

February 10, 2009

To All District Court Employees:

“Individual commitment to a group effort - that is what makes a team work, a company work, a society work, a civilization work.” Vince Lombardi

Selected staff will be meeting this week to evaluate our collection program and process. We've responded to the Supreme Court and their strategic vision of court collections and are methodically adopting a culture shift that understands “A Fine is a Penalty Only if it is Collected”. Now it's time to examine how we're doing and to make adjustments.

Part of the culture shift is our perception and acceptance of the program as court employees. The shift is also our courts image and how stakeholders perceive our court. During these tough economic times it's imperative that the public trusts the court to do its part in making sure fines and costs are paid. The belief that the court is fair, but rigorous with the end result being for the public good is one of our objectives.

Our progress thus far is due to the effort of the entire court system. Although Judge Holmes, Dawn, Hillary and Sherry are at the forefront of the program, everyone plays a part in the message and the results.

Message: Did you know Michigan Court Rule 1.110 and our position, that fines and costs are due at sentencing is stated:

- on the bond form?
- by the Judge when the defendant is arraigned?
- from the court officer after sentencing?
- with all notices to appear?
- on a separate sheet with an estimated total following pre-sentence investigation?
- in communication at the counter and responding to telephone calls?
- in a letter to the defense bar?
- in correspondence with the prosecutors?

Results: Did you know:

- January 2008 general fund revenues were \$271,574 and money taken in at the counter associated with collections was \$113,488?
- January 2009 general fund revenues were \$210,973 and money taken in at the counter associated with collections was \$126,600?

The reduction in general fund revenues is problematic due to many uncontrollable factors. If we did not have our collections program effectively operational, the general fund dollars would be more impacted.

Results: Did you know our collection totals are steadily increasing?

- In 2006, the collection total was \$494,428 with 357 payment plans at year end;
- In 2007, the collection total was \$1,151,181 with 425 payment plans at year end;
- In 2008, the collection total was \$1,330,879 with 933 payment plans at year end.

I think our accomplishments have been staggering and are a credit to every person in every position of our court. We are experiencing a culture shift and the more you as employees understand the program, the more concise the message is relayed to the users of our system and the community. The results would not be so staggering if everyone wasn't participating in the message.

The compassion in this program is the light at the end of the tunnel for people who in the past, never thought they'd be able to fulfill their sentence. A penalty of fine and cost is a sentence. The defendant is responsible for fulfilling the judges fine and cost sentence just the same as fulfilling a probation order or a jail sentence. When ordered to pay a fine and cost, we know that 35-50% of defendants will fulfill their sentence when ordered; 30-40% might fulfill their sentence; and 8-10% can not or will not. Our program allows a method for that 30-40% to take care of their business without a warrant being issued for non-payment. We hope to expand our program in 2009 to work with the remaining 8-10% and provide options.

You are instrumental to our success. You will be periodically updated with information about the program and are encouraged to share any ideas or comments that you may have. Thank you for your continued support.

Sincerely,

Michelle D. Hill
Court Administrator