

# Richland County Court of Common Pleas

**General Division**  
50 PARK AVENUE EAST  
MANSFIELD, OHIO 44902

JUDGE BRENT N. ROBINSON  
419-774-5570

JUDGE PHILLIP S. NAUMOFF  
419-774-5567

MAGISTRATE ANDREA CLARK  
419-774-8303

MAGISTRATE JEFFREY P. UHRICH  
419-774-5569

May 12, 2021



Commissioner Tony Vero  
Commissioner Darrell Banks  
Commissioner Cliff Mears

RE: Need for Additional Courtroom

Dear Commissioners:

This letter serves as a formal request that the space currently in use by the Clerk of Courts be transferred to the General Division for use as an additional courtroom and two conference rooms. The General Division has three magistrates using a single hearing room. The Court's magistrates preside over civil bench trials, miscellaneous civil hearings, criminal arraignments, bond hearings, stalking hearings and numerous other events. The magistrates have always been very busy but the recent change in Ohio Law requiring a bond hearing to be held within 2 days of incarceration has greatly increased the number of hearings being held in the magistrates' hearing room. The Court is now holding bond hearings several times a week before an indictment has been filed and presiding over arraignments five days a week instead of five times a month. These hearings leave little time for civil stalking hearings (which must be heard within 24 hours of being filed), bench trials and the other numerous events that our three magistrates need to hear.

In addition, the building was not built to accommodate the number of jurors required for the Courts large case load. Even before COVID, 50 to 75 jurors were required to assemble in the lobby area of the third floor while waiting for a trial to begin. Although the Court adapted, adopted and implemented as many technical enhancements as possible, COVID social distancing has placed the Courts in a precarious position. The Court cannot limit public access to court proceedings but had no choice but to continue holding hearings and jury trials despite COVID. Courtroom #1 is the only courtroom large enough to use to seat a jury under social distancing guidelines, and even so, the Court has been forced to break its panels into 3 or 4 groups to do so. To maintain social distancing after a jury has been selected, the Court has to use the spectator seats for the jurors and to stream trials on a closed

video loop for the public to the training room on L1. When the Courts have jury trials at the same time, the video for both trials are pushed to the training room where there is inadequate space for socially distanced spectators and sound from the trials compete making it difficult to follow the proceedings. COVID social distancing has also closed our jury deliberation rooms as they are too small to safely accommodate a jury panel. The Court has been forced to use the courtrooms for deliberations which reduces the ability to hold hearings in other cases while a jury deliberates. During the eight months that the Court was permitted to have jury trials in 2020 the Court presided over 26 jury trials and 11 jury trials to date in 2021. Trials can last anywhere from two days to three weeks.

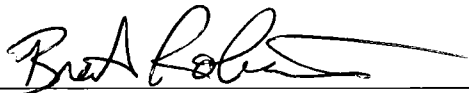
Availability of the courtrooms is further strained because the Court is mandated by the Supreme Court of Ohio to convene Court and meet with defendants that have been accepted into the Courts specialty dockets (drug and re-entry courts) eight times a month. Typically, specialty dockets tie up a courtroom for a half day. In addition, the Fifth District Court of Appeals uses a courtroom for a half a day to hear oral arguments once every two months. Fortunately, the Court of Appeals suspended oral hearings due to COVID but we would expect oral arguments to resume in the near future.

Finally, COVID has made us more aware of the number of people using the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor by the Domestic Relations Court, the General Division Court and Court Services. Attorneys, clients, probationers, jurors, family members, prosecutors, victim's advocates, witnesses, media and staff utilize a very limited space. In addition, the General Division Court has only one witness room so the Court is forced to use the hallway that serves as access for the public to the Courts' offices to seat law enforcement and other witnesses that should be separated from each other and the public. The same hallway is used to moved defendants that are incarnated by RCSO and ODRC into the courtrooms. Two additional conference rooms would help alleviate the overcrowding issues.

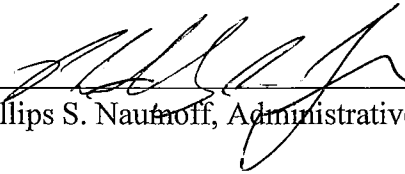
As you can see, an additional courtroom and two conference could be used to address all of the issues raised above and assist the General Division to dispense justice more efficiently, effectively and safely.

Should you have any questions, please contact the Court.

Thank you,



Brent N. Robinson, Presiding Judge



Phillips S. Naumoff, Administrative Judge

**RECEIVED**

*Dez Clon TV*