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April 13, 2020

The Honorable Jan R. Jurden
Superior Court
500 N. King Street
Wilmington, DE 19801

The Honorable David B. McBride
Legislative Hall
P.O. Box 1401
Dover, DE 19903

The Honorable Peter C. Schwartzkopf
Legislative Hall
P.O. Box 1401
Dover, DE 19903

RE: Foreclosure Filing Data – Fourth Quarter 2019

Dear President Judge Jurden, President Pro Tempore McBride and Speaker Schwartzkopf:

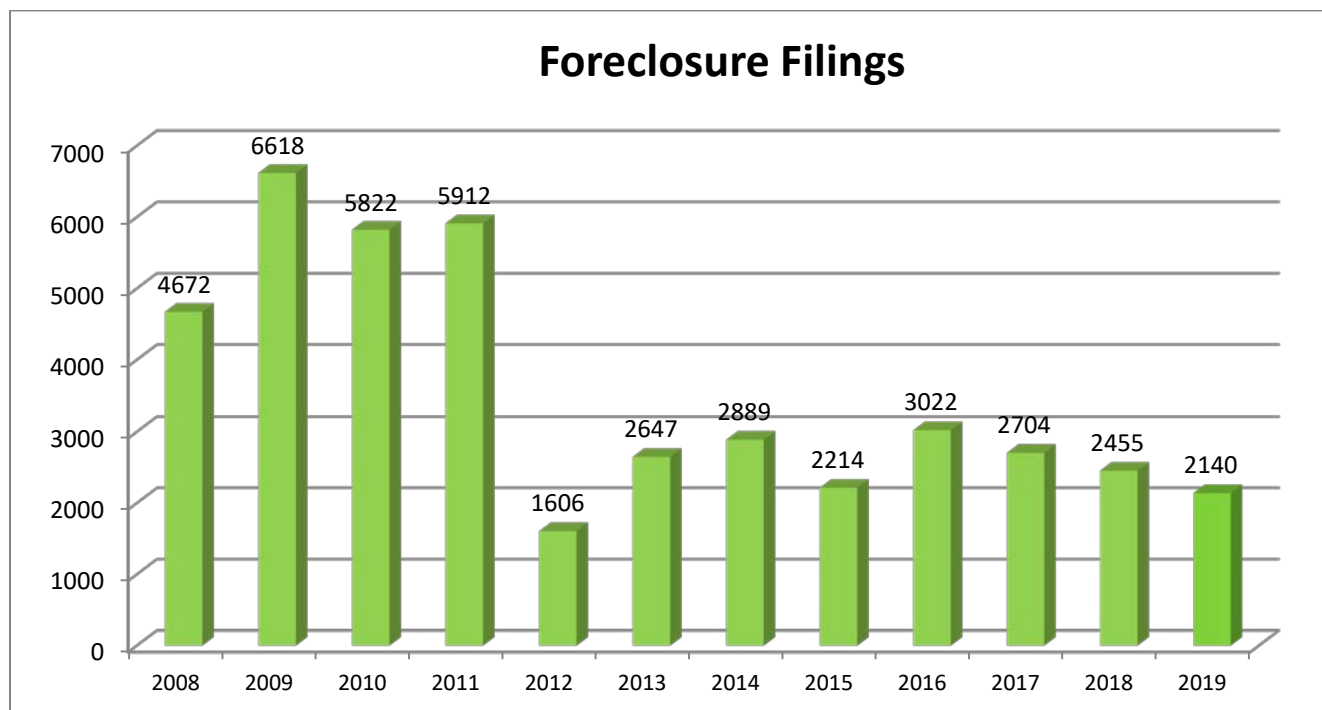
As the delegatee of the Superior Court under 10 *Del. C.* § 5062C(t), the Department of Justice is required to periodically report relevant statistics about the proceedings of the Mediation Program. This letter serves as the Fourth Quarter Report for 2019. The Mediation Program has postponed all mediation conferences through May 15, 2020 and all residential foreclosure filings have been halted. During this Emergency, we continue to be available to assist homeowners and answer their questions regarding the foreclosure process and the options available to them.

1. Statistical Snap Shot

As of December 31, 2019, 13,856 eligible foreclosure actions have been filed since the Mediation Program went into effect on January 19, 2012. A more detailed overview of

foreclosure statistics may be found below, as well as on the Mediation Program website at:
<http://attorneygeneral.delaware.gov/fraud/cpu/automediation.shtml>

The following chart demonstrates the number of foreclosure actions¹ filed statewide in the calendar years indicated.



2. Foreclosure Filings Since Inception of the Mediation Program

Between January 19, 2012 and December 31, 2019, there have been a total of 19,537 foreclosure filings statewide with 13,856 of those cases, or 70.92%, eligible for the Mediation Program.² Beginning

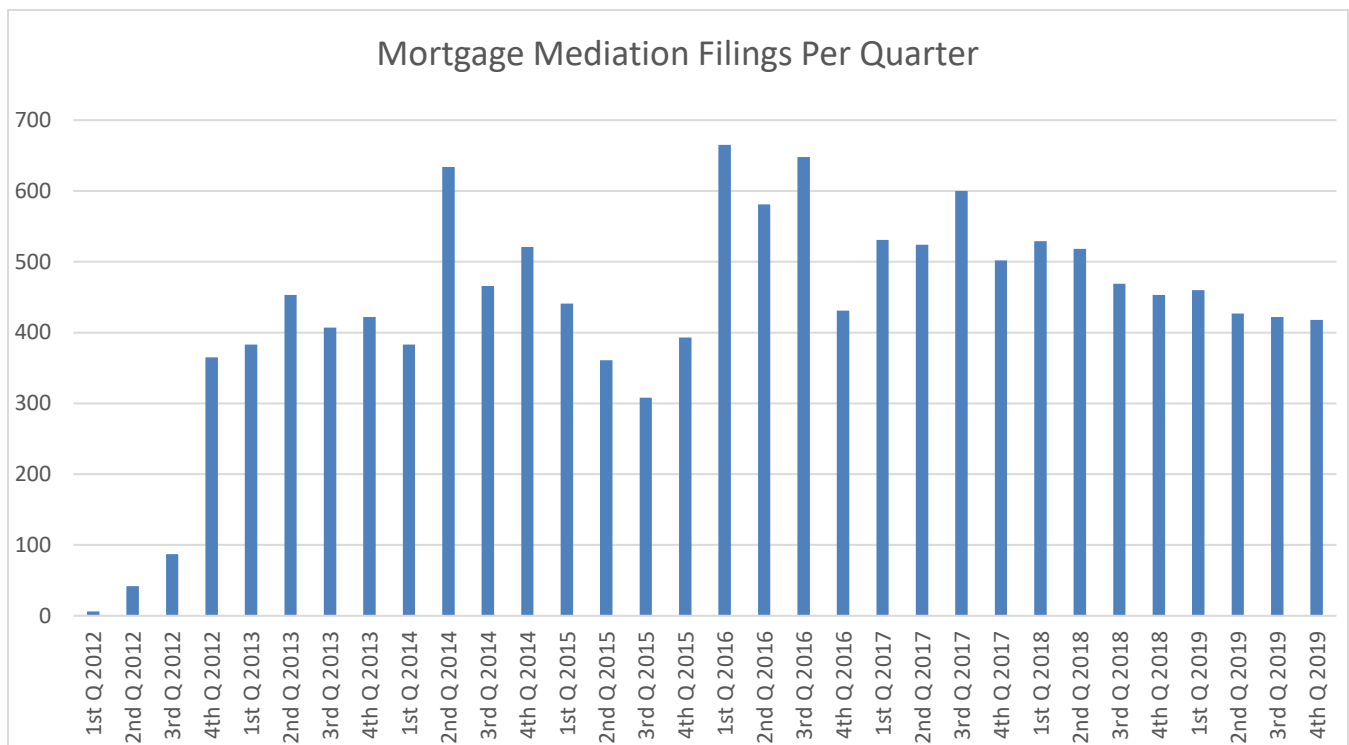
¹ This data is compiled through September 30, 2019. These figures include *scire facias* actions and, as of January 19, 2012, mediation-eligible *scire facias* actions. Additional information by county and case type is available on the Department of Justice's website: <http://attorneygeneral.delaware.gov/fraud/cpu/automediation.shtml>

² Historically, the percentage of mediation-eligible foreclosure actions in Superior Court have been as follows: Q2 2012 – 16%; Q3 2012 – 24%; Q4 2012 – 38.6%; Q1 2013 – 63.3%; Q2 2013 – 69.2%; Q3 2013 – 63.9%; Q4 2013 – 59.7%; Q1 2014 – 65.29%; Q2 2014 – 71.66%; Q3 2014 – 68.96%; Q4 2014 – 67.02%; Q1 2015 – 66.22%; Q2 2015 – 73.56%; Q3 2015 – 65.73%; Q4 2015 – 60.37%; Q1 2016 – 61.43%; Q2 2016- 62.21%, Q3 2016- 63.88%, Q4 2016- 65.35%, Q1 2017- 66.03%, Q2 2017- 66.62%, Q3 2017- 64.62%, Q4 2017- 67.96%, Q1 2018-68.47%, Q2 2018-68.81%, Q3 2018-69.25%, Q4 2018-69.69%, Q1 2019-70%, Q2-70.34% and Q3 2019-70.64%.

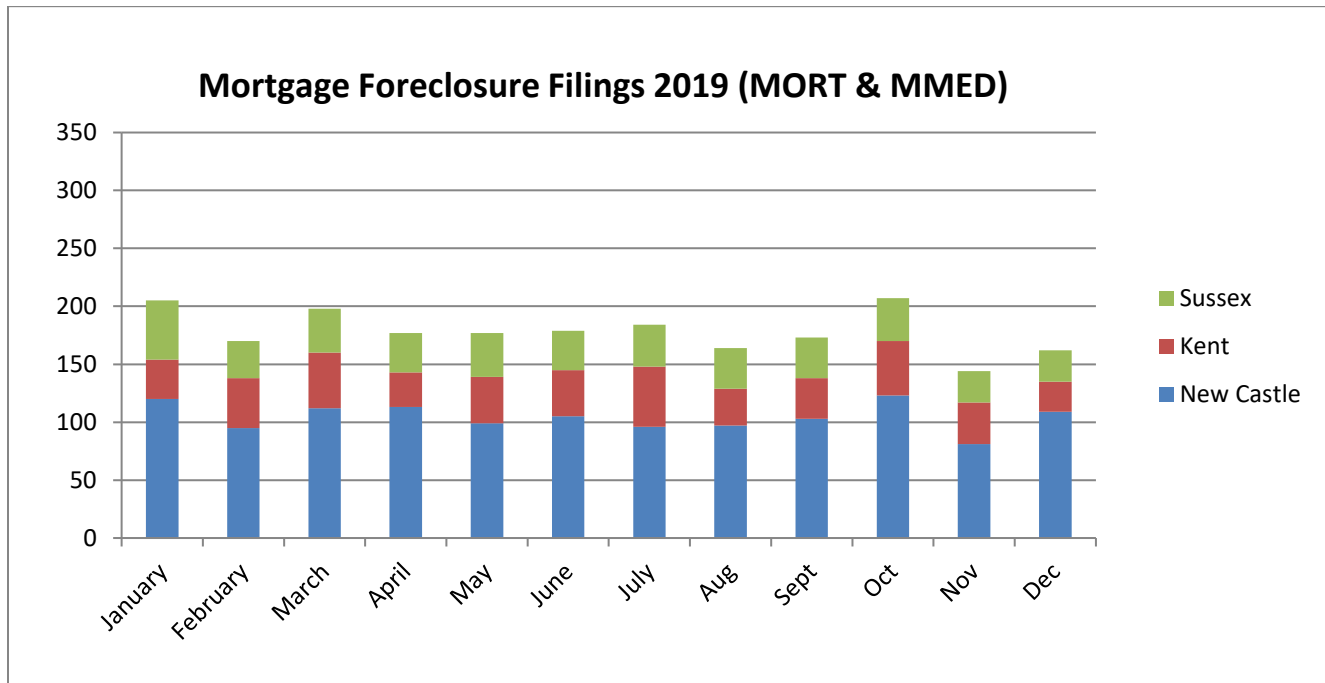
in 2013 and continuing through Fourth Quarter 2014, there was a noticeable increase in mediation-eligible cases commenced in the Superior Court. In 2015, there were an average of 377 filings per quarter. 2016 saw a large increase in the number of filings with 665 mediation eligible filings in the first quarter. 2016 surpassed 2014 with the highest number of mediation eligible foreclosure filings since the inception of the program. There were 2,325 mediation-eligible filings in 2016. The number of filings in 2017 decreased slightly from the 2016 numbers with an average of 541 mediation filings per quarter. There were 2,162 mediation filings in 2017. In 2018, the filings have continued at a steady pace with a total of 1,970 filings in 2018 and an average of 493 filings per quarter. In 2019, there were 1,727 eligible filings with an average of 432 filings per quarter.

The filing numbers for 2016 were markedly higher than any previous year. The major upheavals within the foreclosure law firms in Delaware beginning in second quarter 2015, most notably the sudden closure of Butler & Hosch and the retirement of Robert Aulgur, Esq. of Whittington & Aulgur may have artificially reduced the number of filings for part of 2015 and partially led to the increased number of filings in 2016.

The below chart demonstrates the number of mediation-eligible filings per quarter since 2012.



The following chart demonstrates the number of foreclosures filed in each county from January 1, 2019 through December 31, 2019.³ New Castle County continues to have the highest number of filings while Sussex County has slightly fewer than Kent County.



3. Mediation Conferences and Participation Data

Through the Mediation Program, the Department of Justice administers and oversees conciliation-style mediations for each case in which the homeowner has been served with process. We are able to accommodate up to 120 cases per conference day in each county, with each lender’s counsel holding up to 50 conferences per day. New Castle County averaged 71 mediations scheduled per conference day, Kent averaged 64 mediations and Sussex averaged 34 mediations per conference day during the Fourth Quarter of 2019.⁴ There are two conference days per month in New Castle County and one conference day per month in each of the other two counties. When the Emergency Declaration is lifted and mediations resume, we are prepared to limit the number of conferences scheduled per mediation slot to reduce the

³ These numbers include MORT (not eligible for mediation) foreclosure actions as well as MMED (mediation-eligible) foreclosure actions.

⁴ Average of mediations scheduled per day from October 2019 through December 2019.

Hon. Jan R. Jurden
Hon. David B. McBride
Hon. Peter C. Schwartzkopf
April 13, 2020
Page 5 of 8

number of people in the mediation room and add additional times or days where needed. We will also make accommodations for telephonic conferences where requested.

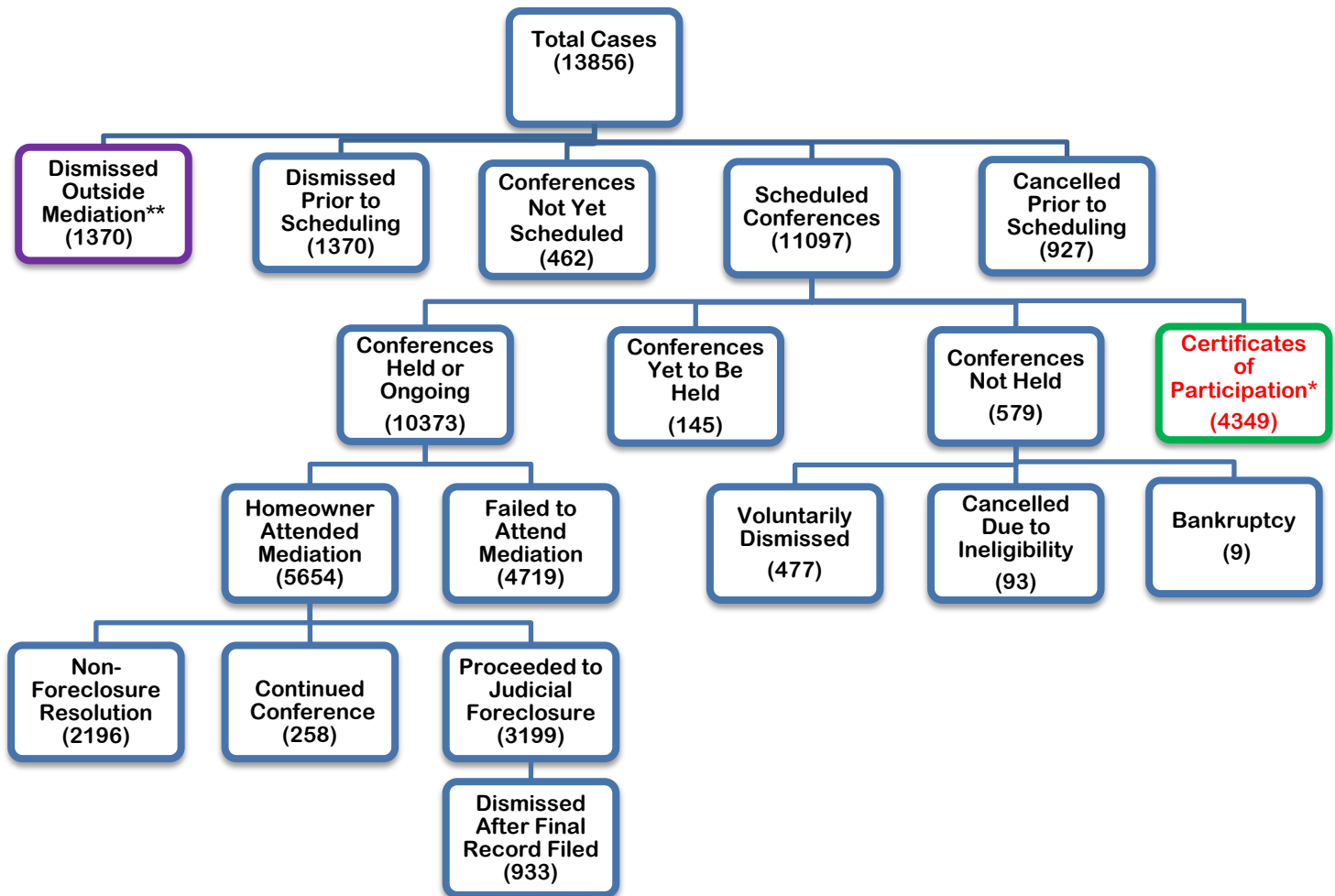
During the Fourth Quarter of 2019, 366 Mediation Scheduling Notices and 157 Certificates of Participation were filed with the Superior Court. Overall, the Mediation Program has a **54.51% participation rate**. Of those Delaware homeowners who elect to actively participate in the Mediation Program, **59.90%** have either achieved a non-foreclosure resolution or remain in mediation and continue loss mitigation negotiations with their lender/servicer.⁵ The remaining 40.10% have resumed court proceedings due to unemployment, severe delinquency, failure to participate in the Mediation Program, failure to reach an agreement on the terms of the loss mitigation offered by the lender/servicer, and/or a failure to work with a housing counselor. The high success rate of the Mediation Program thus far owes a great deal to the support of knowledgeable HUD-approved housing counselors.

The participation data provides a snapshot of the cases in the Mediation Program through December 31, 2019. Our program participation overview chart captures those matters that were dismissed or cancelled prior to mediation and those that were dismissed or cancelled following the scheduling of mediation. Those cases that achieve a non-foreclosure resolution and those that remain in mediation are separated. Additionally, we detailed those cases which have been dismissed outside of mediation.⁶

For those 4,719 homeowners who failed to participate in the Mediation Program, our data indicate that they often have vacated their homes prior to the foreclosure case being filed in the Superior Court. Therefore, they may not receive the information about the Mediation Program which is sent by the Department of Justice. Further, they would not be eligible for mediation if they no longer occupy the home.

⁵ “Successful mediation” is defined as any conference where the homeowner achieves a non-foreclosure resolution to avoid a Sheriff’s Sale of the property, or where the parties remain engaged in negotiations and the homeowner is granted a subsequent mediation conference date.

⁶ Cases dismissed outside of mediation are any cases dismissed without a mediation conference being held, including those matters where a defendant failed to appear for mediation or the matter was cancelled as non-mediation eligible, and the case was subsequently dismissed.



4. Delinquency Rates and Foreclosure Filings

Delaware’s delinquency rates and percentage of loans in foreclosure remain above the national average in the 4th Quarter of 2019.⁷ The total percentage of loans past due for Delaware is 4.77% and the national past due rate is 4.07%.⁸ The steady number of MMED filings throughout 2018 and 2019 illustrate that

⁷ Mortgage Bankers Association, National Delinquency Survey, Q4 2019(February 11, 2020).

⁸ Id. at 4. The seasonally adjusted national total past due rate is 3.77%.

Hon. Jan R. Jurden
Hon. David B. McBride
Hon. Peter C. Schwartzkopf
April 13, 2020
Page 7 of 8

Delaware homeowners continue to struggle with mortgage payments and that lenders/servicers are participating in the Mediation Program.

For the Fourth Quarter of 2019, Delaware reported a seriously delinquent rate or 90+Day delinquency rate of 2.34%, a foreclosure inventory of 1.09%, and total foreclosure starts of 0.30%.⁹ The national non-seasonally adjusted foreclosure inventory is 0.78% and the national non-seasonally adjusted foreclosure starts is 0.21%.¹⁰ The national seriously delinquent rate or 90+ Day Delinquency Rate is 1.76%.¹¹ While the overall foreclosure rates have continued to decline, Delaware ranks relatively high among other states in delinquency measures (11th in percent of loans in foreclosure, 10th in foreclosure starts, and 12th in 90+ days delinquent).¹²

5. Going Forward

The threat of losing one's home remains a painful reality for many Delawareans. As the number of foreclosure filings has increased, the Mediation Program has demonstrated a high rate of success at avoiding foreclosure for homeowners who work with a HUD-approved housing counselor and actively participate in their mediation conferences. It is clear from the most recent quarterly numbers that the number of foreclosure filings in Delaware, and accordingly the need for the program, remains and is projected to remain high for the foreseeable future. Governor Carney signed House Bill 68 in June 2019 extending the Mortgage Foreclosure Mediation Program and the Office of Foreclosure Prevention through January of 2025. The extension of both of these programs will allow Delaware homeowners to continue to receive education and assistance throughout the foreclosure process.

The Department of Justice's Office of Foreclosure Prevention and Financial Education (the "OFP") has been an important complement to the Mediation Program through its community outreach and education seminars, servicer events, and the day-to-day assistance provided to homeowners via the foreclosure hotline. OFP will continue hosting outreach and education events throughout the State where homeowners are given resources and information to assist them in navigating the foreclosure process and avoiding unnecessary sheriff's sales. The OFP's work has served many Delaware homeowners who face this difficult life event and, in many cases, helped to prevent the filing of foreclosure actions against these homeowners.

The Department of Justice is ready to meet the continuing demands from high foreclosure volumes and participation in the Mediation Program. The current COVID-19 crisis and ensuing economic

⁹ Id. at 4.

¹⁰ Id.

¹¹ Id.

¹² Mortgage Bankers Association, National Delinquency Survey, Q4 2019(February 11, 2020) at 15-19.

Hon. Jan R. Jurden
Hon. David B. McBride
Hon. Peter C. Schwartzkopf
April 13, 2020
Page 8 of 8

consequences have affected many Delaware homeowners. The Mediation Program and OFP are ready to assist all affected homeowners.

When foreclosure cases are filed and served, homeowners are promptly scheduled for mediation dates throughout the State, and borrowers have the opportunity to have a meaningful conversation with their lender/servicer before the judicial foreclosure proceeds. Increasing participation and success rates of the Mediation Program will save many more Delaware homeowners from unnecessary foreclosures, increase the stability of our neighborhoods, and improve the housing market in Delaware.

Respectfully,



Owen P. Lefkon, Director
Fraud and Consumer Protection Division
Delaware Department of Justice

cc: Hon. John C. Carney, Jr.
Hon. Thomas R. Carper
Hon. Christopher A. Coons
Hon. Lisa Blunt Rochester
Sec. Anas Ben Addi