

ST. JOSEPH COUNTY
FRIEND OF THE COURT

2023 ANNUAL REPORT

MARY HERENDEEN
FRIEND OF THE COURT

MISSION STATEMENT

The St. Joseph County Friend of the Court is committed to providing the highest quality customer service for the establishment, collection, and enforcement of child support orders, as well as professional, unbiased mediation and investigative services for the resolution of custody, parenting time and support issues.

The Friend of the Court is a branch of Circuit Court whose primary mission is the enforcement of the Court's orders regarding custody, parenting time, and support. The St. Joseph County Friend of the Court is a recognized child support enforcement agency entitled to federal funding under Title IV-D of the Social Security Act.

The Friend of the Court must comply with both federal and state laws regarding child support. The office is subject to compliance audits from both the state and federal levels.

2023 IN REVIEW

FUNDING

In 2023, 94% of our funding came from two sources. The office has a Cooperative Reimbursement Contract with the State that passes through federal funding and reimburses the county for 66% of eligible child support enforcement expenses. In 2023, we received \$807,770.48 from the federal portion of this contract and \$91,904.34 from the State supplement.

In addition, the office is entitled to incentive payments from the federal government based on performance in five categories:

- 1) Paternity establishment
- 2) Support order establishment
- 3) Current support collections
- 4) Support arrearage collection
- 5) Medical support collection

In 2023, the county received \$164,967 based on the Friend of the Court's performance in the five categories above.

The Friend of the Court is also required by Michigan law to provide various custody and parenting time services. These are funded in whole by user fees and judgment fees.

SOURCES OF REVENUE

Federal portion-reimbursement contract	\$ 807,770
State portion-reimbursement contract	\$ 91,904
Federal incentive payments	\$ 164,967
Statutory fees	\$ 37,700
Judgment fees and interest	\$ 16,980
Court costs	\$ 9,306
Other revenue	\$ 5,346
Total revenue	\$1,133,973

COLLECTIONS

Total collections for 2023 were down from 2022. 2020 saw an increase of nearly \$1 million in child support collected due to increased withholding of pandemic unemployment funds and offset of stimulus payments. Pandemic Unemployment payments didn't end until April 17, 2021, which inflated 2021 collections as well. The fact that 2019 had higher total collections than the past two years can be attributed to many support orders being reduced during the pandemic and have not returned to pre pandemic charge levels.

2023

Child Support Collected	\$9,602,243
Spousal Support Collected	<u>\$ 146,181</u>
Total Collections	\$9,748,424

2022

Child Support Collected	\$9,696,266
Spousal Support Collected	<u>\$ 159,751</u>
Total Collections	\$9,856,017

2021

Child Support Collected	\$10,340,675
Spousal Support Collected	<u>\$ 146,339</u>
Total Collections	\$10,487,014

2020

Child Support Collected	\$10,934,119
Spousal Support Collected	<u>\$ 173,597</u>
Total Collections	\$11,107,716

2019

Child Support Collected	\$10,108,991
Spousal Support collected	<u>\$ 181,418</u>
Total Collections	\$10,290,409

NON-ADVERSERIAL PROCEDURES

In 2007, the Friend of the Court adopted new procedures designed to help parties through custody, parenting time, and support proceedings with less litigation. Instead of going directly through a contested hearing in front of the court, usually with attorneys, the case is now referred to Friend of the Court staff for a Facilitative Conference. The office employees five caseworkers who are all trained mediators.

The results continue to be impressive saving judicial time that can be used elsewhere. Contested cases required a pretrial and a full evidentiary hearing before the Referee. Everyone benefits from the current procedures and the court saves judicial time that can be used elsewhere. The parties benefit from quicker and cheaper settlement of their issues. Also, we've found that parties who settle are less likely to return to court with future litigation.

ACTIVITY REPORT – 2023

1. MEDIATIONS & FACILITATIVE CONFERENCES		360
<i>Resolved</i>	260	
2. INVESTIGATIONS WITH RECOMMENDATIONS		928
<i>Custody</i>	105	
<i>Parenting time</i>	127	
<i>Support</i>	687	
<i>Other</i>	9	
3. REFEREE HEARINGS		323
<i>Custody</i>	44	
<i>Parenting time</i>	35	
<i>Support</i>	38	
<i>Other</i>	206	
4. ORDERS ESTABLISHED		380
<i>Paternity</i>	38	
<i>Child support</i>	136	
<i>Parenting time or custody</i>	206	