



2025 Annual Report

Law Director & City Prosecutor,
Stephanie L. Hall

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I. INTRODUCTION & GENERAL INFORMATION

- A. Law Director: 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, the elected Law Director is Stephanie L. Hall, who holds Ohio attorney registration number 0082045 and is also licensed to practice in the United States District Court, Southern District of Ohio, and the Supreme Court of the United States. The Law Director’s current term expires December 31, 2027.
- B. Duties: The Law Director is responsible for providing civil and criminal legal services as enumerated in the ORC for the City of Lancaster. The Law Director also prosecutes all adult misdemeanor crimes charged in the Fairfield County Municipal Court. In her role as City Prosecutor, she prosecutes cases statutorily for the City of Lancaster, and by contract for the Fairfield County Board of Commissioners, the City of Reynoldsburg, and the City of Pickerington.
- C. Location & Hours: 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 4:00 pm, Monday through Friday, and closed on all City holidays.
- D. Contact Information: 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@lancasterohio.gov. Additional information regarding the office as well as staff contact information 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.lancasterohio.gov/196/Law-Director>.



II. LAW DIRECTOR & CITY PROSECUTOR STAFF



Law Director & City Prosecutor Stephanie L. Hall was appointed in January of 2022 and elected in November of 2024 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. He also serves as the City's second Family & Dating Violence Unit Prosecutor currently. 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 & Dating 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 Liz Fox was appointed on February 1, 2024. She 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. 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 and previously served as a Paralegal.



Family & Dating Violence Unit 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's 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 criminal 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 Taci Weidner serves as support staff for the prosecutor handling non-victim related criminal and traffic offenses on Judge Fields' docket. 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. Legal Counsel: Pursuant to the Ohio Revised Code, the Law Director 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 or her assistant attends all regularly scheduled council, committee, commission, and board meetings, as well as special meetings when requested.
- B. 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 2025 and how that compares to prior years.

YEAR	ORDINANCES	RESOLUTIONS
2021	51	147
2022	44	163
2023	52	140
2024	57	136
2025	76	116

- C. 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 2025 regarding a variety of topics. These opinions are not public records as they are privileged attorney/client communications.
- D. Civil Litigation: In 2025, the City was actively involved in thirty-three (33) 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’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 privileged and/or work product privileged but may be made available to City Council members for review.
- E. Self-Insured Claims: The Law Director’s Office manages the City’s insurance claims to save the City approximately \$20,000.00 annually. In 2025, the City received twenty-two (22) insurance claims involving damage to vehicles, persons, and property. Of the twenty-two (22) claims filed, sixteen (16) were denied; five (5) were paid by City Departments or insurance, and one (1) is still pending. The Law Director’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 privileged and/or work product privileged but may be made available to City Council members for review.

F. Internal Legal Counsel: The Law Director 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 2025, 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.

G. 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 2025 for legal issues that required outside counsel.

1. Bond and Tax Counsel: [Squire Patton Boggs](#) – The City utilized the bond expertise of attorney Allison Binkley.
2. Labor Counsel: [Fishel Downey Albrecht & Riepenhoff, LLP](#) – The City navigated grievances with its collective bargaining units in 2025 with the assistance of attorney Marc Fishel.
3. Construction Law Counsel: [Bricker Graydon Wyatt, LLP](#) – The City contracted with attorney Mark Evans for his assistance with a variety of public improvements.
4. Energy Counsel: [Bricker Graydon Wyatt, LLP](#) – The City utilized the energy expertise of attorneys Glenn Krassen and Caleb Bell.
5. Workers’ Compensation Counsel: [Fishel Downey Albrecht & Riepenhoff, LLP](#) – The City utilized the Bureau of Workers’ Compensation expertise of attorney David Riepenhoff.
5. Special Prosecutors: Various – In an effort to save taxpayer money, the City trades special prosecution services with other political subdivisions. In 2025, Assistant Law Director Mitch Harden served as special prosecutor in one (1) criminal case at the request of the City of Newark Law Director.
6. 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.
7. Economic Development Counsel: [Bricker Graydon Wyatt, LLP](#) – The City utilizes the economic development expertise of attorneys Caleb Bell, Colin Kalvas, and Darby Dooley for Tax Increment Financing projects, Community Reinvestment Areas, New Community Authorities, Cooperative Economic Development Agreements, and Joint Economic Development Districts.

H. Board of Education: Pursuant to ORC Section 3313.35, the Law Director is authorized to represent the Board of Education of the Lancaster City School District. The Law Director provides advice and legal representation to Lancaster City Schools upon request as needed.

I. Lancaster Port Authority: The Law Director also serves as legal counsel for the Lancaster Port Authority, a complex component unit of the City dedicated to economic development. The Port Board meets monthly, and the Law Director attends and prepares resolutions for the Board to enact. In 2025, the Law Director drafted twenty-four (24) resolutions for the Board’s approval. The Law Director also assists with the Port’s sales tax exemption leases, conduit bonds, real estate sales and purchases, and other day-to-day operations. The most time-consuming aspects of representing the Port in 2025 included preparing, reviewing, and coordinating documents with outside counsel for the Port and City’s housing and economic development initiatives.

J. Additional Civil Services:

1. **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.
2. **Collections for Damage to City Property**: The Law Director’s Office pursues collections actions for all City departments when City property is damaged (i.e., fire hydrants, guardrails, and other City infrastructure). In 2025, the Law Director’s Office obtained judgments for, collected, and/or forwarded to collections \$14,235.40 in taxpayer funds.
3. **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 of 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 2025 and how that compares to prior years.

Year	Annual Total	
2021	\$79,507.60	These amounts include all Code Enforcement expenditures for mowing, trimming, demolishing, securing and cleaning-up neglected properties.
2022	\$67,514.00	
2023	\$95,056.00	
2024	\$68,879.00	
2025	\$99,124.00	

4. **Public Records Requests**: Ohio’s Public Records Act guarantees citizens access to municipal records. In addition to advising the various City Departments on how to comply with this law and reviewing their responses, the Law Director’s Office also spends significant time reviewing, redacting, and providing public records. In 2025, the Law Director’s Office responded directly to seventy-one (71) public records requests.

IV. CRIMINAL REPORT

A. Traffic & Criminal Prosecution: Pursuant to ORC 1901.34, the City Prosecutor is responsible for the prosecution of misdemeanor criminal cases arising in the City of Lancaster. Since 1997, the Law Director has contracted for reimbursement to the City for prosecution work performed for all the villages (Amanda, Bremen, Carroll, Lithopolis, Millersport, Pleasantville, Rushville, Sugar Grove, Thurston, and West Rushville) and unincorporated areas in Fairfield County (13 townships) 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 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. This provides consistency and clarity for Fairfield County law enforcement and the public in the investigation and prosecution of adult misdemeanor crimes.

B. Traffic & Criminal Statistics: The Court’s statistics for the Law Director’s Office for 2025 represent the major use of resources of this office. Approximately 80% of the budgetary funding for the Law Director’s Office is used for traffic and 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 due to speedy trial rights), cases must be resolved expeditiously. The chart below gives a breakdown of the cases prosecuted in 2025 and how that compares to prior years.

Fairfield County Municipal Court Statistics 2020 - 2025

Year	Misdemeanor Crimes	OVI	Other Traffic	Jury Trials	Trials to Court	New Court Filings Total
2021	1,665	387	8,189	2	1,047	13,191
2022	1,764	560	9,980	11	1,191	15,485
2023	1,868	455	7,851	16	1,220	13,878
2024	1,565	390	7,649	15*	1,388	14,630
2025	1,468	384	9,296	12	1,372	16,257

*Does not include one (1) jury trial where the defendant absconded prior to sentencing.



C. Specialized Dockets: The Fairfield County Municipal Court operates four (4) specialized criminal dockets with the assistance of the Law Director’s Office. Senior Attorney Dave Klemp provides victim input and legal guidance for the Court’s Fresh Start Drug Court Program (defendants with substance use disorders), Mental Health Court (defendants with mental health diagnoses), Veterans’ Treatment Court (defendants who are Veterans), and Special Abilities Court (defendants who receive services from the Fairfield County Board of Developmental Disabilities).

D. Grant Funding: Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) Grant – The Law Director applies annually for VAWA funding to help offset the expense of one (1) Assistant Prosecutor position in the Family & Dating 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 2025, the Law Director was awarded \$51,000.00 in VAWA funds from the Office of Criminal Justice Services to continue funding this position in 2026, bringing the Law Director’s total grant funding award amount to \$3,106,579.03 (for all grants).

E. Family & Dating Violence Unit: To ensure efficient and effective prosecution of victim cases pursuant to the Fairfield County Family & Dating Violence Protocol and that crime victims’ constitutional rights are guaranteed, the Law Director’s Office operates a Family & Dating Violence Unit. This Unit is funded in part by the VAWA grant. The Unit consists of two (2) Assistant Prosecuting Attorneys and one (1) Paralegal who focus solely on coordinating and prosecuting these cases, separate and apart from the other general criminal offenses being prosecuted by the office. The Family & Dating Violence Unit makes it possible to devote the additional attention and resources needed to successfully prosecute these cases. The chart below gives a breakdown of victim prosecutions for 2025 and how that compares to prior years.

Family & Dating Violence Unit Statistics 2020 – 2025				
Year	DV Intakes	Stalking Intakes	Other Victim Cases	Total Victims Served
2021	242	20	693	955
2022	434	15	596	1,030
2023	483	29	649	1,161
2024	427	38	556	1,021
2025	393	28	597	1,018

F. Law Enforcement Training: The Law Director's Office provides free training annually on a variety of issues to all Fairfield County Law Enforcement. In 2025, these trainings focused on the following topics: Fairfield County Family & Dating Violence Protocol, 2025 Traffic & Case Law Update, Crisis Intervention, and Lancaster Citizen's Police Academy Criminal Law Primer.



2025 IN REVIEW

Since approximately 80% of the Law Director's budget supports prosecution efforts, I typically take this opportunity to focus on that work exclusively. As you can see from the data above there is encouraging news to report for 2025. Domestic violence incidents decreased by 8% and stalking charges declined by 30%. Along with child endangering cases, these situations are typically the most time-sensitive, complicated, and volatile that we handle. Any reduction in these incidents is therefore noteworthy, as it has a meaningful impact on victim safety and public welfare.

The City's legal well-being, however, depends on more than criminal prosecution, so this year I also want to mention the office's civil work. Although it receives less attention, the office's civil practice is crucial because it covers a wide range of responsibilities touching nearly every part of municipal operations. The civil portion of this report features some examples of the services we provide including the number of on-going civil cases we handled (33), the number of property damage and personal injury claims we reviewed (22), the number of public records requests we responded to (71), and the number of ordinances and resolutions we drafted (216). While these metrics provide context, they do not fully capture the value of the office's civil work. Success in this area is measured in questions answered, problems avoided, contracts approved, funds safeguarded, disputes resolved, projects completed, and policies implemented.

The pace and complexity of the office's civil practice are demanding. Day to day, it is handled by just two attorneys, myself and the Assistant Law Director, who also manage the office's prosecution efforts, and one paralegal, who also serves as the Office Manager. Maintaining effective operations requires continuous prioritization and the much-appreciated patience and cooperation of our colleagues. Which brings me back to the same conclusion I tend to reach regardless of whether I focus on our criminal or civil work: although the workload is substantial, the people we collaborate with in this office, across the City, and throughout the County make it all worthwhile.

On behalf of myself and my coworkers, I hope you have found the foregoing information useful, and as always, thank you for allowing us to serve our community in the Law Director & City Prosecutor's Office.

Sincerely,

Stephanie L. Hall