

Paula Sollami Covello, Esq.



County Clerk's Corner Newsletter...At Your Service

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Welcome from the County Clerk!

New Voting Machines In Mercer County

I'm very proud to report, on behalf of the three election offices representing Mercer County, that our Mercer County Administration and Board of Commissioners have purchased new voting machines for use in the 2023 General Election and beyond. The voting machines are Dominion ICX Touchscreen machines which allow voters to vote, print out their ballot, and then scan the ballot into the scanners. These are the same voting machines the County presently uses for early voting, however now, they will also be used in every voting district in Mercer County on Election Day.

It is really a great achievement that our County has made in providing voters with voting machines that produce a verifiable paper trail. Voting advocacy groups urge that a paper trail be a part of any new voting system to allow for an auditable backup to any electronic voting. Why? Because if the computer in the machine fails, you will still have the paper to count and recheck. In fact, the State of New Jersey only certifies voting machines designed with a paper backup for counties to purchase.

Because we have had very positive feedback about the voting machines used in Early Voting, I'm excited for the voting public to try out these new machines in the November General Election. For one, they are simple to use because you just touch the screen and it marks your ballot. No more Sharpie pens will need to be used! Also, voters can enlarge the font on the machine screens and, request the ballots to be shown in different languages.

Lastly, the new machines will allow you to print out your ballot and scan it into the scanner. However, if you prefer to hand-mark your ballot, you still can do that by printing out a blank ballot and requesting a marker from the poll worker. Mercer didn't want to take the ability to hand mark your ballot away.

The new voting machines means that as a voter, you will have more options in how to cast your vote. You can vote on a new voting machine on Election Day, or you can vote during the Early Voting period at a voting center, several days prior to the election, or you can vote by mail -- an option many people prefer because the ballot comes right to your home.

We leaders of our other three County election offices; County Clerk, Office of the Superintendent of Elections, and the Board of Elections, have been preparing videos and news releases to educate the voting public about the new voting machines. These will be released on our County websites and on our social media pages. There will also be new enhanced training classes for poll workers on how the use the new voting machines.

In summation, we want you to know that Mercer County heard the voters and invested in a new voting system to our County in time for the upcoming November General Election. Hopefully, the new voting machines will prove to be a positive addition to our County services for many years to come.

Passport Services Update

Apply Now

The Mercer County Clerk advises constituents to plan ahead for Fall and Winter travel. The current wait time for passport services is 7-9 weeks for expedited services and up to 14 weeks from the time of submission for a regular application. The fee for a Passport Book increased from \$110 to \$130, and to \$100 for minors. Please note, processing times do not include mailing times. Mailing times vary, please check your application status at passportstatus.state.gov. For more information regarding passports, please visit the Mercer County Clerk's website at <https://www.mercercounty.org/government/county-clerk-office-services/passports> or call the County Clerk's passport office at 609-989-6473 or the County Connection at 609-890-9800.



County Clerk and Staff recently held a Lawrence Township passport service day as part of our office outreach.

Mercer County Clerk Announces Digitization and Preservation of Land Records

Mercer County Clerk Paula Sollami Covello announced that her office completed a book-scanning project that preserved and digitized over one million of Mercer County's historic property records. These records, dating back to the County's inception in 1838, are now available to the public online.

This will allow for business transactions to take place more efficiently, via computer, permitting more of Mercer County's property searches to be conducted remotely. It also preserves the records of the County for future generations.

The project involved the scanning of 1,214 books in the Mercer County Clerk's vast record collection. It includes deeds dating back to January, 1839, Mortgage Releases from the early to mid-20th century, and Chancery Notices, also known as "lis pendens," recorded from 1932-1960, all on one platform. Once scanned, the images were uploaded onto the Mercer County Clerk's land record management system, New Vision Systems, for online searching.

The preservation of historic records is a critical responsibility of the Mercer County Clerk's Office. County Clerk Sollami Covello said, "This project represents my ongoing commitment to innovation and public service. As Mercer's official property recorder, I know the importance of this project to our region's title companies and real estate professionals. I'm especially proud it preserves valuable historic information before that information was lost due to the decay of aging books or other damage." She added, "Scanning will continue but this is a major achievement."

The scanning project involved meticulous planning and collaboration over several years. It was also completed with the utilization of advanced technologies by vendor, County Business Systems, following a competitive contracting process wherein it was stressed that the records must be clear and legible for real estate professionals and future generations to be able to read them. Some images were enhanced to improve readability while other technologies were implemented to eliminate the "bleed-through" of words from two-sided copies.

To access the digitized records online, individuals must first register by visiting the [Mercer County Clerk's Online Public Record Search Page](#). The County Clerk's Office and its Public Record Room is located at 209 South Broad Street, Trenton, from Monday through Friday from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. and late on Wednesdays until 6:45 p.m.



Mercer County Clerk Sollami Covello, Union County Clerk Joanne Rajoppi and Cumberland County Clerk Celeste Riley visiting the Union County Clerk's Records Room

County Clerk Advises Residents on Home Title Scam, Property Alert

Mercer County Clerk Paula Sollami Covello reminds County residents about home title theft that can occur when someone forges the deed to your property so that the title is no longer listed under your name. This kind of theft usually coincides with identity fraud. Con artists often use a falsified or stolen identity to hide their involvement in the theft. Then, they create a fake document that transfers ownership of the property to their own name instead of the name of the valid owner. Some property owners are much more likely to fall victim to deed theft such as seniors, individuals with second homes, or identity-theft victims.

To ensure that one's property is protected, Sollami Covello reminds residents to register for the County Clerk's Property Alert Service to provide property owners with important alerts concerning their properties. The Property Alert Service is completely free and alerts Mercer County property owners when the Mercer County Clerk's Office records a document affecting a specific property. Residents can sign up for the alert system by going to <https://records.mercercounty.org/PropertyAlert/> and registering.

It should be noted that the Property Alert Service does not prevent fraudulent activity from occurring; it helps monitor activity and transactions on properties. Anyone who suspects fraudulent activity should contact authorities. Additionally, if a County resident feels they have been victimized by property fraud, they may call our County Clerk's Property Alert Hotline at **609-989-6470**.

For more information, please visit the Mercer County Clerk's website at <https://www.mercercounty.org/government/county-clerk> or call the office's main number at 609-989-6465.

County Clerk's Office Holds Passport Event

The Mercer County Clerk's Office hosted a Passport Event at the Senior Center in Lawrence Township. With a commitment to providing exceptional service, the event proved to be a resounding success as it brought together a seamless passport application process and a warm community atmosphere. Attendees received expert guidance from dedicated clerks who ensured that each applicant's journey was smooth and hassle-free. The event not only showcased the Mercer County Clerk's Office's dedication to serving its residents but also highlighted its innovative approach to making the passport application process accessible and enjoyable. Photos were also offered on site. The County Clerk's Office has been holding passport events throughout the County and will be holding another event in East Windsor partnered with Mayor Janice Mironov, on October 12th from 2:30 to 6:30 pm., at the East Windsor Municipal building.. For more information on the upcoming event, please call the Mercer County Clerk's Passport Office at **609-989-6473**.



County Clerk Covello and Staff recently held passport service day in Lawrence Township as part of our office outreach

Mercer County Clerk Issues Warning to Passport Applicants

Passport Fees Required at all Passport Facilities

The U.S. Department of State advises all passport applicants that there are no free passports nor fee waivers, and that a fee is required for all passport applications. Payment is required at all Passport Acceptance Facilities, including the Mercer County Connection in Hamilton Township and the Mercer County Clerk's Office in Trenton.

Recent social media videos circulating on the internet, which advise customers that passports can be free by submitting form I-912, are false, misleading and incorrect. The form they are referring to is for U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) and not for Passport Services. The form is NOT a Department of State form and it is not honored by them.

Mercer County Clerk Paula Sollami Covello explained that videos on social media platforms such as TikTok and Instagram are not being produced by government officials, and have created confusion among constituents who believe them to be accurate.

For further information on the Form I-192 and the individuals eligible, please visit <https://www.uscis.gov/i-192> for clear instructions and additional information.

See page 1 for more information regarding passport application.



Clerk's Office staff member Aida Borges assists a customer with their Passport Application

Did you Know?

The County Clerk's Office performs Wedding Ceremonies once a month, in our office at 209 South Broad Street in Trenton. For more information, call 609-989-6820.



Clerk Announces Opportunity for Real Estate Professionals

Real estate professionals may once again have access to all property records, including those subject to Daniel's Law, if they complete a simple registration with the state, explains Mercer County Clerk Paula Sollami Covello. Real estate professionals, including title searchers, may now register with the NJ Department of Banking and Insurance, and once approved, these professionals will have clear access to all records, including those that were redacted, or masked, in accordance with Daniel's Law.

Daniel's Law was implemented in 2020 in order to protect law enforcement officers, judicial officers, prosecutors, and their families from public record searches. Consequently, County Clerks and other government offices redacted their addresses from public search engines throughout New Jersey. However, the NJ Legislature later created an exemption for qualified real estate professionals so that property transactions could continue moving forward. Those business entities are defined as "any person or entity organized under the laws of this State for the primary purpose of determining the existence of any lien, lawsuit, lease, easement, mortgage or other encumbrance or restriction, or ownership interest, on any property and regularly conducts business with any title insurance company or title insurance agent."

Once registered with the Department of Banking and Insurance, title search businesses and real estate businesses may request documents subjected to redaction or nondisclosure under Daniel's Law. Applications may be submitted electronically by completing the form and following the instructions here: https://www.state.nj.us/dobi/division_insurance/titlesearch/index.html. There is no cost to complete the registration process.

All registrants must maintain their information and immediately inform the Department of Banking and Insurance of any changes to the information in their registration. Any questions regarding the registration process can be directed to: TitleSearch@dobi.nj.gov.



For more information on the services offered by the Office of the Mercer County Clerk or questions regarding our public search room, please visit the Mercer County Clerk's website at <https://www.mercercounty.org/government/county-clerk> or call the office's main number at **609-989-6465**.



County Clerk Covello and Clerk's Office Staff at Congresswoman Bonnie Watson Coleman's Constituent Fair in Ewing offering information on our various services



County Clerk Covello, Councilwoman Yazminelly Gonzales, Councilwoman Crystal Feliciano and Commissioner Terrance Stokes at the Puerto Rican Flag Raising Ceremony in Trenton



County Clerk Covello with Trenton Board of Education Member Gene Bouie, where she was a featured speaker. Trenton will begin electing their board of education members this year, following years of having an appointed board



County Clerk Covello attends national night out and supports law enforcement as they embrace the communities that they serve. She is pictured with Prosecutor Angelo Onfri and First Assistant Prosecutor Jennifer Downing Mathis and Lloyd Mathis

Summer Office Interns Recap

.As the warm summer days come to a close, we wanted to take a moment to reflect on the incredible journey of our talented group of summer interns. This summer, our interns brought a fresh perspective, enthusiasm, and dedication that enriched our workplace and contributed to our shared goals. Our interns dove headfirst into a range of challenging projects, spanning all of our departments from Passports, Recording and Indexing, to our Election department. Guided by our dedicated team members, our interns had the opportunity to learn from the best. We had skill-building sessions, and one-on-one mentorship, as they worked to sharpened their professional skills. From the first day to the last, the energy and enthusiasm our interns brought to the office was truly infectious. Their positivity and willingness to take on new challenges inspired us all to continue pushing boundaries and striving for excellence.



The Mercer County Internship Program is designed to provide students in high school and college with paid opportunities to work and gain practical training and hands-on, real world experience that will help meet their educational goals and prepare them for a professional career. During the course of the summer program, students have the opportunity to take part in a variety of curated activities coordinated by the Office of Personnel designed to teach new techniques and skills, enhance existing knowledge and abilities, while also exploring possible career paths in the public administration.



For more information regarding Mercer County internship opportunities, please visit [The Office of Personnel](#).



Reminder: If you are a College Student, or parent of a College Student now is the time to apply for a vote-by-mail ballot for the upcoming November General Election. We will send it to your College address so you can vote.

Notary Night Schedule for 2023

Notary Nights will continue to be held on the first Thursday of each month, from 3:00pm to 7:30pm. Notary Nights are held at the Mercer County Connection satellite office in Hamilton. A mask or face covering is optional. The remaining dates for 2023 are as follows:

September 7

October 5

November 2

December 7

To be sworn in by Mercer County Clerk's Office staff as a new notary, prospective notaries must apply through the State Department of Treasurer online and have their applications signed by a legislator. If you file your application online it will be sent to your legislator electronically. After the State of New Jersey processes your application, you will be sent your commission by mail. You must take your oath of office. The fee is \$15; checks and money order are accepted. Prospective notaries will also need to bring a photo ID and their State certificate to be sworn in.

*At the current time, appointments are required for notary services in Hamilton. Appointments can be made at both by calling the Clerk's main number at 609-989-6465. The Clerk's office offers notary services five days a week from 8:30– 4:30, as well as until 6:45 on Wednesday nights in Trenton.

Election Related Deadlines

September 23– Commencement of mailing mail-in ballots

October 17– Voter Registration Deadline

October 28– Nov 5— Early Voting Period

October 31– Deadline to apply for VBM by mail

November 6– 3 pm Deadline to apply for VBM in person

November 7– General Election

Did You Know?

You can register to vote at age 17 so that you will be able to vote at age 18. Here is the state link: <https://www.state.nj.us/state/elections/voter-registration.shtml>

About the Mercer County Clerk's Office

The County Clerk's Office offers many services that Mercer County residents and businesses use every day. The Clerk's Office files and records all documents concerning real estate ownership and transfer, registers small business trade names, processes U.S. passport applications, and swears in notary public applicants.

The office offers photos for people seeking passports and County and Veteran ID cards, and Gold-Star Parent ID cards as well. The County Clerk also has certain election responsibilities – including the printing of ballots, counting of votes cast by electronic machines and the issuance of vote-by-mail ballots. Elections information can be found on our website at <http://www.mercercounty.org/government/county-clerk/elections>.

Get in Touch

**Mercer County Clerk's Office
209 South Broad Street
Trenton, NJ 08608**

**Mercer County Connection Satellite Office
957 State Highway 33
Hamilton, NJ 08690**

Visit our website: mercercounty.org/government/county-clerk

By Phone

Main number: 609-989-6465

Deputy Clerk and Administrative Offices: 609-989-6353

Press Inquiries: 609-989-6074

Elections: 609-989-6495

Indexing/Imaging: 609-989-6472

Business Registrations: 609-989-6469

Passports: 609-989-6473

County ID/Veteran ID/Gold Star Parent ID: 609-278-7108

Recording: 609-989-6466

Fax: 609-989-1111

County Connection: 609-890-9800

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