

ALLEGAN COUNTY
PROSECUTING ATTORNEY

2024 Annual Report



Michael Villar
Prosecuting Attorney

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Angela Brotherton, Irregular Part Time Victim Advocate Specialist
Hilary Anes, Victim's Rights Specialist
Joey, Canine Advocate

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LETTER FROM THE PROSECUTING ATTORNEY

Dear Allegan County Board of Commissioners and citizens of Allegan County:

I am pleased to present to you my first Annual Report as the newly elected Prosecuting Attorney. It is my hope that the information presented to you will be both helpful and informative. As you know, this report is for 2024, and I did not take office until January of 2025.

I did not receive any cooperation from the outgoing prosecutor and was initially not allowed to interview the staff and attorneys prior to starting in office. Thanks to the County Administration, I was able to procure times at a location outside of the prosecutor's office to interview the staff prior to the onset of my tenure. Those interviews were extremely helpful and all but one of the legal specialists were invited to stay on. Fortunately, the rest of the staff employed in 2024, when given the option, chose to stay working with the new management team and are excelling in their positions at this point. I chose not to re-appoint three Assistant Prosecutors and brought in three experienced attorneys to begin 2025, with two of them being former Assistant Prosecutors in Allegan County.

Steve Sedore was particularly helpful to the changeover. In 2024, he met with me and Jessica Winsemius, my Chief Assistant Prosecutor and the former Allegan County District Court Administrator, in an attempt to make sure that the upcoming office renovation was going to be efficient and would serve the needs of the Office of the Prosecuting Attorney. I was shocked to find that the plans prior to my involvement included office cubicles for 16 Assistant Prosecutors and five other offices for Assistant Prosecutors. It was, as we were informed, the ten-year plan for this office. Mr. Sedore was instrumental in changing the office layout to accommodate our wishes, and we now have a beautiful space with the ability to accommodate up to 13 Assistant Prosecutors over the next ten years. We currently have 10 Assistant Prosecuting Attorneys. As is obvious, the 10-year plan for Assistant Prosecutors has changed somewhat dramatically.

Unfortunately, there are no guarantees as to the accuracy of the numbers presented in this Report. My predecessor received a \$184,000 grant from PAAM to switch to Prosecutor by Karpel, a new paperless system for prosecuting attorney offices and law enforcement. Prior to that, the office, under my predecessor, was using the ACT office system and using paper files. The Prosecutor's Office began using a portion of Karpel sometime in 2024. At the start of 2025, Karpel was being significantly underutilized and the support staff was attempting to do both Karpel and paper files. Finally, my predecessor was absent from the office for a sizable period of time between the August primary and when I was sworn in in January of 2025. As a result, all numbers presented for 2024 must be considered potentially inaccurate. The numbers for 2025 will be much more trustworthy as our office has fully engaged with the Karpel paperless system.

I look forward to working with you all and to serving the citizens of Allegan County.

Sincerely,

Michael Villar



Duties of the Prosecuting Attorney

The Michigan Constitution mandates that every county elect a Prosecuting Attorney. The duties of the prosecutor are statutorily defined in Michigan.

The Prosecuting Attorney acts as the Chief Law Enforcement Officer for Allegan County.

The Prosecuting Attorney is responsible for a wide array of legal functions for the County.

The prosecutor is responsible to do the following:

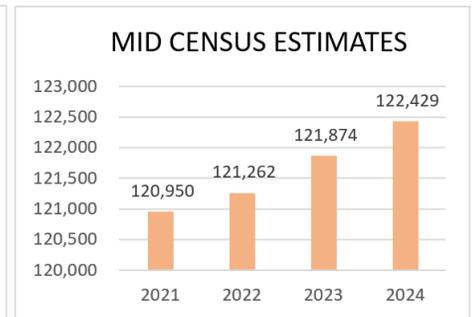
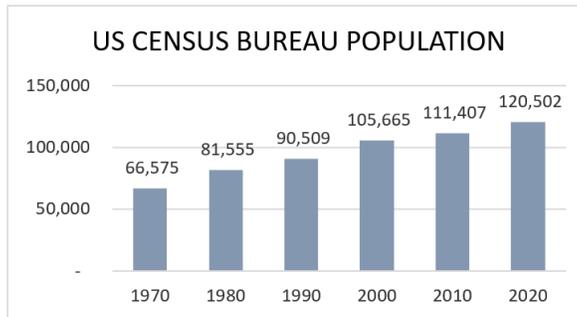
- ◆ Act as the chief law enforcement official in the County.
- ◆ Review, authorize and prosecute violations of felony and misdemeanor criminal laws of the State of Michigan and County ordinances committed inside the County.
- ◆ Authorize and prosecute felony, misdemeanor and juvenile delinquency offenses.
- ◆ Represent the County in criminal matters before the District and Circuit Courts; juvenile delinquency, parental neglect and contested mental health commitment hearings as well as other miscellaneous probate matters in the Family Court; and appeals in the Court of Appeals and Michigan Supreme Court.
- ◆ Advise the Michigan Department of Human Services on child abuse and neglect petitions, and actions to terminate parental rights.
- ◆ Advise the County Board of Commissioners and other County departments on legal matters.
- ◆ Primary law enforcement agencies in Allegan County include
 - ◇ Michigan State Police,
 - ◇ Allegan County Sheriff's Office,
 - ◇ Gun Lake Tribal Police,
 - ◇ West Michigan Enforcement Team (WEMET),
 - ◇ South West Enforcement Team (SWET),
 - ◇ Department of Natural Resources (DNR),
 - ◇ Plainwell Department of Public Safety,
 - ◇ Otsego City Police Department,
 - ◇ Wayland City Police Department,
 - ◇ Holland City Police Department,
 - ◇ Allegan City Police Department
 - ◇ Douglas Police Department.

POPULATION

Out of the 83 counties in Michigan, Allegan County is no longer one of the top 5 fastest growing counties in the state. As of 2025, Allegan County is 29th in growth of Michigan counties.

I have included the Census.gov website (<https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/popest/2020s-counties-total.html>) to show the growth of Allegan County from 1970-2020. I've also included estimates for mid census population.

Population by Year		% Increase
1970	66,575	
1980	81,555	22.50
1990	90,509	10.90
2000	105,665	16.70
2010	111,407	5.40
2020	120,502	8.16



CRIMINAL CASE CHARGING DUTY

Under Michigan Law, it is the duty of the Prosecuting Attorney to decide if someone will be charged with a crime and the precise nature of that charge. Police agencies submit their investigative reports to the Prosecuting Attorney to determine if a factual and legal basis exists to initiate prosecution. The Prosecuting Attorney has a responsibility to carefully review reports and properly charge suspects. Each investigative report, if it results in a charged crime, could result in a jury trial in District Court, Circuit Court, or Family/Probate Court; and a jury trial could cost Allegan County between \$300.00 and \$800.00 per day of trial or even more. In 2024 the Prosecutor's Office lost 16 of 20 misdemeanor trials in District Court. There were also 26 Circuit Court felony

CASES ENTERED IN ACT/JCT and PbK

	Total Received	Abuse/Neglect	Total Denied
2015	4817	146	637
2016	4895	151	655
2017	5341	76	616
2018	5545	99	771
2019	5100	94	732
2020	4232	88	639
2021	4234	81	619
2022	4007	47	605
2023	4447	53	601
2024	3524	50	342

% of Charging Requests Denied

2015	13.63	Anderson/Kengis
2016	13.80	Anderson/Kengis
2017	11.69	Kengis/Koch
2018	14.15	Koch/Kasson *
2019	14.62	Koch/Kasson
2020	15.43	Koch/Kasson
2021	15.19	Koch/Kasson
2022	15.27	Koch/Kasson
2023	13.68	Koch/Kasson
2024	9.7	Koch/Kasson

* Kengis PA 1/1/18-3/16/18 Koch PA 3/17/18-12/31/18

trials that took place during 2024. The Prosecutor’s office won 18 of the 26 trials (69.2%). Historically, Allegan County held about 12 trials per year. In 2023 there were 38 trials and in 2024 there were 26 trials. There have been 8 trials in 2025. We have won 7 of those, and 2 more pled guilty the day of trial.

The chart in the previous page shows the number of Adult and Juvenile charging requests and Abuse and Neglect petitions received by our office and how many charges were denied since 2015.

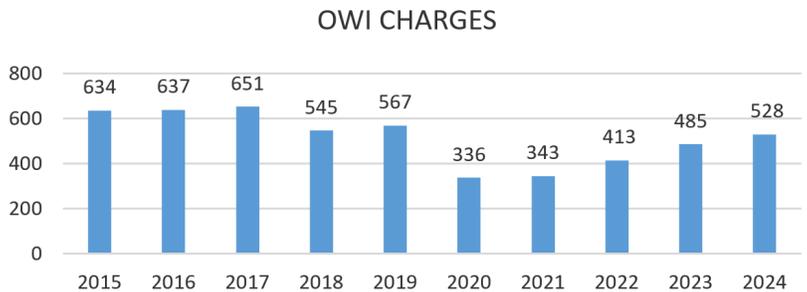
During the last year, this office reviewed 3524 adult and Juvenile request for charges. We received 50 new Abuse and Neglect petitions. That number is down significantly from the 4447 Adult and Juvenile requests in 2023. Again, this highlights the potential unreliability of the 2024 numbers.

On average, the office received 15.8 requests for adult and juvenile charges each day and 4.2 new Abuse and Neglect cases each month during 2024.

The Office of Prosecuting Attorney has to staff the 8 courtrooms and hearing rooms in the Circuit, District and Family Courts, and also has to have attorneys available to review requests for arrest warrants and search warrants, among many other required statutory duties. Due to the serious nature of criminal cases and county civil liability, it is necessary for Assistant Prosecutors to have a sufficient amount of time to review investigative reports and prepare for each hearing.

Operating While Intoxicated (OWI) Cases

In 2024, 528 individuals were charged with Drunk Driving. The chart below shows the total number of Drunk Driving Charges authorized from the years 2015 through 2024. There were two counts of OWI causing death, and 11 counts of OWI causing serious injury. There were 22 counts of OWI with an occupant under the age of 16. There were 9 cases where juveniles were charged for having a blood alcohol content while driving.



In 2023, there were 65 counts of felony level OWI, 1 count was OWI Causing Death, 8 counts of OWI Causing Serious Injury and 4 counts of OWI with an Occupant under the age of 16.

Domestic Violence

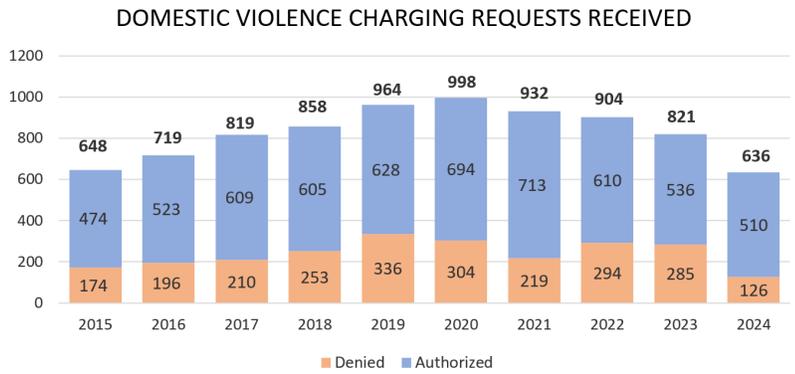
Domestic Violence is abuse perpetrated by one or both partners involved within an intimate or family relationship. Domestic Violence is considered to be fairly expansive in nature, due to the fact that it may include a wide range of victims, activities, and severity. The term “Domestic Violence” can include

physical assault, property damage, arson, home invasion, weapons charges, telephone misuse, interfering with electronic communication (interrupting a phone call for help), stalking, emotional abuse, unlawful imprisonment, sexual abuse, and homicide.

Domestic Violence can take place within a variety of intimate relationships, including married couples, individuals who are cohabitating, individuals considered to be intimately involved or child/parent relationship. Domestic Violence is not specific to any age, sexual orientation or economic group. When children are subjected to Domestic Violence it can often result in the perpetuation of violence within the home, at school or in their own dating relationships.

Despite the existence of institutions providing resources, shelter, and assistance through the legal system, it is estimated that only about 50% of Domestic Violence incidents are reported.

The graph on the right outlines the number of requests we received each year since 2015 for charges relating to Domestic Violence.

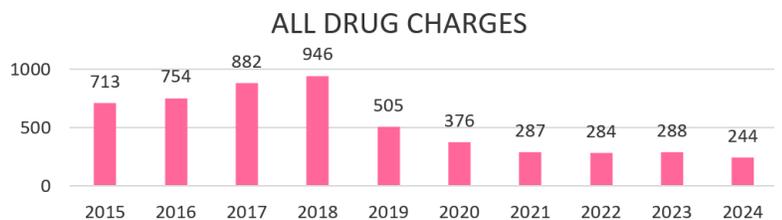
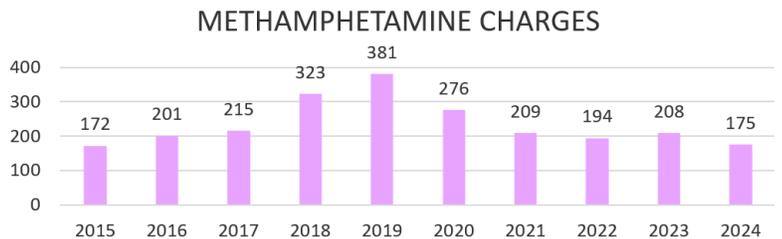


In 1998, the 57th District Court, at the request of this office and the Allegan County Domestic Violence Task Force, implemented a Domestic Violence Diversion Program where first time offenders are given the opportunity to receive counseling and avoid criminal convictions. The pre-requisites for acceptance into the program are specific, and one cannot qualify if there is aggravated physical injury or a history of Domestic Violence. The goal of the program is to stop the cycle of violence.

Controlled Substances

A large portion of our felony case load consists of controlled substance violations. Out of the 244 Drug charges during 2024, 175 were methamphetamine related.

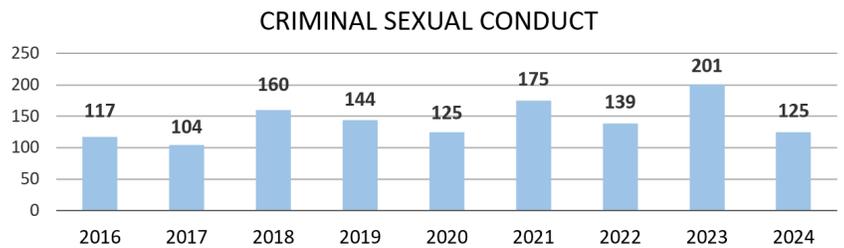
The use of Marijuana was legalized in December 2018. In the years prior to that more than 50% of all drug cases were



marijuana related (2017 was 61.9% and 2018 was 53.49%). In 2019 it dropped to 3.76% (19), 2020 had only 9 cases, 2021 there were 13 cases, in 2022 there were 17, and 2023 there were 8 cases related to marijuana. In 2024 only 4 were related to marijuana.

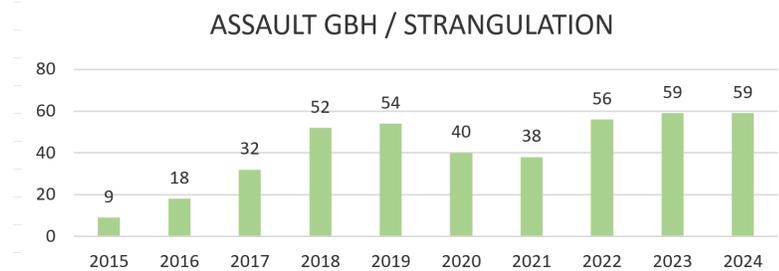
Criminal Sexual Conduct

Criminal Sexual Conduct (CSC) charges, Child Sexually Abusive Materials and/or Activity (CSAM), and Sexual Assaults are included in the graph below. These cases often require a significant amount of investigation before authorization. There was also a large increase in these cases in 2023, and a significant decrease in 2024.



Assault-Great Bodily Harm (GBH)/Strangulation

In 2015, a change in the law made Strangulation a 10 year felony, instead of a 93 day misdemeanor. The graph on the right shows the number of cases filed each year since 2015.

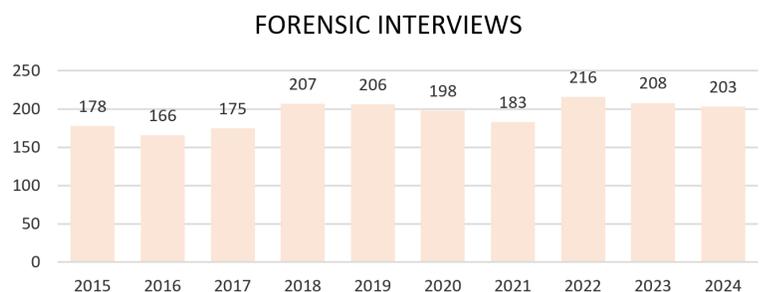


Homicides

During 2024, there were no charges authorized for murder. Many hours, weeks and months are spent preparing and organizing these cases, reviewing evidence, filing and answering motions, and meeting with witnesses. We currently have 4 open murder cases in 2025.

FORENSIC INTERVIEWS

An interview of a child typically takes one hour to complete. Interviews are conducted by a trained forensic interviewer, while the remainder of the multi-disciplinary team views the interview over closed circuit video at the Safe Harbor Children’s Advocacy Center.



ON CALL DUTIES

One Prosecuting Attorney is on call twenty-four hours a day. The Prosecutor is required to consult with police agencies, issue arrest warrants even during evenings, weekends and holidays and be available to prepare search warrants, and answer questions for law enforcement.

MISDEMEANOR CASES - DISTRICT COURT

Misdemeanor cases are crimes handled in District Court where punishment may result in incarceration in the county jail for up to one year. Allegan County has two District Court Judges and a Hearing Magistrate. All felony cases begin in and have several hearings with the District Court before they are Bound Over to Circuit Court. This office lost 16 of the 20 misdemeanor trials in District Court in 2024.

Specialty Courts

It is an important part of our duties to respond to concerns of the community. One example is the participation of this office in the use of the Allegan County Mental Health Court, West Michigan Regional Veterans' Treatment Court and Sobriety Treatment Courts. These programs require assigning an Assistant Prosecuting Attorney to attend program meetings and hearings in court.

MENTAL HEALTH TREATMENT COURT

On September 14, 2009, Judge Skocelas together with representatives from the Allegan County Sheriff's Department, Allegan City Police, Allegan County Prosecutor's Office, Allegan County Community Mental Health, Michigan State Police, local defense attorneys and local substance abuse provider Allegan Ottawa Recovery (OAR) to create a Mental Health Treatment Court.

During the year 2024, approximately 25 people applied to the program, 13 people were admitted into the program, and 12 people were rejected. 5 people graduated successfully from the program. The number of graduates included participants that were admitted in 2023 as well as 2024.

VETERAN'S COURT

The West Michigan Regional Veterans' Treatment Court began operation on February 7, 2014 and Magistrate Daniel Norbeck was the Administrator/Case Manager. Mr. Norbeck has now rejoined the Allegan Prosecutor's Office as an Assistant Prosecuting Attorney. The jurisdiction of the Veteran's Treatment Court is that of both the district and circuit courts of Allegan, Van Buren and Ottawa counties, but also accepts veterans from surrounding counties. It was developed and organized by Judge Baillargeon and the treatment court team to help veteran participants address underlying service related issues.

Partnering with the court from all three counties are county commissioners, judges, prosecutors, probation, law enforcement, mentors, community supervision providers, treatment providers, the Veterans Health Administration, Veterans Benefit Administration, veteran employment representatives and veterans service organization service officers.

During the year 2024, approximately 8 people applied for the program, 5 people were admitted, 3 were rejected. Seven individuals graduated successfully. The number of graduates included participants that were admitted in 2023 as well as 2024.

SOBRIETY TREATMENT COURT

The Sobriety Court was established in April of 2018 and was presided over by Judge Baillargeon. This was specifically designed to address Operating While Intoxicated (OWI) 2nd Offense. This program has three goals: divert from jail, eliminate substance use among substance abusers and to reduce OWI recidivism.

During the year 2024, approximately 23 people applied to the program, 18 were admitted, 5 were rejected, 19 graduated successfully. The number of graduates included participants that were admitted in 2023 as well as 2024. Sobriety Court currently has 2 therapy groups.

DRUG TREATMENT COURT

The first participant was admitted into the Adult Drug Treatment Court on June 30, 2011 and was presided over by District Court Judge Baillargeon. The Allegan County Drug Treatment Court addressed the revolving-door cycle in which drug and alcohol offenders moved in and out of the justice system. Drug Treatment Court provided a comprehensive, sustained continuum of therapeutic interventions, treatment and other services to increase a participant's periods of abstinence and reduce relapse, re-arrest and subsequently incarceration. During 2021, the program was discontinued. The program is currently being revived and the Prosecuting Attorney has received the proper certification for the drug treatment court.

FELONY CASES - CIRCUIT COURT

The Circuit Court docket includes felony cases which are crimes where punishment is incarceration in excess of one year. Allegan County has two Circuit Court Judges.

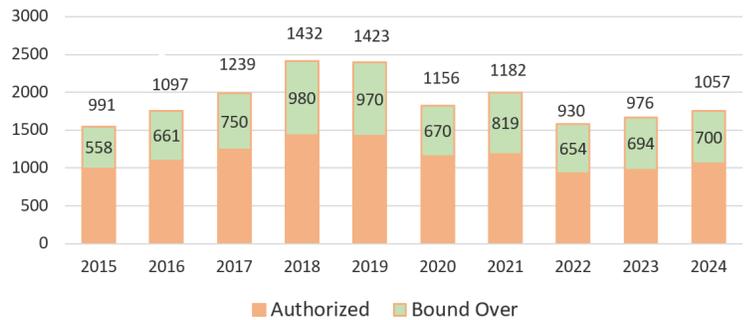
The chart on the following page shows the number of felony cases authorized each year and how many felonies were bound over to Circuit Court. Felony cases require significant staff time and multiple court appearances such as Probable Cause Conferences and Preliminary Examinations in District Court. If the case is bound over to Circuit Court, the Prosecuting Attorney is responsible for all proceedings at that level including pre-trials, motion hearings, pleas, bench or jury trials, and sentencing. All felony cases have strict

time limits both for preliminary examinations (within 14 days) and trials (within 180 days). There are two Circuit Court Judges that are primarily responsible for handling the adult felony cases.

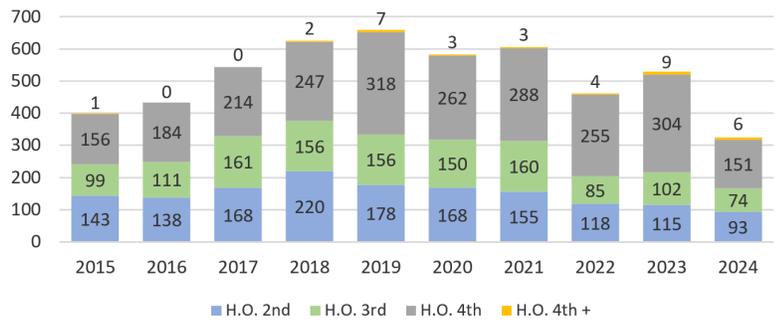
Habitual Offenders

Under Michigan’s current habitual offender law, once an individual has previously been convicted of one or more felonies (or attempts to commit felonies), that person can be sentenced for subsequent felony charges as a “habitual offender.” A habitual offender faces increased sentencing depending on the number of previous felony convictions he or she has.

FELONY CASES AUTHORIZED AND BOUND OVER TO CIRCUIT COURT



HABITUAL OFFENDER



CIRCUIT COURT – FAMILY DIVISION

The Circuit Court – Family Division has one Family Court/Probate Judge, and two Hearing Attorney/Referees. In the Family Court, the Prosecuting Attorney has the responsibility of bringing cases of child neglect or abuse to the court, cases of juvenile delinquency, as well as involuntary Mentally Ill commitments pursuant to the Mental Health Code in Probate Court.

Abuse/Neglect

The chart on the right shows how many new Abuse and Neglect Petitions were authorized since 2015. In 2024 this office authorized 50 new Abuse and Neglect Petitions. This represents 117 children. Also, during 2024 our office filed 15 petitions to Terminate the Parental Rights of one or both parents in Abuse and Neglect cases.

ABUSE AND NEGLECT PETITIONS



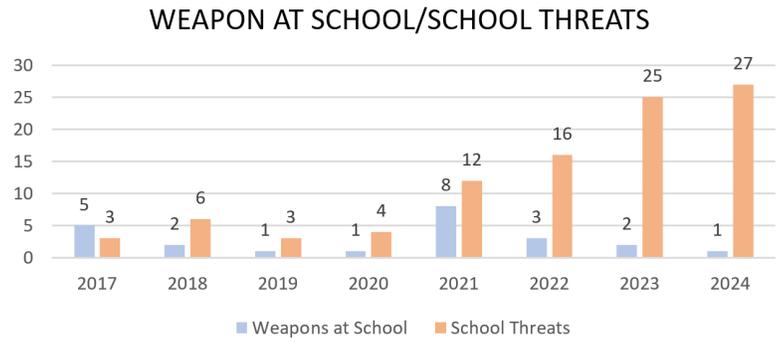
DELINQUENCY CASES AUTHORIZED



Delinquency

In 2024, this office authorized 327 juvenile delinquency petitions. (This number includes some requests for charges received in 2023.)

The chart on the right illustrates charges regarding school threats and possession of weapons at school over the last 8 years. The increase in school threats and weapons in school are related to school shootings nation-wide and in the state of Michigan, coupled with the increase in media and social media coverage surrounding them.



Mentally Ill

It is necessary to regularly appear for involuntary commitment hearings of the mentally ill. These hearings are held every month at the Kalamazoo Psychiatric Hospital (KPH). Our county is on a rotation schedule with 14 other counties, and in 2024 this office attended 3 times. These Hearings typically required an APA from our office travel to the KPH on the days our Probate Judge and his recorder are scheduled to conduct these hearings. These were changed to Zoom hearings when court resumed during the Covid Restrictions. During 2024, all of these hearings continue to be conducted via Zoom. Occasionally, our Probate Court will conduct hearings on Mentally Ill Petitions for Treatment with the Allegan County Probate Judge. During 2024 there were 40 hearings set in the Allegan County Probate Court that our office attended (in 2023 there were 25). These cases include many people that are a serious threat to the public or themselves.

OFFICE UPDATES

On June 10, 2024, our office converted our case tracking system (Adult Case Tracking/Juvenile Case Tracking (ACT/JCT)) to Prosecutor by Karpel (PbK). Our office was given an initial grant of \$184,000 from the Prosecuting Attorney's Association of Michigan (PAAM) with an additional 3 years of service agreement payments to upgrade our office data retention system from Adult Case Tracking and Juvenile Case Tracking. The new system integrates both adult and juvenile cases. The system will be used statewide and is updated as needed by Karpel and PAAM.

This system supports electronic evidence submission, creation of legal documents and subpoenas, among a great many other advances. The extent of this system greatly reduces, and eliminates the need for paper files.

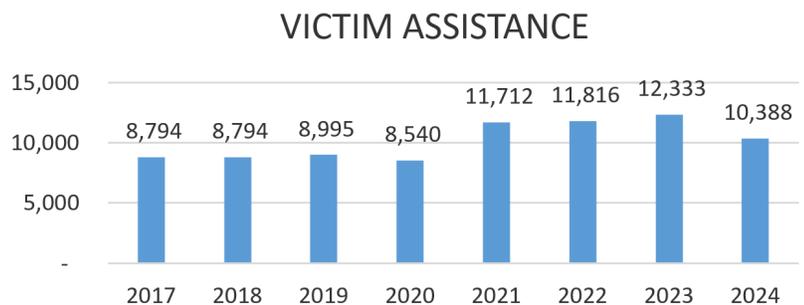
This change has improved long-term efficiency and data management. However, the initial implementation presented significant challenges to the previous prosecutor. Staff required time to learn and adapt to the new system, while maintaining a full paper filing system. Some essential tracking elements were not captured, available, or in many cases not utilized by my predecessor.

It was necessary to gather data from other departments where possible, because the data from the 2024 Prosecutor’s office is unreliable.

Due to the way the new system was only partially implemented by the previous prosecutor, the data recorded during 2024 is almost certainly incomplete or inconsistent. Therefore, I cannot fully verify the accuracy of this 2024’s case-related reporting. I anticipate much improved accuracy and reporting capability next year as we have committed fully to the Karpel system. See Attachment A.

CRIME VICTIM ASSISTANCE

Most crime victims experience physical suffering, financial loss, and emotional distress. Physical injuries occur in nearly one-third of all violent crimes. Our Victim Assistance Program provides an extensive notification service to victims to advise them of each court proceeding as their case moves through the court system. In 2024, the Victim Assistance Program provided over 10,388 contacts with victims throughout the year. This is 1,945 less contacts than in 2023. The chart on the right outlines how many contacts have been made yearly since 2017. These contacts are a very important function of this office and is mandated by the Crime Victims Rights Act. During 2024, our office provided services by way of letter, text, telephone contact and email, providing support to victims in court and providing appointments with victims of various crimes.



The Victim/Witness Coordinator serves as the primary contact for victims of Domestic Violence, Criminal Sexual Conduct, Homicide/Open Murder, Drunk Driving or Driving Under the Influence of Controlled Substance Causing Death or Serious Injury, as well as other victim related crimes. This contact includes explaining of rights, court procedures, services, shelter alternative and assistance. On every death related case, the Prosecuting Attorney, Assistant Prosecuting Attorney, Detectives and Victim/Witness Coordinator personally meet with the families of the victims multiple times.

Our Victim Assistance Program is funded by a grant of \$170,126. This is \$1,421 less than the previous

year. This Grant is used to employ both a full time Victim's Rights Coordinator, full time Victim's Rights Administrative Assistant, and a part time Victim Advocate Specialist, who assists the Victim/Witness Coordinator.

The Allegan County Victim/Witness Coordinator has a Bachelors Degree in Psychology with over thirty-four years of experience working with child and adult victims.

Canine Advocate - Joey

On July 11, 2019, our office received our Canine Advocate, Joey. Joey is a yellow lab and was 18 months old when he came to work in our office. His handler is Emelda Calanchi-Pope, our Victim/Witness Coordinator.



During 2024, Joey assisted 144 children, teens and adult victims prior to prelims and for trial prep and during appointments. This In 2023, Joey assisted 147 children, teens and adult victims.

In January 2024, Joey celebrated his 6th Birthday. Among many other things, he participated in the Safe Harbor's Pinwheel Garden Open House in April. Joey also participated in Wear Purple Day in October, which is in observance of DV awareness month. He also participated in the Trunk or Treat that was hosted by the Allegan DHHS.



Joey was sworn in by the Prosecutor on January 2, 2025. See attachment B. Joey has his own Facebook page with occasional uplifting posts and Holiday messages.

APPEALS

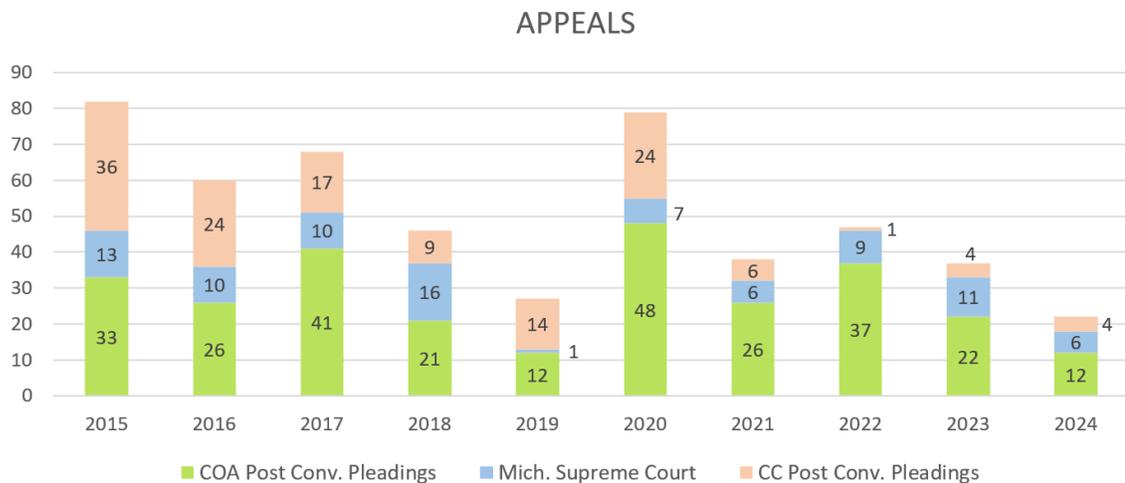
Persons convicted of crimes are entitled to seek appellate review of their conviction, as are parents involved in civil child protection cases, juvenile delinquents, and those subjected to involuntary mental health

proceedings. The Prosecuting Attorney litigates these appeals. In addition, the Prosecuting Attorney periodically seeks redress in appeals courts. A lack of diligence in defending appeals can result in convictions being overturned and dangerous people being prematurely released from incarceration. In addition, as they say, “Justice delayed is justice denied.” Re-litigating cases that are reversed on appeal causes additional trauma to victims and witnesses and substantial costs. Occasionally, appeals are pursued prior to trial. These also require action by the Office.

As reflected in the graph below, The Prosecuting Attorney received and reviewed 28 pleadings and filed 12 pleadings with the Court of Appeals. Our office participated in 7 oral arguments in the Court of Appeals. We received and considered 76 instances of correspondence from the Court of Appeals.

The Office received and reviewed 7 pleadings filed in the Michigan Supreme Court and filed 6 pleadings. We received correspondence requiring consideration 8 times from the Supreme Court.

We reviewed 7 post-conviction pleadings in the Circuit Court and filed 4 post-conviction pleadings.

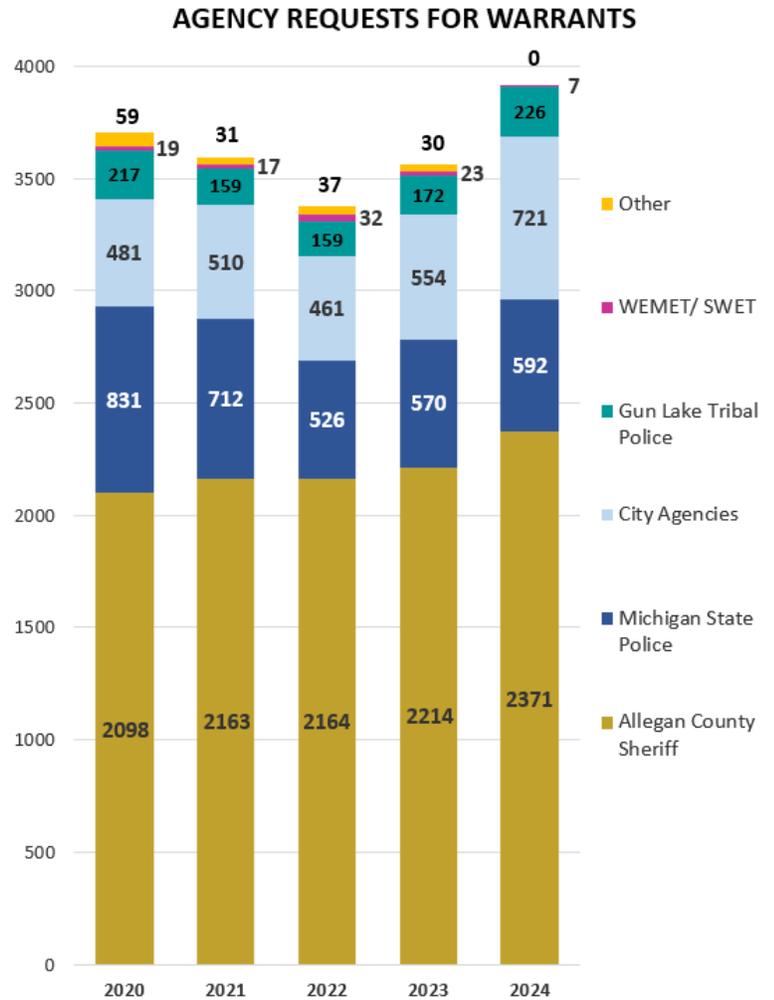
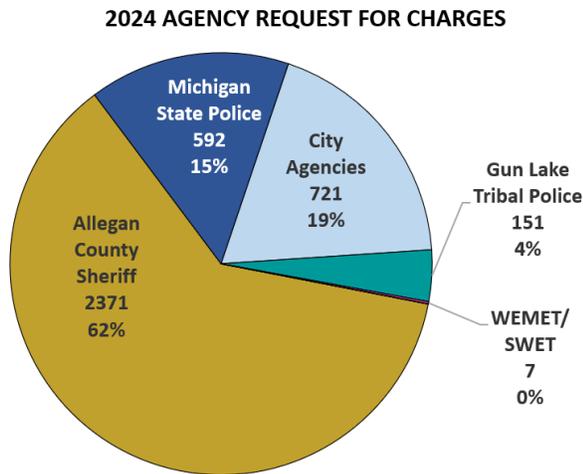


LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES

This office serves all the law enforcement agencies in Allegan County which includes the Allegan County Sheriff’s Office (ACSO), the Michigan State Police (MSP), Department of Natural Resources (DNR), Gun Lake Tribal Police (GLTP), West Michigan Enforcement Team (WEMET), Southwest Michigan Enforcement Team (SWET) and the Cities of Plainwell, Otsego, Wayland, Holland, Allegan and Douglas.

As the gatekeeper of all criminal activity from the policing agencies to the court system it is critical to our criminal justice system to adequately staff the Office of the Prosecuting Attorney and not compromise the public safety of the citizens of Allegan County.

The pie chart below shows all of the charging requests we received in 2024, and what the percentage was from each police agency. Also, below is a graph showing what the different agencies have submitted over the last 5 years.



CONCLUSION

I look forward to working with all the members of the law enforcement community, the Board of Commissioners and all other County Departments to help make Allegan County a safe place in which to work, live, and raise a family.

Respectfully submitted,

Michael Villar
Prosecuting Attorney

Allegan Prosecutor's Office goes fully digital, saves resources

The new system streamlines justice processes by managing digital case files, coordinating with law enforcement, and ensuring secure, efficient prosecutorial operations.

BY SHANDRA MARTINEZ • **GENERAL** • APRIL 28, 2025



Courtesy of Allegan County – Allegan County Prosecutor Mike Villar.

When Mike Villar took office as Allegan County's prosecutor in January, he inherited an office running on two parallel systems: stacks of paper files and a partially used digital case management tool called Karpel.

Within weeks, Villar jumped all-in on digital. On Feb. 14, his office ditched paper files and went fully paperless, a transition Villar calls "transformational" for efficiency and employee morale.

"I knew going in that we had to make a change," Villar says. "We had laptops, we had access to Karpel, but we were still trying to do everything the old way. It was doubling the workload and wasting time. So we ripped the Band-Aid off."

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Karpel, officially known as PROSECUTORbyKarpel, is an electronic case management system designed for prosecuting attorneys' offices.

The software allows seamless communication with local and state law enforcement agencies. It automates document handling and allows secure access to case files from anywhere, critical when real-time decision-making can mean the difference in a case.

Pioneering the upgraded system

The state of Michigan, in collaboration with the Prosecuting Attorneys Association of Michigan, began rolling out the Karpel system to counties as part of an effort to modernize the justice system. Allegan County was among the first in the state to receive the upgrade, according to Steve Sedore, the County's Deputy County Administrator of Operations.

"This system bridges the gap between paper and digital," Sedore says. "The prosecuting attorney's office had a records management system before, but it didn't offer document imaging. Karpel gives us a fully integrated platform. Everything related to a case can be accessible instantly, from anywhere."

Sedore oversees the county's information technology and project management offices and was instrumental in coordinating the implementation of Karpel. He notes that the transition was funded by the state, making it not just efficient but cost-effective.

Before the transition, prosecutors had to physically retrieve and transport thick paper files, often filled with thousands of pages of police reports, affidavits, and court documents, to courtrooms or offices. That process is now obsolete.

“Now when I need a file, I just get on my laptop,” Villar says. “Everything is dual-encrypted and accessible within seconds. No more waiting for a secretary to bring a file. No more losing time, or the file.”

Chief Assistant Prosecutor Jessica Winsemius agrees.

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“If you’re down in court and the judge asks about a case not on the docket, you don’t have to take a recess to go find it,” Winsemius says. “You pull it up on your laptop and you’re ready to go. That’s huge.”



Courtesy of Allegan County
Chief Assistant Prosecutor Jessica Winsemius.

Winsemius, who previously served as a district court administrator, had experience implementing paperless systems. She notes that the Karpel transition not only improved access but also made the office more secure.

“Our files are now stored with several layers of encryption,” she says. “It’s in line with LEIN (Law Enforcement Information Network) and FBI security protocols. This protects sensitive information better than any locked file cabinet ever could.”

The benefits go beyond speed and security. The shift to digital is projected to yield significant cost savings in staffing and materials.

“Maintaining paper files is expensive,” says Winsemius. “We were spending thousands of dollars a year just buying file folders and paper. And that’s not counting the time staff spent printing, filing, and retrieving them.”

Saving time, money, and space

With Karpel, case files are digital from start to finish. After the statutory retention period, digital files can be securely destroyed with a few clicks, no shredders required.

Perhaps the most tangible benefit is space. A large file room on the second floor of the courthouse stores paper records dating back to 2018. Once the records are scanned and uploaded, that space can be repurposed.

“We’re reclaiming rooms that were basically just paper graveyards,” Villar says. Sedore adds that scanning and digitizing six years of records will be a one-time effort with long-term payoff.

“That frees up valuable real estate in our courthouse,” he says. “And it ensures continuity of operations. If there’s a fire, flood, or pandemic, we’re not scrambling for paper. Our files are safe and accessible.”

The hybrid model Villar inherited was taking a toll on employees, who were working overtime to manage both paper and digital workflows.

“It was inefficient and demoralizing,” Villar says. “Secretaries had to enter the same data twice, once in Karpel, once on paper. No one had a clear picture of the caseload.”

That’s changed. With Karpel fully deployed, management can view real-time workloads and case progress across the entire team.

“We can see who’s working on what, where the bottlenecks are, and reallocate resources,” Villar says. “That wasn’t possible before.”

Focus on other work

While the change was met with initial anxiety, especially among staff accustomed to paper, Winsemius says the office adapted quickly.

“After a few weeks, everyone saw how much easier it made their jobs,” she says. “Even staff who were hesitant at first are now champions of the system.”

The transition has also allowed staff to refocus on the core mission of the prosecutor’s office: justice.

The office includes 11 attorneys, nine support staff, three victim-witness coordinators, and an in-house investigator. With less paperwork, employees now spend more time on tasks like supporting crime victims, preparing for trial, and reviewing evidence.

“We’re not using automation to cut staff,” Winsemius says. “We’re using it to better serve the public.”

The improved system has been critical for handling juvenile cases, which are subject to strict privacy laws. Previously, juvenile data was being entered in the adult system, a mistake that risked public exposure and compromised funding reports.

“When we pulled our annual data, it looked like we had zero juvenile cases,” says Villar. “We got the juvenile module of Karpel turned on and started migrating cases correctly. Now, we’re in compliance and eligible for state grants.”

Allegan County's experience is being watched across Michigan as more counties prepare to implement the Karpel system.

"This is going to become the standard," Winsemius says. "Better for law enforcement, more efficient for our office, and more secure for everyone involved."



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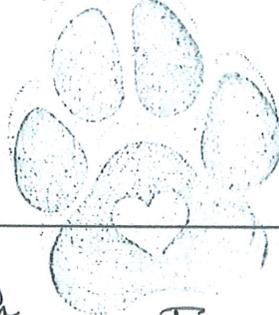
Michael Villar
Allegan County
Prosecuting Attorney

State of Michigan
County of Allegan

I do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will support the Constitution of the United States, and the Constitution of this State, and that I will faithfully discharge the duties of the office of

Canine Advocate

in and for the Office of the Prosecuting Attorney for the County of Allegan and State of Michigan, according to the best of my ability.



Subscribed and sworn to before me, this 7th day of January 2025


Michael Villar P-46324
Prosecuting Attorney
Allegan County, Michigan

