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# JUSTICE JOURNAL

Presented by the Mahoning County Prosecutor's Office  
Paul J. Gains, Prosecutor

## PROSECUTOR'S OFFICE RELEASES INAUGURAL ANNUAL REPORT

The Mahoning County Prosecutor's Office released its 2021 Annual Report. The 19-page report recounts events from 2021, including significant cases and matters, a synopsis of the work performed by each division in the office, and the office's community involvement. For the calendar year 2021, the Prosecutor's Office was responsible for prosecuting every offense level, including felonies, juvenile cases, and adult misdemeanors. In addition, the office provided legal representation to all Mahoning County elected officials and boards, including the trustees and fiscal officers of all fourteen townships. This year, the Prosecutor's Office, in collaboration with the Board of Mahoning County Commissioners and Mahoning County Sheriff, created the Mahoning County Special Needs Registry and sponsored a donation drive benefitting victims of domestic violence.

This Quarter our newsletter is jam packed with information on our Inaugural Annual Report, 2 new hires, our community outreach initiative, notable cases and more!

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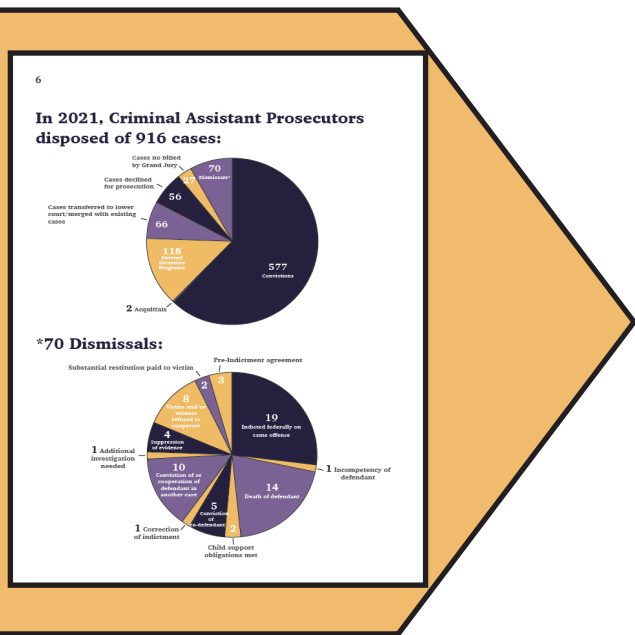
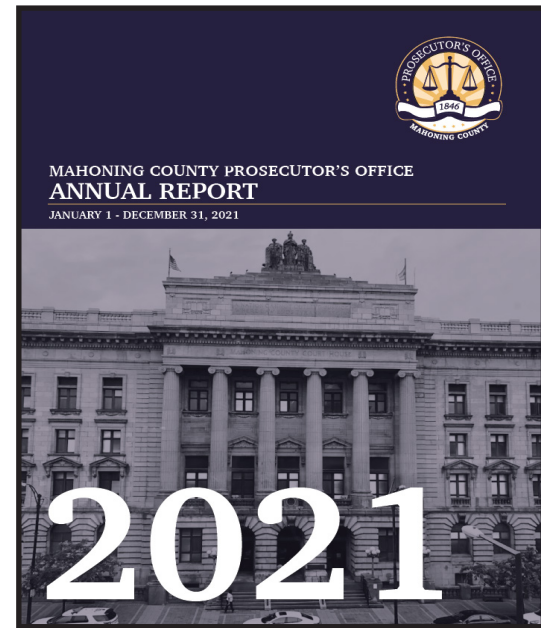
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WOMAN'S HISTORY MONTH

# OFFICE NEWS

## Inaugural Annual Report

The Mahoning County Prosecutor's Office would like to announce the inaugural Annual Report formally. The Annual report is also loaded with easy-to-understand information. We have broken down statistics and specific cases easy enough for anyone to read and understand the office's accomplishments within the last year. Our extensive report also outlines all the different divisions within the Prosecutor's Office. The report explains the duties of the Criminal Division, Civil Division, Delinquent Tax Division, V.A.W.A., Appellate Division, and our Victim/Witness Services.



The report is meant to bring a sense of transparency and understanding to the work we accomplish throughout the year. Our 2021 Annual Report is filled with statistics that explain what the Mahoning County Prosecutor's Office does for Mahoning County. For example, our Criminal Division resolved 916 matters and our Civil Division handled over 2,500 legal issues and reviewed over 1, 100 contracts. In addition, our Delinquent Tax Division collected over 1.5 million dollars on behalf of the Mahoning County Treasurer's Office.

Also, you'll be able to meet the prosecutors who help protect the people of Mahoning County and represent the Townships of Mahoning County. We have a team of over 40 attorneys who have years of experience with criminal, juvenile, and civil law.

EXECUTIVE TEAM	
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# OFFICE NEWS

## New Appointments

We are pleased to announce the appointments of Alan Rodges and Ella Dumke. Alan will serve as the Public Information Specialist, while Ella is a Victims/Witness Coordinator for Mahoning County Prosecutor's Office.

Public Information Specialist Alan Rodges works for the Mahoning Prosecutor's Office with several goals: to extend community outreach and emphasize the office's fantastic work. Alan Rodges holds a B.A. in Journalism from Youngstown State University and an M.A. in Professional Communications from Youngstown State University. Rodges comes from a news background where he worked in Cleveland as a local news producer and right here in Youngstown at 21 WFMJ.

Victim/Witness Coordinator Ella Dumke is also new to the Mahoning County Prosecutor's Office. Dumke comes to the Prosecutor's Office with plenty of experience after working for Someplace Safe, Trumbull County Domestic Violence Shelter, as a Shelter Advocate and then as a Legal Advocate for the Niles Municipal Court. She also helped prepare Civil Protection Orders for Domestic Violence victims. Dumke says she accepted this position to assist victims and witnesses and make the legal process easy for those who have already had traumatic experiences. Dumke holds an Associate Degree in Criminal Justice, and an Associate in Legal Assisting Technology, both acquired from Kent State University.



Alan Rodges

Public Information Specialist



Ella Dumke

Victim/Witness Coordinator

# OFFICE NEWS

## COMMUNITY OUTREACH

### JUSTICE FOR ALL

Assistant County Prosecutors Ebenezer Appiagyei and Lori Shells Simons went to Westminster College to volunteer in a Diversity and Inclusion Event called “JUSTICE FOR ALL.” It is an interactive program displaying systemic racism in the Criminal Justice System, held to celebrate Black History Month. Lori and Ebenezer were tasked with playing the roles of Prosecutor and Defense Counsel during the fictional case. At the same time, the students were the jurors, and Judge Carla J Baldwin played the role of Judge from Youngstown Municipal Court.



### TOWNSHIP TRAINING

In February, our office held a meeting for the Township Trustees. During this meeting, our Prosecutors explained to the dozens of township officials how different legal processes work. That includes labor laws, open meeting laws, Ohio Public Records Act, and breaking down the process of obtaining and spending ARPA money. The Mahoning County Prosecutor’s Office is the statutory legal counsel to all County elected officials, County offices, County boards and commissions, The Mahoning County Law Library, and all Fourteen townships in Mahoning County, including township officers, boards, commissions, and police departments.



### YSU EXPLORATION AND CAREER FAIR

In March, our office was well represented at the Youngstown State University Spring 2022: All Majors Career Exploration Fair & Graduate College Fair! Our Chief Assistant Prosecutor, Linette Stratford, and Assistant Criminal Chief Prosecutor, Ralph Rivera, reached out to aspiring students who had questions about the Criminal Justice System and the ins and outs of practicing law. There are Summer Internships that are available right now on our website. Students will be able to take advantage of several internships that give them invaluable experience! The office is looking for those who want to work in every level; there are openings for an Appellate, Felony Criminal, and Civil Division interns. If your’e interested please visit [Prosecutor.mahoningcountyoh.gov](http://Prosecutor.mahoningcountyoh.gov) for more!



Thank you to all of the students that took the time to speak with us, and thank you to the YSU staff for being very accommodating.

# OFFICE NEWS

## SPECIAL NEEDS REGISTRY CONTINUES TO MAKE HEADLINES

It's April and that means the Easter Bunny is about to spring into homes! More and more families are gathering outside to participate in Easter egg hunts. Our Office was invited to the All-Inclusive Egg Hunt at the Canfield Fairgrounds. The extraordinary event was an accommodating place for families of all shapes and sizes; our office was fortunate enough to take part, hand out gift bags, and spread awareness about our Special Needs Registry!



In March, two local news outlets featured the Special Needs Registry. The Vindicator and WKBN both did a story about the new registry that helps law enforcement and first responders to assist people with special needs. Both news stories have helped get our message out to a broader audience. Nearly 70 families have signed up for the Special Needs Registry so far. If you or anyone you know wants more information or would like to sign someone up for the registry, visit our website at <https://prosecutor.mahoningcountyoh.gov/>.



# OFFICE NEWS

## COMMUNITY OUTREACH

Over this past year, several of the Prosecutors within this office decided to take on the joys of teaching at Youngstown State University. Assistant Prosecutor Ed Czopur, Chief Assistant Linette Stratford and Criminal Chief Assistant Prosecutor Ralph Rivera all teach classes at YSU. Attorney Czopur and Assistant Chief Rivera teach classes in the Criminal Justice Department as well as Constitutional Law, Chief Assistant Stratford teaches Business Ethics and Philosophy of Law classes.



## AUSTINTOWN MOCK TRIAL TEAM ACCOMPLISHES HISTORIC ACHIEVEMENT

The Austintown Fitch Mock Trial Team is excited to announce that both teams have earned a chance to compete in the Regional Competition after winning their first series of trials. This achievement is a first in Austintown Fitch history, and it is no small feat! While the Fitch Mock Trial Team has consistently developed complex case strategies year after year, the one thing that had eluded the team was a bid for the Regional Competition. All that changed at this year's District Competition when Fitch Team Red competed on January 13 and Fitch Blue Team competed on January 21. Both teams blew the competition out of the water and won their first series of trials to advance to this year's Regionals! Several Attorneys from the Prosecutor's Office have helped the Austintown Mock Trial team this season. Assistant Prosecutor Raymond Hartsough acts as the team's legal advisor. Grand Jury Prosecutor Michael Yacavone, Chief Assistant Prosecutor Linette Stratford, and Assistant Prosecutor Kevin Trapp served as mock trial judges for the aspiring students. "These students have worked so hard every year to get better every day, every practice, and every season. To see them finally have their hard work payoff is amazing, and we are so proud of each and every one of them!" said Attorney Hartsough.



# CRIMINAL DIVISION NEWS

## NOTABLE CASES

### *State of Ohio V. Shainquon Sharpe & Taquashon Ray*

On February 10th, a jury found Shainquon Sharpe & Taquashon Ray guilty for the November 2018 shooting deaths of Edward Morris, Valarcia Blair, and their three-month-old son, Tariq. Sharpe and Ray were both found guilty of three counts of aggravated murder. The Honorable Judge Maureen A. Sweeney sentenced the two men to life in prison with parole eligibility after 107 years. The two men were found guilty after shooting and killing Morris, Blair, and their son Tariq in a car parked in front of a home at Pasadena Avenue and Gibson Street. Morris was found shot dead on Gibson St. while Blair and Tariq were both alive when officers first arrived but soon died after being transported to the hospital. Great work Attorneys Andrews and Meikle!



**Robert J. Andrews**  
**Senior Trial Counsel**



**Aaron Meikle**  
**Assistant Prosecutor**

### *State of Ohio vs. Mark Cuprik*

On February 7th, 23-year old Mark Cuprik plead guilty to sex charges. The former youth pastor pleaded guilty to a slew of charges, including Sexual Battery, Pandering Sexually-Oriented Material involving a Minor, Importuning, and Disseminating Material Harmful to a Juvenile. Cuprik was sentenced to four years in prison by the Honorable Judge R. Scott Kirchbaum. Cuprik will also have to register as a sex offender for the rest of his life. Cuprik had a sexual relationship with a 15-year-old girl and then moved in on a 13-year-old girlfriend. He began sending pictures to the first victim in 2017 when he was 18, and she was 14. Great work Attorney Andrews!



**Caitlyn Andrews**  
**Assistant Prosecutor**

# CRIMINAL DIVISION NEWS

## NOTABLE CASES CONT...

### State of Ohio vs. Dustin Rüter

On January 4th, 47-year-old Dustin Rüter was convicted of rape, and was sentenced to 77 years behind bars. All of Rüter's victims were minors. The sexual assaults involved three minors aged 16, 15, and 14. Rüter was found guilty by a jury of over 70 sex charges involving minors; 33 were Felony Rape and Sexual Battery charges. The state called 13 witnesses during the four-day trial. Rüter will also need to register as a Tier III sex offender every 90 days for the rest of his life if/when he is released from prison.



Jennifer McLaughlin  
Chief, Criminal Division



Caitlyn Andrews  
Assistant Prosecutor



# HUMAN TRAFFICKING PREVENTION MONTH

## Prosecutor's Office brings attention to Human Trafficking in Ohio

January is National Human Trafficking Prevention Month. Human Trafficking is a complex topic to talk about, but it's a topic that our office and law enforcement around this country will not shy away from. In 2020, Ohio had 310 reported Human Trafficking cases, over 260 of those involved women, while 77 involved minors. In 2012, The Ohio Human Trafficking Task Force was created by Executive Order, and it coordinates efforts between 11 departments. The task force was created to help victims of Human Trafficking by attempting to intervene and apprehend the criminals before anyone is severely injured. The Mahoning County Prosecutor's Office plays a big part in helping the task force. The hard-working attorneys within this office have prosecuted two high-profile cases within Mahoning County.

### STATE V. KALNA



**CONVICTED**

- David Kalna was the first Human Trafficking cases tried in Mahoning County.
- Kalna was convicted for trafficking a 15-year-old girl.
- Kalna was trading 'dates' with the 15-year-old in exchange for money.
- When the girl didn't want to spend time with the man Kalna was setting her up with, Kalna threatened her.
- Kalna was sentenced to a minimum 30-years in prison. He must also register as a Tier Two sex offender when he completes his sentence.



**CONVICTED**

### STATE V. HELLMAN

- Ronald Hellman was another high profile case in Mahoning County.
- Hellman was convicted of running a Human Trafficking ring that involved numerous women, including juveniles.
- Hellman was paid to give women to another man.
- Hellman was sentenced to 15 years in prison and ordered to register as a Tier Three sex offender.

# CIVIL DIVISION NEWS

## Prosecutor's Office helps secure ARPA funds for cafe helping those in need

In 2021, the United States Congress allocated certain funds to communities across the United States through the American Rescue Plan Act. These funds restore communities affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, including Mahoning County. With the funds allocated to Mahoning County, many programs aimed at enhancing our county have applied through the Mahoning County Commissioners to receive funds. The Mahoning County Prosecutor's Office has been an integral part in helping ensure that specific legal requirements and benchmarks are met before any of these funds are allocated to any of the programs. Each month, we will feature one of these

sisting in making Mahoning County turing Café Augustine. Café August-County for just over five years. Since its establishment in 2015, the looking for a financial footing for volunteers and paid employees from are the norm. The county agreed that en \$50,000 under the American Res-

teaches youth business life skills, mentoring, and personal finance. The accomplishments that these young men and women have set are becoming a beacon of hope and growth within an area stricken with poverty and crime. Café Augustine also boasts several resources for those entering the program, including a business curriculum that opens up opportunities for gainful employment. The students are involved in the daily inventory, preparing shopping lists, going to the store to get the necessary items needed for the café, and safely storing the products when they return. All students must take an online food safety course to learn the proper handling and storing of food before working in the kitchen. Some students that have graduated from the café's program are now in managerial roles. They are learning how to balance the responsibilities that come with leadership. The establishment is based on welcoming someone from a financially troubled home to their first job experience with the chance to learn how to network and observe how a business is run. Café Augustine is just one of the many businesses trying to make a difference in Mahoning County.



fantastic programs and how they are as-a better place. This month, we are fea-tine has been a staple within Mahoning café has played home to inner-city youth successful careers. The café is staffed by backgrounds where financial hardships the Saint Augustine Society could be giv-cue Plan Act to establish a program that



# CIVIL DIVISION NEWS

## **Prosecutor's Office helps secure ARPA funds for organization that assists with mortgage and rent relief**

We are also featuring the Mahoning-Youngstown Community Action Partnership, better known as MYCAP. In 2021, MYCAP applied to receive ARPA funds to establish a utility and mortgage relief program for those facing financial hardships during the pandemic. The Mahoning County Board of Commissioners, with the assistance of the Prosecutor's Office, took a closer look at MYCAP and their proposal and agreed that it qualified to receive \$500,000 under the American Rescue Plan Act get the ball rolling. MYCAP's utility and mortgage relief program was a great success, and the funds expended under it helped countless families to stay warm and in their homes throughout the year.

So what exactly is MYCAP, and what is its mission? In 1965, the Youngstown Area Community Action Agency was founded as a non-profit organization to "mobilize and utilize the resources within the City of Youngstown and Mahoning County for the purpose of making a unified attack on poverty therein." In 2003, the organization change its name, but its mission remained the same.

MYCAP accomplishes its mission by aiming their programming towards moderate to low-income individuals in keeping or putting a roof over their heads while also providing for the implementation, coordination, and delivery of quality programs and services to help these individuals overcome social and economic poverty barriers.

An example of MYCAP's programs is its Winter Crisis Program. This program helps eligible Ohioans to stay warm during the winter months through financial assistance for members of the community whose gas or electricity is set to be disconnected, who have less than a 25% supply of bulk fuel, or who are in need of a repair to their non-heating furnace.

The Winter Assistance program is just one of the many programs that MYCAP has to offer Mahoning County residents. Other programs include the Home Weatherization Assistance Program, the Electric Partnership Program, the Emergency & Planned Assistance Program, the Mahoning Senior Levy Programs, the Professional Development Center, and many more. MYCAP's longevity and tradition of community partnerships is truly a testament to the spirit of cooperation and togetherness found only in Mahoning County!

MYCAP is just one of many non-profits making a difference in Mahoning County. Check out next month's edition of the Justice Journal to see what other organizations are helping to strengthen our communities!



# WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH

## Celebrating the amazing women of the Mahoning County Prosecutor's Office

March was Women's History Month, and during that month, we took time to recognize the amazing women that work right here in this office! We want to acknowledge every one of their contributions' to Mahoning County. They strive to make this office a wonderful place to work and help keep Mahoning County a safe place to live. Today and every day, we celebrate the women leading the way and making a difference. March 8 is also known as International Women's Day.



### First woman elected as a Boardman

### Township Trustee passes away at 85

In 1991, Elaine Mancini was elected as a Boardman Township Trustee after upsetting Democratic Incumbent Paul Shovlin. It was a historic moment in Boardman history. Mancini served several terms as chairperson. Elaine Mancini was a strong advocate of drug and alcohol education. She was a charter member of the advisory board of drug-free, a program dedicated to educating children on alcohol and drug abuse in public schools. Mancini was treasurer and member of the Boardman School Board. Mancini was a strong advocate of the Boardman Police Department programs that improved professionalism and service to the community. She also was a key influence on how the Boardman Police Department transitioned into the age of computer software and programs. Mrs. Mancini retired in 2007. She was a dedicated public official and a wonderful friend to Boardman and Mahoning County and will be sorely missed.



# NEWS AROUND TOWN

## SAYING GOODBYE TO LONGTIME CHIEF



With a new Police Chief, Poland Township says goodbye to the previous one. Former Police Chief Brian Goodin will now step away. He's been a part of the Poland Township police force for 38 years and has acted as Chief for the last 18 years. In February, dozens of people said their goodbyes to former Chief Goodin, who has a retirement party at the Poland Township Administrative building this month. Goodin was gifted with a "Job well done" plaque from the County Commissioners and a retirement badge and ID from the new Chief, Greg Wilson. Goodin has already started his new job for the City of Columbus as the assistant director for the Department of Public Safety.

## BIG MOVES HAPPENNING IN POLAND POLICE DEPARTMENT

In December, the Poland Township Police Department received a brand new Chief of Police! Chief Greg Wilson was sworn in as the new Poland Township Police Department Chief. Wilson has been working in law enforcement for nearly 30 years and held the title of a detective for 20 years. Wilson was hired as a patrolman in 1997 and was just recently assigned to the Poland Investigative Unit. Wilson is also a Mahoning County Task Force member and has worked closely with the FBI, DEA, and ATF.

