

Press Release

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Summit County Court of Common Pleas' Office of Backlog Reduction to host Settlement Week 2023, October 30th through November 3rd

Settlement Week will be held Monday, October 30th through Friday, November 3rd, 2023, at the Summit County Court of Common Pleas, General Division, located at 209 South High Street in downtown Akron. Offered at no cost, the weeklong event brings civil litigants and highly-trained volunteer mediators into the courthouse to resolve civil disputes. All court hearings will proceed as scheduled during Settlement Week.

"We are very excited to revive this dispute resolution effort," said Summit County Court of Common Pleas' Office of Backlog Reduction Director Retired Judge Richard Reinbold. "The last time a dispute resolution effort of this scale was held within the Summit County Court of Common Pleas was in 2002. That year, 41 (30 percent) of the 137 cases assigned to the Settlement Week case roster were settled through mediation."

Mediation is any process in which a mediator, a neutral third party, facilitates communication and negotiation between parties to help them reach a voluntary agreement regarding a dispute. The mediator provides a forum that allows parties (and their attorneys or support individuals, if present) to discuss their dispute and any other issues that may concern them. Their discussions may include everyone in the same room, or the mediator may speak with each party separately, including the attorneys, without their clients being present. The mediator will ensure that the parties provide all documents, forms, or other materials needed to reach an agreement.

From 1988 through 2002, Summit County Court of Common Pleas, General Division hosted Settlement Week mediation events annually. The dispute resolution events led to 1,651 cases being settled.

"This year, 36 experienced civil trial attorneys will be serving as volunteer mediators during this in-person event," added Reinbold. "Together, they will work to resolve 148 pending civil court cases."

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A breakdown of the types of civil cases scheduled to be mediated during Settlement Week 2023 includes: business/contract disputes (26), personal injury (93), and workers' compensation (29).

Settlement Week 2023 is being hosted by the Office of Backlog Reduction, a unit established in 2023 through the support of American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) grant dollars to reduce the backlog of pending civil proceedings.

According to 2022 data released by the Ohio Supreme Court, the 10 judges operating within the Summit County Court of Common Pleas, General Division, have nearly twice the criminal caseload (707 per judge) as the state average (354 per judge). In addition to their high criminal caseload, judges are also responsible for managing civil (non-criminal) caseloads.

"The more civil cases that can be settled during Settlement Week, the more time judges will have to meet the demands of their ever-increasing criminal caseloads," said Summit County Court of Common Pleas, General Division Court Executive Officer Robert Gainer.

"Filing a lawsuit naturally creates an adversarial approach where each party is focused on presenting their best case to win. This approach can make it difficult to create a cooperative atmosphere that encourages an open dialogue to work toward the resolution of the case. Settlement Week allows litigants to use alternative dispute resolution techniques to keep the lines of communication open between the parties," said Summit County Court of Common Pleas, General Division Chief Magistrate and Mediation Supervisor Kandi O'Connor. "By creating a collaborative environment, instead of adversarial, the mediator can help the parties find common ground to work towards a mutually satisfactory resolution. Settling a civil case through mediation is quicker, more efficient, less expensive, and less stressful than a trial."

For more information about Settlement Week 2023, scan the QR code or click on <https://www.summitcpcourt.net/settlementweek/>

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