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COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA

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NORFOLK CIRCUIT COURT

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February 24, 2011

To: The Honorable City Council Members and City Manager
From: George Schaefer, Clerk of Circuit Court

CC: Budget Director, Circuit Court Chief Judge

Subj: Annual State of the Circuit Court Clerk's Office Report

Ladies and Gentlemen;

It is with great pleasure that I present this report on the state of the Circuit Court Clerk's Office to you. As I enter my 8th year as the Circuit Court Clerk, I can only express to you my sincere appreciation for the partnership we have developed with virtually every department within the city.

2010 has been a good year for the Clerk's Office. Although the housing market is still depressed, we have seen a slight uptick in our deed processing. We entered a partnership with Simplifile e-recording solutions, allowing banks, title companies and others to electronically record authorized records. This process has assisted in keeping our staff at its lowest level in over 25 years. We continue to feel the sting of the national economy as evidenced by the continued low revenue figures generated for the City of Norfolk and the Commonwealth of Virginia.

Digitizing efforts continue to provide increased productivity and capacity for our staff and remote access to land records and other non-confidential court records has provided a vehicle for greater access to the court files by the general public. Although the General Assembly continues to shift the redaction requirement deadline, my office has completed the redaction of Land Records, Judgments and Marriage Licenses from 1968 to present. In conjunction with the Supreme Court of Virginia Office of the Executive Secretary, we have developed and released an online, secure, subscription based service that allows Officers of the Court to access criminal and civil case files. Our criminal database in digital form runs from 1997 to present and the civil case files are completed from 2004 to present. The digital efforts in my office have resulted in an estimated 15 million images. All courtrooms have been outfitted with computers to allow digital access to all case files reducing, and in some cases, eliminating the need for

printing. We have assumed additional duties, i.e. Jury Management, with no loss in productivity or customer service.

While other Clerks Offices were reducing their hours because of budget cuts, we were able to meet the budget reductions and maintain the service level of 40 hours per week. As a result of our ability to meet the reductions, many other Clerks Offices around the commonwealth are implementing our practices to reap the same benefits.

The national movement into social media and the ever-increasing use of technology has not skipped over Norfolk. Our citizens are delving deeper into applications such as Facebook, Twitter and iPad/iPhone apps. We were the first court in the nation to utilize Twitter. Through this media outlet, we are able to keep citizens informed about their jury service, important case decisions and other happenings in the court and clerk's office. Our near "real-time" docket app has received great reviews from the local bar association and more importantly our police department. Officers are able to view when and where they are needed in court rather than "sitting around" for hours waiting.

Portability for the judicial side of the house is a key component to increasing access to justice. We are working to ensure our Judges have access to case files and information 24/7 if they choose. Along with access to resources, we are looking to an increased use of video, thereby reducing the costs involved with transporting defendants and witnesses.

Our criminal caseload fell below the 10,000 case mark for the third straight year indicating a slow but steady trend down in crime. Our civil case filings have increased 7% over last year and continue to show an increase in the first quarter of 2011. We have seen a significant drop in concealed weapons permits, an increase in marriage licenses, and stability in most other areas. Land records have seen the largest reduction with a decrease of 30% over 2009. Foreclosures accounted for the largest portion of these transactions. As stated earlier, although we were down significantly in recordations, we are beginning to see slight upward movement in sales and a decrease in foreclosures.

As General Receiver my office has continued to provide the best value to the citizens for which we are holding funds. By lowering the costs associated with the management of those funds and negotiating a higher interest rate, we have been able to add roughly 6% to each of the 450 individual accounts that we manage.

Restitution payments to victims continue to be a priority in my office and the use of the Tax Set-off program and other measures have resulted in the timely recoupment of funds. The Clerk's Office collected and disbursed over $360,000 to victims in the 4th Circuit.

Specific examples of our case load for calendar year (CY) 2010:

Criminal Cases concluded in CY10: 8,516 (down 10.5%)
Civil Cases opened in CY10: 6,289 (up 6.3%)
Will documents processed in CY10: 8,667 (down 1.4%)

Land Record documents processed in CY10: 25,708 (down 29.5%)
Other (marriage license, weapons permits, trade names, etc.): 52,958 (down 1.6%)
Back scanning of documents in CY10: 1,432,157

Overall, our workload is down from 2009.

Working closely with Sheriff's Office staff, we have processed 142 community service letters resulting in in-kind payment of $150,918.00 dollars in court cost debt owed by inmates.

We continue to review each area of revenue on both the state and local level, ensuring a maximum collection of costs for the city and state treasury. According to the Fiscal Year 2010 Final Fines and Fees Report just released by the State Compensation Board, my office, in the midst of the worst economy in recent memory, saw total collections leap from $726,995 to $1,244,707. This was 42% more than in FY09 and resulted in an additional $517,711 for the Commonwealth's coffers. This is the biggest increase in collection revenue by a Circuit Court Clerk's Office in Virginia.

Passport Services continue to be in demand. We have processed 363 passport applications in 2010.

Cash flow through this office hit just over $38 million dollars in calendar year 2010, a 21% decrease over 2009.

My office continues to receive high marks with no management points from the Auditor of Public Accounts for every year of my first term.

With my continued preference toward Norfolk citizens, I am proud to announce that 92% of my staff calls Norfolk home.

Please find attached statistics from 2010. I have included, as a part of this package, graphs that we employ to determine the ebb and flow of the activities at the courthouse. This gives us the ability to manage our staff efficiently and foresee problem areas.

Thank you for your time and I look forward to a continued partnership between the Circuit Court and the City we serve.

Very truly yours;

George E. Schaefer
Clerk of Circuit Court