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## Self-help legal center planned

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*Lansing* --The Michigan Supreme Court plans to develop a statewide legal self-help center for people representing themselves in divorce, foreclosure and other civil matters, Chief Justice Marilyn Kelly said Wednesday.

Kelly announced the initiative as part of her State of the Judiciary address before a joint session of the House and Senate that also included news that Michigan courts have become more efficient at processing cases.

Kelly has appointed a Solutions of Self-help task force to oversee development of a Web site and other resources.

"This will not always mean that people don't get lawyers -- it's about creating a continuum of legal services depending on what people are facing," said Lorraine Weber, Michigan Supreme Court director of access and fairness and a co-chairwoman of the task force.

The Web site is to be modeled after those in other states, including Illinois, according to Linda Rexer, executive director of the Michigan State Bar Foundation.

"Other states find it saves litigants time and money, with fewer rejected filings and fewer adjournments," said Rexer, another task force co-chairwoman.

Kelly said Michigan's economy has contributed to fewer people able to afford legal services. "Legal aid agencies are doing a valiant job, along with the many Michigan attorneys who donate over 30,000 hours of free services each year," she said. "But the need far outstrips their capacities."

Kelly told the legislators Michigan courts have become increasingly efficient in recent years. In 2009, the clearance rate was 100 percent, meaning courts are keeping up with their case loads.

Clearance rates by court:

- The Supreme Court, which had 2,224 new filings in 2009, resolved 2,240 cases, for a clearance rate of 101 percent.
- The Court of Appeals, had 6,257 new filings, had 6,810 case dispositions, for a clearance rate of 109 percent. Ninety percent of cases were addressed by the Court of Appeals within 18 months of filing.
- Circuit courts had a 99.1 percent clearance rate, with 323,613 new filings or reopened cases and 320,547 case decisions or other resolutions.
- District courts had a disposition rate of 101.5 percent, with an incoming caseload of 3.69 million and 3.75 million case dispositions.
- Probate courts, which can often oversee some cases for years, had 23,997 new filings in 2009 and 24,261 dispositions, for a disposition rate of 97.2 percent.

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