



G. GARY TYACK

FRANKLIN COUNTY PROSECUTING ATTORNEY

First Annual Prosecutor's Report – 2021 Recap and Look Forward to 2022

On January 4, 2021, Gary Tyack was sworn in as the first new Franklin County Prosecutor in 24 years. This change of leadership during the midst of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic presented its own set of unprecedented challenges. Despite those challenges, the pursuit of justice continued as felony caseloads increased, eligible offenders sought diversion and treatment, and government agencies sought our legal advice and support. While focused on their own individual challenges, most people were understandably unaware of the pandemic's "hurricane" of impacts on the judicial and criminal justice system.

- **Lack of Jury Trials:** Due to the pandemic, there were almost no jury trials from late March 2020 to April 2021. In April 2021, judges implemented alternating weekly schedules thereafter to reduce COVID spread, both of which slowed the trial docket.
- **The 2021 spike in homicide cases** – On December 31, 2021, there were 193 pending and charged homicide cases in Franklin County. In all of 2021, the City of Columbus alone saw an additional 204 homicides committed.
- **Time & Resource Consuming High-Profile Cases:** Several high profile police shootings and a homicide case involving a medical doctor and multiple victims. Juries have rendered decisions in two of those cases.
- **Law Enforcement & Prosecutor Staffing Shortages or Turnovers:** Some police agency staff shortages coupled with pandemic-caused delays in forensic testing and processing of evidence.
- **COVID budgetary belt-tightening in 2020** that saw well over twenty (20) assistant prosecutor vacancies that were later filled in 2021.

We are mindful that families and small businesses have struggled and continue to struggle to navigate the treacherous waters of the ongoing pandemic. The aftereffects on our communities (inflation, housing costs, supply chain and health care delivery) all remain. Similarly, there were no obvious or simple solutions to the challenges this Office has faced.

To find solutions, we sought out and listened to our many stakeholders, including the public, our staff, the courts, community leaders, our police officers, defense attorneys and policy makers – all of whom have a voice in how we can do better in ensuring justice, protecting civil rights, and improving public safety.

After taking a deeper dive into Office culture, we set about to implement some positive changes based on stakeholder feedback. Below is just a small sampling of our progress in 2021:

- **Increasing Prosecutor Office diversity:** To help ensure this Office reflects the communities we serve, minority hires increased by nearly 50% within the first year.
- **Adding and assigning assistant prosecutors to areas where needed:** In response to certain rising violent crime rates, the Office added positions to the Gun Crimes Unit, Major Crimes Unit, Special Victims Unit, and Drug Unit. Nearly every assistant prosecutor is handling at least one homicide case and some prosecutors with up to 15 homicide cases.
- **Securing a federal grant for \$551,000.00 to establish a first ever Conviction Integrity Unit** to bolster public confidence that convictions are not in error.
- **Revamping the Civil Division to improve efficiency and customer service** to the many local government and county entities that this office represents.
- **Stepping up community education and outreach** including leading the Joint Task Force of federal, state and local law enforcement agencies to find ways to better connect and collect digital evidence of serious crimes from (video cameras, shot spotter, license plate readers, etc.).
- **Crime Center:** Based on the work of the Prosecutor-led Joint Task Force on Digital Evidence, the City of Columbus committed to build a Real Time Crime and Information Center in conjunction with its new computer aided dispatch center. This initiative will help to better detect, respond to, and prosecute serious crimes. Also to be a police force multiplier as the number of patrol officers has declined in the City of Columbus from 2020 to the present.
- **Increasing collections of drug seizure monies:** \$284,535.81 in 2020 to over \$538,000 in 2021.
- **Filing and indicting criminal defendants on some 12,241 felony charges in 2021.**
- **Applying for over \$3.5M dollars in posted ARPA Grant dollars** to assist the Office in securing additional resources to combat COVID-related spikes in violent crime. These grant dollars would be used in conjunction with our law enforcement partners to reduce serious crime spikes.
- **Working to improve state and county coordination to better combat Elder Abuse & Financial Exploitation.** The Office is helping lead this effort along with the County Probate Court, County Adult Protective Services, the Ohio Office on Aging, and the Ohio Department of Public Safety. This initiative will better engage & educate seniors; family members, caregivers, attorneys; financial institutions, medical providers, and other stakeholders. This along with enhanced resources to better prevent and address elder abuse/financial exploitation situations.

Besides securing convictions in nearly 40 homicide cases in 2021, there were many other noteworthy complex prosecution cases in 2021, too many to mention here. However, examples of just two of them are:

- **A 2021 felony indictment of a former book keeper** who allegedly stole \$720,000 from one former employer and \$220,000 from another. This new indictment came after a conviction in Common Pleas Court and previously serving time in federal prison for similar offenses.
- **A major drug investigation** in 2021 that resulted in a multi-count indictment with the arrest of some 79 defendants who are part of a larger multi-state drug trafficking ring. This is a very complex drug trafficking case that is part of our office’s stepped up efforts to reduce illicit and dangerous fentanyl-laced drugs which are causing more deaths in our county. These are illicit fake prescription looking drugs that kill unsuspecting drug users. In some cases, victims think they are taking a prescription drug rather than a dangerous fentanyl-laced drug.

Narcotics Seized:

Fentanyl – 11,917.6 grams
Cocaine – 47,650.10 grams
Methamphetamine – 3,203.70 grams
Crack Cocaine – 59 grams
Misc. Pills – 120 UD
Marijuana - 1,029 grams

Weapons Seized:

Handguns – 37
Assault Style Rifle – 4
Shot Guns – 6
Rifle - 2

Currency Seized:

\$511,838.00

The Common Pleas Court statistics for 2021 speak for themselves in showing how many criminal cases each judge must manage. The number of monthly pending criminal cases among the 17 common pleas judges averaged 312 per judge in January 2021 and reportedly improved to 292 in December 2021. The averages are coming down. Even so, in part due to COVID, the time needed to properly adjudicate and move criminal and civil cases through the justice system has increased as it has almost everywhere in the world.

All of this and more stretched our Office to its limits. Yet, our staff rose to the occasion as did law enforcement, the forensic experts, the courts, treatment facilities, the County Coroner’s office and other community stakeholders.

Franklin County residents can be proud of the work everyone has done at this Office. In these extraordinarily difficult times, we continue to work to reduce case backlogs and address resource and staff shortages. We will continue to join with our residents to work for a fair, just and compassionate justice system. One that works to treat all people “... the way we would want to be treated.”

G. Gary Tyack, Prosecutor