

Tioga County Probation Summary for 2020 Annual Report

The Tioga County Probation Department works with Tioga County Court, Drug Treatment Court, Family Court, Surrogates Court and 15 separate Town or Village Justice Courts in the County. The Department prepares time sensitive documents to assist those courts in making sentencing decisions for the citizens before them.

Much of the Department's work is proscribed by New York State laws, such as what information must be included in an investigation submitted to the courts and how frequently Probation Officers meet with individuals sentenced to probation supervision. Over the years, New York State has moved from an equal partnership with counties in regards to Probation funding to the current state of only funding 9% of the Probation budget. This makes Probation, a mandated service in counties, one of the top ten departments that affect county budgets. Currently, 90% of the Probation budget is covered by Tioga County taxpayers.

In the juvenile part of our system, Tioga County Probation runs Alternative to Detention programs to reduce or eliminate the use of expensive detention placement for youth in the juvenile justice system.

In the adult part of our system, Tioga County Probation runs three Alternatives to Incarceration programs to reduce reliance on the Tioga County Jail. The presence of an approved ATI program also assists the County by allowing the Jail to follow a reduced classification system within the facility, reducing its costs. The Department operates Pre-Trial Release, (an opportunity to be released from jail and monitored, without paying bail) Community Service, (perform community service hours at government or not for profit agencies in lieu of incarceration) and Electronic Monitoring (wearing an ankle unit that tracks GPS location in lieu of incarceration). However, due to the implementation of bail reform and the 2020 pandemic, the ability to operate the Pre-Trial Release and Community Service programs was severely impacted.

During 2020, Probation began planning for the anticipated retirement of long-time Probation Director, Donna Joy Bennett in January of 2021 and the promotion of a Sr. Probation Officer to Supervisor and a Probation Officer to Sr. Probation Officer. Through the use of Tioga County's Institute for Advancement Program and succession planning by Director Bennett, plans were established for the appointment of Brian Cain to Director, promotion of Chad Post to Supervisor and Fred Kiechle to Sr. Probation Officer at the end of January 2021.

The disturbing upward trend of opiate use in Tioga County continued during 2020. This was manifested in addiction to prescription opiate medications as well as the use of illicit opiates. In 2020, Tioga County Probation saw a marked increase in the use of methamphetamine by people on probation. Despite the reduction in services due to the pandemic, Probation continued to work closely with agencies such as ACBC to attempt to provide those struggling with addiction with the necessary services and support.

Obviously, the 2020 COVID-19 Pandemic drastically affected the Tioga County Probation Department. Probation staffing was reduced beginning March 18, 2020 and all in person contacts (other than emergencies) were suspended. The Justice Courts ceased all operation and Tioga County Court suspended all in person appearances and began holding virtual court proceedings. With the approval of New York State, Probation began utilizing a virtual reporting system called CE Check In which required probationers to check in using their computer by answering a series of questions. The answers to those questions were reviewed by their Probation Officer to determine if additional intervention was needed at that time. On May 18, 2020, Tioga County Probation returned to 100% staffing. This return to 100% staffing was done much sooner than many other Probation Departments throughout the state. On June 1, 2020, Probation resumed in person supervision appointments. With the implementation of

safety measures such as social distancing, the use of Personal Protective Equipment, the installation of plexiglass barriers in offices and staggered scheduling, the physical affect of COVID-19 on Probation has been minimal. However, the flexibility, ingenuity, and dedication of Probation Staff during the pandemic has been nothing short of remarkable. Without hesitation, staff selflessly adjusted schedules, made home checks to offender's residences, and adapted to numerous other situations to provide community supervision and enhance the safety of Tioga County.

In 2020, Probation was working with an 18-year-old young man who was serving a term of probation ordered by the Tioga County Family Court. Prior to being placed under probation supervision, the young man struggled to cooperate with numerous services who attempted to stabilize his behaviors at home and in the community. Probation immediately engaged the young man with service providers from the Juvenile Specialized Supervision Program (JSSP) which is provided through a contract with Cayuga Counseling Services. With JSSP working hand in hand with the young man's probation officer, he was able to briefly live in his own space before taking up residence with a service provider in the community. The young man was able to obtain employment with a local business and is currently seeking an independence residence in Tioga County.

Tioga County Probation Department goals for 2021 are:

1. Engagement of schools and other community organizations in a collaborative effort to focus on prevention and create a more proactive approach prior to the arrest of both juvenile and adult offenders.
2. Continue with Succession planning in the Department, preparing for key Department positions to change due to retirement in the next 2-4 years (financial secretary, Supervisor, & two Sr. Probation Officers).
3. Submit criminal court investigations to sentencing courts forty-eight hours before sentencing for review. The state mandate is to have reports present at courts twenty-four hours before sentencing.
4. Continuing Education- All Tioga County Probation Officers will complete at least twenty-one hours of training during the 2021 calendar year. The focus will be on the utilization of virtual trainings as opposed to the traditional in person trainings typically attended prior to the COVID-19 Pandemic.
5. Begin discussions about the feasibility of converting hundreds of closed cases files to electronic files, therefore ensuring their security and availability in the future.