

Midland judge, court system praised in State of the Judiciary address

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By the Midland Daily News | [0 comments](#)

Midland County Probate Court Judge Dorene Allen and the Midland County Circuit Court were prominently mentioned during a State of the Judiciary address at the Capitol, according to state Rep. Jim Stamas, R-Midland.

In a special House/Senate session, Michigan Supreme Court Chief Justice Marilyn Kelly addressed the Legislature, statewide public officials and the public on the state of the judiciary. Kelly singled out Allen, who was in the audience, for her leadership in directing the county probate court. Kelly also mentioned the local circuit court for using electronic filing to save money for the county and state.

"Judge Allen deserves to be commended for helping reduce crime in Midland County while saving taxpayer dollars," said Stamas. "The Midland County Circuit Court system also is on the cutting edge for using today's technology for the betterment of our region."

Allen reported a significant reduction in juvenile crime and budgetary savings due in part to treating young people locally rather than transferring them to residential treatment programs.

A State of the Judiciary address had not been given since 2000.

In that speech to lawmakers, Kelly said the state's poor economy has made it harder for some residents to afford legal services and steps must be taken to help them.

Her plans to address the problem include creating a task force to promote ways to help people who can't afford an attorney, and a website will be developed for non-lawyers who represent themselves in legal proceedings, Kelly said.

Home to the nation's highest unemployment rate of 14.1 percent, Michigan now has more people eligible for civil legal aid but agencies must often turn them away because they, too, have limited resources.

"Among our most persistent and entrenched problems is the high cost of using the courts," Kelly said.

"For too many low- and middle-income people, the legal system is too expensive. And that's been the case for decades," she said. "But now in a cruel but logical irony, the state's current struggling economy has rendered more people in serious need of legal services and simultaneously made those services harder to afford."

Kelly, who became chief justice last year, also urged more support for those with mental illness, including programs that might prevent them from landing in the state's criminal justice system.

"The truth is that a great amount of crime has its origins in mental illness," Kelly said. "Unfortunately, our current model for dealing with the mentally ill tends toward imposing treatment only after a person's behavior has reached a crisis point, when the person becomes violent."

Some mental health support services have faced budget cuts in recent years of Michigan's ongoing state government budget problems. The pressure to make cuts will continue in the budget year that begins Oct. 1 because the state faces an overall combined budget deficit of about \$1.7 billion.