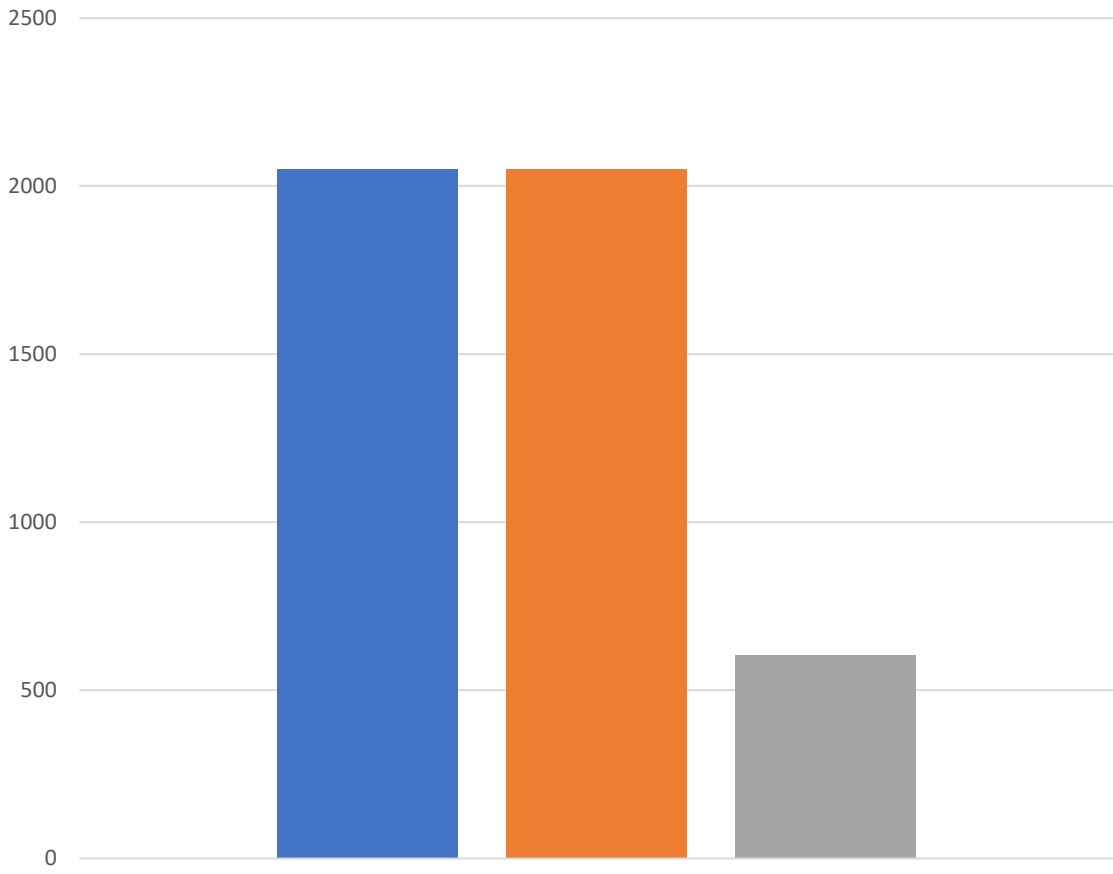
# Summary of 2025 Civil Case Filings



■ Regular Civil ■ Small Claims ■ Evictions

Source: Annual Superintendence Reports to the Supreme Court of Ohio

## Summary of All Civil Cases



**2025**

Year

■ Civil Cases Filed and Reactivated

■ Cases Terminated

■ Pending Civil Cases- Year End

**CIVIL DIVISION – LANDLORD/TENANT  
ANNUAL STATISTICAL SUMMARY**

	<b><u>2024</u></b>	<b><u>2025</u></b>
Cases Pending at Beginning of Year	76	38
Cases Filed & Reactivated	444	488
Cases Adjudicated	<u>(487)</u>	<u>(497)</u>
Cases Pending Year-end	38	31

<u>Case Adjudication Summary</u>	<b><u>2024</u></b>	<b><u>2025</u></b>
Trial Hearing by Judge	10	2
Court Trial	-	1
Hearing by Magistrate	236	217
Dismissal for Want of Prosecution	0	0
Other Dismissals	233	244
Bankruptcy Stay	0	2
Other Terminations	<u>3</u>	<u>31</u>
Total	487	497

**CIVIL DIVISION – SMALL CLAIMS  
ANNUAL STATISTICAL SUMMARY**

	<u>2024</u>	<u>2025</u>
Cases Pending at Beginning of Year	128	110
Cases Filed & Reactivated	472	456
Cases Adjudicated	<u>(490)</u>	<u>(472)</u>
Cases Pending Year-end	110	94

	<u>2024</u>	<u>2025</u>
<u>Case Adjudication Summary</u>		
Trial Hearing by Judge	4	6
Hearing by Magistrate	200	233
Transfer to Civil Docket/Other	3	0
Dismissal for Want of Prosecution	1	0
Other Dismissals	278	233
Bankruptcy Stay	0	0
Other Terminations	<u>4</u>	<u>0</u>
Total	492	472

Small Claims Cases Filed by Type 2025

Regular Civil – 85  
Municipal Tax – 371

Civil Revenue

**City of Lakewood**

**State of Ohio**

Local Costs	322,302.73	Legal Aid	55,136.51
CMF	7,604.00		
SPF	420.00		
Legal Aid 1%	441.15		
Marriages	1,200.00		

**Total Civil Revenue: 387,104.39**

## **PROBATION DIVISION**

The Probation Department is responsible for two primary functions within the court system: presentence investigations and probation supervision.

A presentence investigation (PSI) is conducted after the defendant has been convicted through a plea of guilt or a finding of guilt. The defendant is interviewed by a probation officer to provide the court with more background information about the offense and the offender prior to final disposition. The resulting presentence report may include collateral information from family members, the arresting officer and the victim. The Probation Department wrote 212 presentence reports in 2025.

When an offense causes property damage or personal injury, the victim is contacted to provide information regarding the offense and is encouraged to express an opinion regarding sentencing. The Probation Department consults with the victim to verify the amount of loss or personal injury and forwards that information to the court so the court may order payment of restitution. In 2025 the Probation Department collected \$48,292.87 in restitution. This was distributed to the crime victims. A condition of community control supervision regarding a victim may also include a No Contact Order.

The Probation Department oversees offenders placed on community control supervision. The average number of probationers supervised each month is 275. Probationers must comply with a variety of court-imposed conditions to maintain their freedom in the community and avoid the original jail sentence. Terms of community control supervision often contain a strong rehabilitation component to address what initially brought the offender to court. The rehabilitation may include mandatory treatment for alcohol and drug dependency, abstinence from all mood-altering substances, attendance at recovery support meetings, personal counseling or case management services, completion of an anger management or domestic violence program, mental health treatment or community work service.

The Lakewood Probation Department works with Court Community Service in the city of Cleveland and local community non-profits, regarding any hours placed upon a probationer's community control supervision conditions. According to the Court Community Service Department, in 2025, the number of referrals received totaled 90. The hours worked by Lakewood Municipal Court referrals totaled 1,063.5. More specifically, the hours worked at the Lakewood Service Department by Lakewood Court referrals totaled 116.

The Probation Department uses electronic monitored house arrest and global tracking as an alternative to jail when appropriate. Ohio law requires offenses sentenced to electronic monitoring to serve three times as many days under house arrest to equal actual jail time as designated by statute for the offense. Only those non-violent offense convictions and who lack significant prior criminal histories are eligible for house arrest. Offenders under house arrest must pay for their service fees to the house arrest provider.

The Probation Department makes referrals to ignition interlock services for repeat OVI offenders with driving privileges. Installation of an interlock device requires the driver to blow into a breathalyzer attached to the ignition. The car will not start if the device tests positive for alcohol.

Probation officers spend a significant amount of time devoted to case management and preparation for probation violation hearings. In 2025, 180 hearings were held in which probationers were required to appear in court on charges of a probation violation. The probation officer informs the offender of the charges and prepares testimony for the court detailing the violation. The court may choose to impose the original sentence or require further probation conditions.

Offenders referred to the Probation Department often suffer from a variety of personal problems including alcohol and/or drug addiction, family problems, financial, mental health, homelessness, and medical issues. Probation officers use a variety of community resources to offer offenders assistance in the areas of need. The goal is for the offender to successfully return to the community when the probation term expires.

Recent years have seen an increase in the number of individuals addicted to drugs. Lakewood Municipal Court uses a jail reduction program in conjunction with the Cuyahoga County Probation Department and the Cuyahoga County Jail. This program takes individuals who have received a jail sentence and places them in a treatment program, followed by a period of community control supervision. In 2025, three (3) people were referred to this program.

The Lakewood Municipal Court works together with the Cleveland Municipal Court Specialized Dockets. Defendants may be referred by the Lakewood Municipal Court for specific supervision and treatment through the Cleveland Municipal Court, depending on their offense. Defendants are placed on community control through the Lakewood Municipal Court and supervised by the Cleveland Probation Department, while participating in the specialized docket. These dockets include the Greater Cleveland Drug Court, Mental Health Specialized Docket, Veterans Specialized Docket and the Human Trafficking Specialized Docket.

Through a contract made available by the City of Lakewood from Recovery Resources, a court liaison from Recovery Resources, who is a licensed counselor and social worker, is assigned to the Lakewood Municipal Court. When an individual is in need of a mental health and/or a chemical dependency assessment(s), the person can be referred to Recovery Resources at no cost to the individual or Court. As a result, mentally ill offenders have decreased time spent in jail and have been diverted to more appropriate services, such as crisis stabilization units or home. Mentally ill offenders have benefited by not losing housing or other entitlements and by being linked with the mental health system. This program has also helped those with drug addictions or those with dual diagnosis. In 2025, sixty-four (64) people were referred for these services.

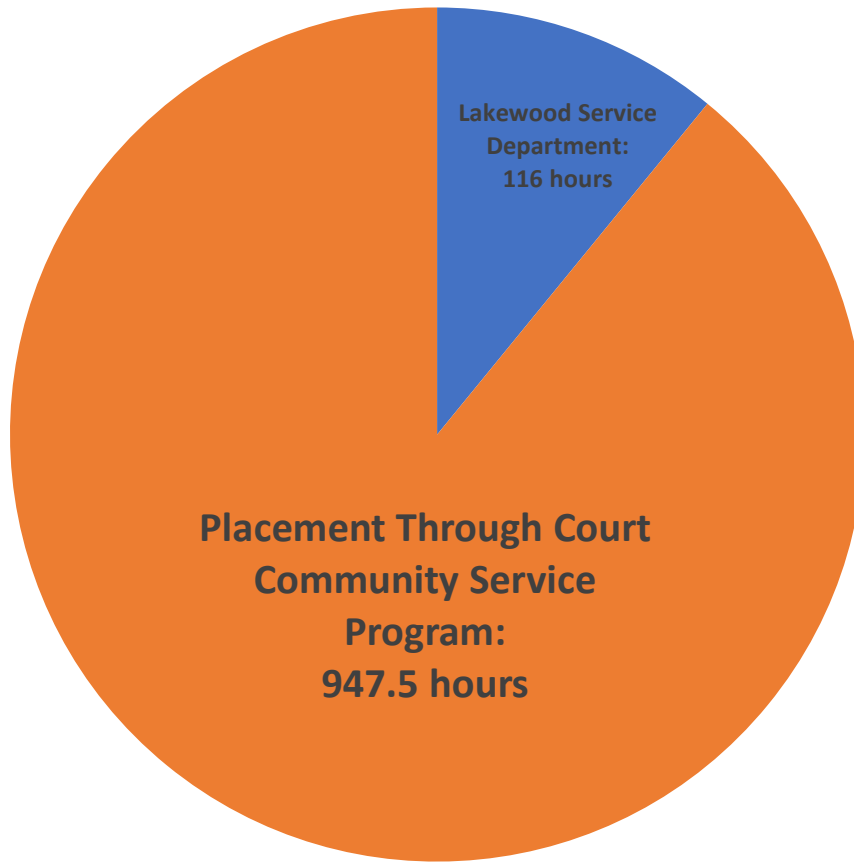
**2025 PROBATION DIVISION ACTIVITY SUMMARY**  
**REFERRAL INFORMATION**

Restitution Collected	\$47,862.32
PSI Monthly Referrals	212
PSI People Interviewed	174
Probation Violation Hearings	180
Active Probation	516
Active Probation Terminated	609
Diversion	81
Diversion Completed	85

# 2025 Summary of Community Work Service

Total Referrals: 90

Total Hours Worked: 1,063.5



■ Lakewood Service Department

■ Placement Through Court Community Service

# Total Restitution Collected by Probation Department for Victims of Crime

