



LANCASTER

**2022 Annual Report of the
Law Director & City Prosecutor
Stephanie L. Hall**

I. Introduction & General Information

- A. Law Director & City Prosecutor – The City of Lancaster is organized under the general statutory plan of municipal government. Therefore, pursuant to Ohio Revised Code (“ORC”) § 733.49, the City Director of Law “shall be elected for a term of four years, commencing on the first day of January next after his election. He shall be an elector of the city.” In addition to being a Lancaster resident who has reached the age of majority, ORC § 733.50 prohibits any person from being “eligible to the office of city director of law who is not an attorney at law, admitted to practice in this state.” Presently, Stephanie L. Hall, who resides within the municipal corporation limits and holds Ohio attorney registration number 0082045, is the appointed Law Director & City Prosecutor. She is also licensed to practice in the United States District Court, Southern District of Ohio, and the Supreme Court of the United States.
- B. Duties – The Law Director is responsible for providing civil and criminal legal services as enumerated in the ORC for the City of Lancaster. By contract with the Fairfield County Board of Commissioners, the City of Reynoldsburg, and the City of Pickerington, the Law Director also prosecutes all the adult misdemeanor crimes that occur in Fairfield County.
- C. Contact Information – The Law Director & City Prosecutor’s Office is located on the second floor of the Fairfield County Municipal Court at 136 W. Main Street, Lancaster. The office is open from 7:45 am to 4:15 pm, Monday through Friday, and closed on all City holidays. You can reach the office during normal business hours by calling (740) 687-6616. For general inquiries, assistance, or public records requests, the office email address is: lawdirector@ci.lancaster.oh.us.
- D. Website – Additional information regarding the office can be located on the Law Director & City Prosecutor’s homepage which can be found on the City of Lancaster’s website at: <https://www.ci.lancaster.oh.us/196/Law-Director>.



Law Director’s Office Swearing-In Group Photo, January 2022

II. Law Director & City Prosecutor Staff



Law Director & City Prosecutor Stephanie L. Hall was appointed in January of 2022 but has been with the office since she started as a Licensed Legal Intern in 2006. As Law Director, she is chief legal counsel for the City and as City Prosecutor she is responsible for the prosecution of all adult misdemeanor crimes in Fairfield County. Stephanie is an Amanda-Clearcreek graduate, and she received her bachelor's degree from Ohio University and her juris doctorate from Capital University Law School.



Assistant Law Director Mitch Harden is responsible for both civil and criminal matters. He advises City administrators and elected officials, department superintendents, boards, commissions, and committees on a variety of legal issues. He also supervises the prosecution of criminal cases and appeals. Mitch is a Logan High School graduate, and he received his bachelor's degree from The Ohio State University and his juris doctorate from Capital University Law School. He has been with the office since April of 2017.



Senior Attorney Dave Klemp represents the City and State in all stages of prosecution in the Fairfield County Municipal Court and Fifth District Court of Appeals. Dave is a Westerville North graduate, and he received his bachelor's degree from The Ohio State University and his juris doctorate from Capital University Law School. He has been with the office since May of 2017. Prior to that he practiced in insurance subrogation.



Family Violence Unit Prosecutor Joe Sabo represents the City and State in all stages of prosecution in the Fairfield County Municipal Court and Fifth District Court of Appeals. Originally from Northeastern Ohio, Joe received his bachelor's degree from Kent State University and his juris doctorate from Case Western Reserve University School of Law. He has been with the office since January of 2019. Prior to that he practiced in the areas of civil litigation and non-profit law.



Assistant Prosecutor James Young represents the City and State in all stages of prosecution in the Fairfield County Municipal Court and Fifth District Court of Appeals. James received his bachelor's degree from The Ohio State University and his juris doctorate from Capital University Law School. He has been with the office since October of 2021. Prior to that he served in the Navy and practiced as a criminal defense attorney in Southeast Ohio.



Assistant Prosecutor Andrew Semelsberger represents the City and State in all stages of prosecution in the Fairfield County Municipal Court and Fifth District Court of Appeals. Andrew received his bachelor's degree from Belmont University and his juris doctorate from Suffolk University Law School. He has been with the office since November of 2022.



Office Manager Teresa Sandy serves as support staff for the Law Director and Assistant Law Director and prepares easements, contracts, legislation, and other legal documents as well as managing all budgeting, collections, supplies, payroll, and grant coordination. Teresa is a Fairfield Union graduate. She has been with the office since January of 1996.



Victim Services Paralegal Jenny Swope serves as support staff for prosecutors exclusively handling victim-related offenses, including domestic and dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking. She also assists all victims of violent crime with navigating the prosecutorial process. Jenny is a Logan High School graduate, and she received her associate degree from Hocking College. She has been with the office since July of 2007.



Paralegal Elisabeth Azbell serves as support staff for the prosecutor handling non-victim related and traffic offenses on Judge Ullom's docket. Elisabeth is a Berne Union High School graduate. She has been with the office since January of 2010.



Paralegal Liz Martens serves as support staff for the prosecutor handling non-victim related and traffic offenses on Judge Fields' docket. Liz is a Lancaster High School graduate, and she received her bachelor's degree from The Ohio State University. She has been with the office since December of 2014.



Clerical Assistant Taci Miller serves as general support staff for the office. She also assists members of law enforcement and the public with their requests for criminal charges. Taci is a Liberty Union High School graduate and received her bachelor's degree from Youngstown State University where she majored in criminal justice. She has been with the office since August of 2022.

III. Civil Report

A. Civil Activities –

1. Legal Counsel: Pursuant to the Ohio Revised Code, the City Director of Law is legal counsel for all City Departments, City Administration, City Council, City Boards, Committees and Commissions, and the Lancaster Board of Education. The Law Director’s Office attends all regularly scheduled council, committee, commission, and board meetings, as well as special meetings when requested. The Law Director also serves as legal counsel for the Lancaster Port Authority, a complex component unit dedicated to local economic development.
2. Legislation: The Law Director is responsible for preparing all legislation for City Council. The chart below details the number of ordinances and resolutions provided in 2022 and how that compares to prior years.

YEAR	ORDINANCES	RESOLUTIONS
2017	41	146
2018	30	100
2019	32	152
2020	35	140
2021	51	147
2022	44	163

3. Legal Opinions: The Law Director issues oral and written legal opinions upon request of City Council, City Administration, City Departments, City Boards, City Schools, and the Lancaster Port Authority. The Law Director encourages written opinions so that the City develops an archive to assist with complex legal issues now and in the future. Many legal opinions were sought and issued in 2022 regarding a variety of topics. These opinions are not public records as they are privileged attorney/client communications.
4. Civil Litigation: In 2022, the City was actively involved in eleven (11) cases involving community block grant mortgage foreclosures, allegations of personal injury, allegations of federal and state law violations, declaratory relief actions, construction law claims, and constitutional law challenges. The Law Director & City Prosecutor’s Office litigates these cases internally and in some cases, with the assistance of outside counsel. Due to the nature of civil litigation, additional details regarding these pending civil litigation cases are attorney/client privilege and/or work product privilege but may be made available to City Council members for review.
5. Self-Insured Claims: The City received four (4) insurance claims in 2022 involving vehicle, personal injury, and property damage. Of the four (4) claims filed, three (3) were denied; one (1) was paid by the Lancaster Department of Transportation. The Law Director’s Office assumed this responsibility in 2006 in order to save the City approximately \$20,000.00 annually. The Law Director & City Prosecutor’s Office, in conjunction with the City’s insurance agent, processes, investigates, and reviews these claims against the City in the context of governmental immunity. Due to the nature of these claims, additional details regarding their review and disposition are attorney/client privilege and/or work product privilege but may be made available to City Council members for review.

B. Administration –

1. Internal Legal Counsel: The Law Director & City Prosecutor and her staff provide advice and legal counsel to the Mayor, Service Safety Director, Auditor, Treasurer, Income Tax Commissioner, and all department heads who administer the various City departments. In 2022, in addition to constant phone, text, and email communication, the Law Director met personally with the Mayor and Service Safety Director bi-weekly to assist with the lawful and efficient operation of the City.
2. Outside Counsel: The Law Director is responsible for coordinating the efforts of all outside counsel for the City. Below are the attorneys and firms the City used in 2022 for legal issues that required outside counsel.

- a. Bond and Tax Counsel: Squire Patton Boggs – The City utilizes the bond expertise of Attorney Allison Binkley and tax law expertise of Attorney Michael Cullers.
- b. Labor Counsel: Fishel Downey Albrecht & Riepenhoff, LLP – The City utilizes the labor expertise of Attorney Marc Fishel.
- c. Construction Law Counsel: Bricker & Eckler – The City utilizes the construction law expertise of Attorneys Mark Evans, Jeff McSherry, Doug Shevelow, and Jack Rosati.
- d. Energy Counsel: Bricker & Eckler – The City utilizes the energy expertise of Attorneys Glenn Krassen and Caleb Bell.
- e. Workers Compensation Counsel: Fishel Downey Albrecht & Riepenhoff, LLP – The City utilizes the Bureau of Worker’s Compensation expertise of Attorney David Riepenhoff.
- f. Special Prosecutors: Various – In an effort to save taxpayer money, whenever there is a conflict of interest that precludes the City from prosecuting a criminal matter, the City trades special prosecution services with other political subdivisions and utilizes the Ohio Attorney General’s Office as needed as well. In 2022, Assistant Prosecutors served as appointed counsel in two (2) criminal cases at the request of other local political subdivisions.
- g. Insurance Carrier Appointed Outside Counsel: Various – The City’s insurance carriers appoint various outside legal counsel to litigate lawsuits filed against the City in which the insurance carrier is providing coverage on the claim.
- h. Right-of-Way and Telecommunications Law: Ice Miller – The City utilizes the right-of-way and telecommunications expertise of Attorney Chris Miller.
- i. Income Tax Litigation: Frost Brown Todd LLC – The City utilizes the income tax expertise of Frost Brown Todd Attorneys Eugene Hollins, Stephen Smith, Frank Reed, Yazan Ashrawi, and Thad Boggs.
- j. Tax Incremental Financing (TIF): Bricker & Eckler – The City utilizes the economic development expertise of Attorneys Caleb Bell and Colin Kalvas.



- C. Board of Education – Pursuant to Section 3313.35 of the ORC, the Law Director is authorized to represent the Board of Education of the Lancaster City School District. The Law Director & City Prosecutor provides advice and legal representation to Lancaster City Schools as needed.

D. Miscellaneous

1. Additional Services

- a. Down Payment Recovery: The Law Director reviews all contract forms for the Community Development Department for the award of Community Development Block Grant Funds and assists in the recovery of these funds in foreclosure and bankruptcy cases.
- b. Collections for Damage to City Property: Since 1998, the Law Director’s Office has conducted collections actions for all City departments when City property is damaged (i.e., fire hydrants, guardrails, and other City infrastructure). In 2022, the Law Director’s Office obtained judgements for, collected and/or forwarded to collections \$17,623.98 in taxpayer funds.
- c. Zoning and Code Enforcement: The Law Director & City Prosecutor’s Office is mandated by ORC to handle misdemeanor zoning and code enforcement prosecution for the townships and villages in Fairfield County. As these political subdivisions adopt zoning and property maintenance codes, prosecutions for these violations continue to increase annually.
- d. Special Assessments: When property owners fail to comply with property maintenance codes within the municipal corporation limits, the Code Enforcement Department may abate the violation using the services of a contractor. The abatement expense is then assessed against the property’s tax duplicate by the Fairfield County Auditor pursuant to ORC along with an administrative processing fee and a special assessment fee. The Law Director’s Office coordinates with Code Enforcement to file these assessments on behalf the City. The property cannot be transferred until the assessed amount is paid in full. The chart below details the total amount of assessments the Law Director filed in 2022 and how that compares to prior years.

Year	Annual Total	
2017	\$53,916.00	These amounts include all Code Enforcement expenditures for mowing, trimming, demolishing, securing and cleaning-up neglected properties.
2018	\$89,276.00	
2019	\$155,235.90	
2020	\$65,282.00	
2021	\$79,507.60	
2022	\$67,514.00	

IV. Criminal Report

- A. Criminal Prosecution – Pursuant to ORC 1901.34, the Law Director & City Prosecutor’s Office is responsible for the prosecution of misdemeanor criminal cases arising in the City of Lancaster and in the unincorporated areas of the county. Since 1997, the Law Director & City Prosecutor has contracted for reimbursement to the City for prosecution work performed for all the villages in Fairfield County (Amanda, Bremen, Carroll, Lithopolis, Millersport, Pleasantville, Rushville, Sugar Grove, Thurston, and West Rushville) by negotiating one contract with the Fairfield County Board of Commissioners. Additionally, the Law Director negotiates

prosecution contracts with the City of Pickerington and the City of Reynoldsburg due to the increased number of criminal cases being filed and prosecuted in the Fairfield County Municipal Court from those jurisdictions. Through this process, the Law Director is responsible for the prosecution of all adult misdemeanor crimes that occur in Fairfield County, Ohio. This provides uniformity of access and expectations to Fairfield County law enforcement and the Municipal Court in the investigation and prosecution of adult misdemeanor crimes.

- B. Criminal Statistics – The Court’s statistics for the Law Director & City Prosecutor’s Office for 2022 represent the major use of resources of this office. Approximately 80% of the budgetary funding for the Law Director & City Prosecutor’s Office is used for criminal prosecution. Management and prosecution of the high volume of cases takes a team approach. Because of the short timeline for prosecution of misdemeanor cases (30-90 days without a time waiver), cases continue regardless of the availability of the prosecutor. Our office assigns Assistant Prosecutors to the dockets as needed to keep cases moving forward in the courts. The chart below gives a breakdown of cases prosecuted in 2022 and how that compares to prior years.

Fairfield County Municipal Court Statistics 2017 - 2022						
Year	Misdemeanor	OVI	Other Traffic	Jury Trials	Trials to Court	New Court Filings
2017	2,917	633	13,981	12	2,629	21,453
2018	2,517	532	12,347	13	2,114	19,616
2019	2,382	571	12,223	13	2,111	19,663
2020	1,782	372	8,381	3	1,182	13,539
2021	1,665	387	8,189	2	1,047	13,191
2022	1,764	560	9,980	11	1,191	15,485

- C. Grant Funding – Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) Grant: The Law Director & City Prosecutor applies annually for VAWA funding to cover the expense of one (1) Assistant Prosecutor position in our Family Violence Unit. This position focuses on and expedites the prosecution of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault and stalking cases and coordinates comprehensive victim services for victims affected by these crimes in Fairfield County. In 2022, we were awarded \$44,264.00 in VAWA funds from the Office of Criminal Justice Services to continue funding this position for 2023, bringing the Law Director’s total grant funding award amount to \$2,942,152.09.
- D. Family Violence Unit – To ensure efficient and effective prosecution of these cases pursuant to the Fairfield County Domestic Violence Protocol, and to assure that crime victims’ constitutional rights (Marsy’s Law) are guaranteed, the Law Director & City Prosecutor’s Office operates a Family Violence Unit. This Unit is funded in part by the VAWA grant. The Unit consists of two (2) Assistant Prosecuting Attorneys and one (1) Victim Paralegal that focus solely on coordinating and prosecuting these cases, separate and apart, from the other general criminal offenses being prosecuted by our office. The Family Violence Unit makes it possible to

devote the additional time and attention needed to successfully prosecute these cases. The chart below gives a breakdown of victim prosecutions and how that compares to prior years.

Family Violence Unit Statistics 2017 – 2022				
Year	DV Intakes	Stalking Intakes	Other SB 2 Cases	Total Victims Served
2017	261	23	487	770
2018	284	27	600	905
2019	280	27	842	1,149
2020	252	14	752	1,018
2021	242	20	693	955
2022	434	15	596	1,030

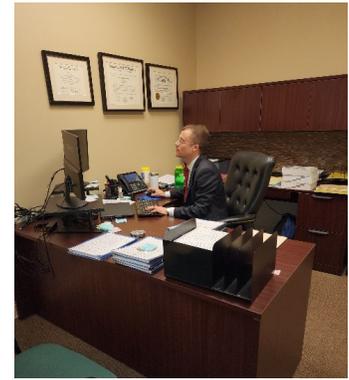
E. Law Enforcement Training – The Law Director & City Prosecutor’s Office provides free training annually on a variety of issues to all Fairfield Law Enforcement. In 2022, these trainings focused on the topics below.

1. Fairfield County Domestic Violence Protocol: This training was provided to all newly hired Lancaster Police Department Officers who are not familiar with the Fairfield County Domestic Violence Protocol which focuses on best practices for handling victim cases.
2. Case Law Update: This training was provided to all Pickerington Police Department Patrol Officers to educate them about important changes to case law in the Supreme Court of Ohio and Fifth District Court of Appeals.
3. Constitutional Carry Legal Update: This training was provided to the Lancaster Police Department in conjunction with the Fairfield County Prosecutor’s Office.
4. Crisis Intervention Training: This training was provided to the Fairfield County Law Enforcement officers attending this year’s multi-disciplinary ADAMH Crisis Intervention Training, which focused on the process of emergency admission for mentally ill individuals pursuant to the ORC.
5. Statutory and Administrative Code Review: This training was provided to Lancaster Fire Department employees in the Fire Inspector Certification class.

F. Attorney Training – Ohio attorneys are required to complete twenty-four (24) hours of Continuing Legal Education (CLE) bi-annually. The Law Director and her assistants try to focus on topics that will inform their criminal and civil work for the City, but due to budget constraints, they frequently rely on free CLEs provided by the Fairfield County Bar Association, the Ohio Traffic Resource Prosecutor, and other legal organizations. The 2022 CLE trainings attended included:

1. Moving on From Xanax: Impaired Driving with Novel Benzodiazepines
2. Ohio’s Sunshine Laws Training
3. OVI and Standardized Field Sobriety Testing
4. OVI and the Healthcare Portability and Accountability Act
5. IOLTA: Rule 1.15 and Attorney Unclaimed Funds
6. How to Have Difficult Conversations About Race
7. OSBA Winter Legislative Update
8. The Intersectionality of Inequality

9. Equity Education Series – Parts 1 & 2
10. Preference, Bias, Prejudice, and Privilege
11. Real Property Taxation from Start to Finish
12. OSBA Spring Legislative Update
13. 2022 Public Practice Legal Ethics Seminar
14. OSBA Summer Legislative Update
15. Supreme Court Update
16. Constitutional Implications of State Issue 1 and State Issue 2



V. In Summary

As anticipated, 2022 was a year of transition for the Law Director's Office. Internally, we focused on evaluating and refining our existing processes and procedures as well as filling vacant positions that are essential as the Court and world begin to return to business as usual post-pandemic. This year we welcomed a Clerical Assistant, Taci Miller, who happily assists law enforcement and the public with the filing of traffic and criminal charges, and Assistant Prosecutor Andrew Semelsberger, who skillfully represents the City and State in Judge Ullom's courtroom. They are both integral to operations already and we are very excited to watch them learn and grow in their respective positions.

While the total number of traffic and criminal filings for 2022 is not quite as high as it was pre-Covid, the number of jury trials was closer to normal, and the number of domestic violence filings increased significantly. Ohio has a preferred arrest policy for domestic violence, which gives officers little discretion when probable cause exists, so those cases were the only filings that did not decrease dramatically during the pandemic. Early in my career I prosecuted domestic violence cases exclusively, so I take these crimes very seriously. I am proud to report that the City's Family Violence Unit was partially funded by VAWA again this year. This office has relied on VAWA funding for approximately twenty (20) years, and while grant administration is a complicated and time consuming responsibility, we will continue to pursue VAWA funds even though we know they are not a permanent solution to ensure domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking cases get the prosecutorial attention they require.

On the civil side, we drafted more legislation than we have in years past, which demonstrates that the City has an active and engaged legislative authority. The City also experienced the fewest liability claims that it has ever experienced, which means your City employees are keeping themselves and others safe as they carry out the City's essential functions. My office continues to work alongside the new Executive Director of the Lancaster Port Authority, Stephanie Bosco, to help the City take advantage of all the economic development opportunities that arise. The City has been very fortunate on that front, but it does require a lot of unseen labor that keeps Executive Director Bosco, the Port Authority Board, and City Administration continuously busy.

Having worked in this office for sixteen (16) years alongside my extremely professional staff, I was confident that my appointment as Law Director would not disrupt the services we provide to the City, Fairfield County law enforcement, or the public. Their proficiency allows me to focus on the unique legal challenges the City is facing, and I have my predecessors to thank for that, specifically Judge Terre L. Vandervoort and Judge Randall T. Ullom. They put people and processes in place during their tenure to ensure the continuous, efficient operation of the Law Director & City Prosecutor's office. The other City elected officials, including the Mayor, City Council, the Auditor, and the Treasurer, and the City department heads have been a pleasure to work with. I especially appreciate the institutional knowledge they possess and their desire to serve the citizens of Lancaster. The Fairfield County Municipal Court's elected officials, including the Judges and the Clerk of Court, as well as each of Fairfield County's elected officials, have been extremely welcoming and helpful in my transition as well. I look forward to continuing to serve the public with every one of them in 2023 and beyond. Thank you for the opportunity.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Stephanie L. Hall". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Stephanie L. Hall,
Law Director & City Prosecutor