

ST. JOSEPH COUNTY
FRIEND OF THE COURT

2020 ANNUAL REPORT

WILLIAM THISTLETHWAITE
FRIEND OF THE COURT

MISSION STATEMENT

The St. Joseph County Friend of the Court is committed to providing the highest quality customer service for 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.

2020 IN REVIEW

FUNDING

In 2020, 92% of our funding came 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 2020, we received \$675,578 from the federal portion of this contract and \$84,459 from a 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 2020, the county received \$127,968 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	\$ 675,578
State portion-reimbursement contract	\$ 84,459
Federal incentive payments	\$ 127,968
Statutory fees	\$ 46,825
Judgment fees and interest	\$ 17,020
Court costs	\$ 10,970
Other revenue	<u>\$ 6,930</u>
Total revenue	\$ 969,750

COLLECTIONS

Total collections in 2020 were in line with previous years:

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

2018

Child support collected	\$ 10,161,158
Spousal support collected	<u>\$ 197,308</u>
Total collections	\$ 10,358,466

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 resolution conference. The office employs five caseworkers who are all trained mediators.

The results have been impressive. In 2020, only a handful of contested cases required a full evidentiary hearing before the Referee. Everyone benefits from the current procedures. 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 - 2020

1. MEDIATIONS & RESOLUTION CONFERENCES

213

Resolved 137

2. INVESTIGATIONS WITH RECOMMENDATIONS

618

Custody 48

Parenting Time 53

Support 517

Other 0

3. REFEREE HEARINGS

343

Custody 34

Parenting time 28

Support 52

Other 229

4. ORDERS ESTABLISHED

391

Paternity 27

Child support 152

Parenting time or custody 212

STEP PROGRAM

In the fall of 2016, the Friend of the Court began a new initiative called the Support to Employment Program (STEP). The purpose of this program is to identify and address the barriers that parents face which prevent them from financially supporting their children. These hurdles may include: unemployment, substance abuse, criminal history, physical or mental health issues. Our goal is to assist parents in identifying solutions to these challenges so that they can provide much needed emotional and financial support for their children.

Our Employment Specialist creates a case service plan for each client referred to STEP and partnering with other community resources helps the client overcome the identified barriers to regular employment. Our normal support enforcement remedies are suspended while the client participates in STEP. The client receives more intensive one on one contact than previously possible.