



MICHIGAN
Justice for All Commission

Annual Report

2022

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Introductory Letter

Justice Brian K. Zahra and Angela Tripp

Co-Chairs, Justice for All Commission



Chair, Justice Brian Zahra
Michigan Supreme Court



Vice-Chair, Angela Tripp
Director, Michigan Legal Help

To the People of Michigan:

Each year, many people must navigate Michigan’s complicated civil legal system without the assistance of an attorney. Individuals are often dealing with issues that can significantly impact their lives such as debt collection, eviction, and child custody or support. The Justice for All Commission (JFAC) is dedicated to advancing reforms that will make the civil justice system easier to navigate while providing additional resources for those navigating the civil justice system without the assistance of legal counsel.

For many people, accessing the services of legal aid providers can make a meaningful difference in the outcome of their legal issue. In 2022, the Commission released [a report](#) examining the value and impact of legal aid organizations on individuals navigating the civil justice system, as well the people of Michigan as a whole. Looking at 2019-2020, for every \$1 invested in Michigan’s civil legal aid services, the people of Michigan received a 669% return on that investment in immediate and long-term financial benefits. While legal aid services alone will not eliminate the civil justice gap, ongoing investment in additional legal aid resources is a prudent strategy which often provides a lifeline to those navigating the system.

In 2022, the Commission took a significant step forward in its efforts to make the civil justice system easier to navigate through the adoption of [recommendations](#) from the Process Simplification – Debt Collection Work Group. We are excited for the Commission to begin implementation efforts on these recommendations in early 2023. As these implementation efforts begin, we are also eagerly anticipating the presentation of additional recommendations from several of the Commission’s other committees and work groups that will continue to build upon these reform efforts.

The breadth and depth of the civil justice issues being addressed by the Commission is substantial. As we begin the third year of Commission activities, we want to express a deep appreciation for the significant commitment of more than 150 volunteer work group/committee members and Commissioners. Working together we will achieve our goal of 100 percent access to the civil justice system in Michigan.



2022 Commissioners

Hon. Margaret Zuzich Bakker
Circuit Court Judge

Jennifer Bentley
Michigan State Bar Foundation

Kevin Bowling
Court Administrator

Thomas P. Boyd
State Court Administrator

Rep. TC Clements
Michigan House of Representatives

Peter Cunningham
State Bar of Michigan

Nicole Huddleston
Detroit Justice Center

Deborah Hughes
Legal Assistance Center

Hon. Timothy Kelly
District Court Judge

Bonsitu Kitaba-Gaviglio
State Planning Body

Ashley Lowe
Legal Services Association of Michigan

Hon. Allie Maldonado
Tribal Court Judge

Hon. Mabel Mayfield
Probate Court Judge

Bianca McQueen
Lakeshore Legal Aid Board of Directors

Alicia Moon
Deputy Legal Counsel for Governor

Joshua Rivera
Michigan Dept. of Health and Human Services

Amy Salminen
Peter White Public Library

Brittany Schultz
Ford Motor Company

Yusef Shakur
Michigan Roundtable for Diversity and Inclusion

Carol Siemon
Prosecuting Attorneys Association of Michigan

Kristen Staley
Michigan Indigent Defense Commission

Clarence Stone
Michigan State Housing Development Authority

Angela Tripp (Co-Chair)
Michigan Legal Help

Hon. Cynthia Ward
Association of Black Judges

Carmen Wargel
Turning Point Macomb

Dana Warnez
State Bar of Michigan

Michelle Williams
Michigan Department of Education

Hon. Brian K. Zahra (Co-Chair)
Michigan Supreme Court

Lynda Zeller
Michigan Health Care Endowment Fund



Pillars & Tactics Framework

The work of the Justice for All Commission is guided by the vision established by its forerunner, the Justice for All Task Force. Following an 18-month collaborative effort with the Michigan State Bar Foundation, State Bar of Michigan, Michigan Legal Help, the State Court Administrative Office (SCAO), and community stakeholders, the Task Force set forth a [strategic plan](#) for achieving 100 percent access to the civil justice system for the people of Michigan.

The consensus view of the Task Force was that a civil justice system that provides access to justice can be described by five notable and essential characteristics:

1. Welcoming;
2. Understandable;
3. Collaborative;
4. Adaptive, and
5. Trusted



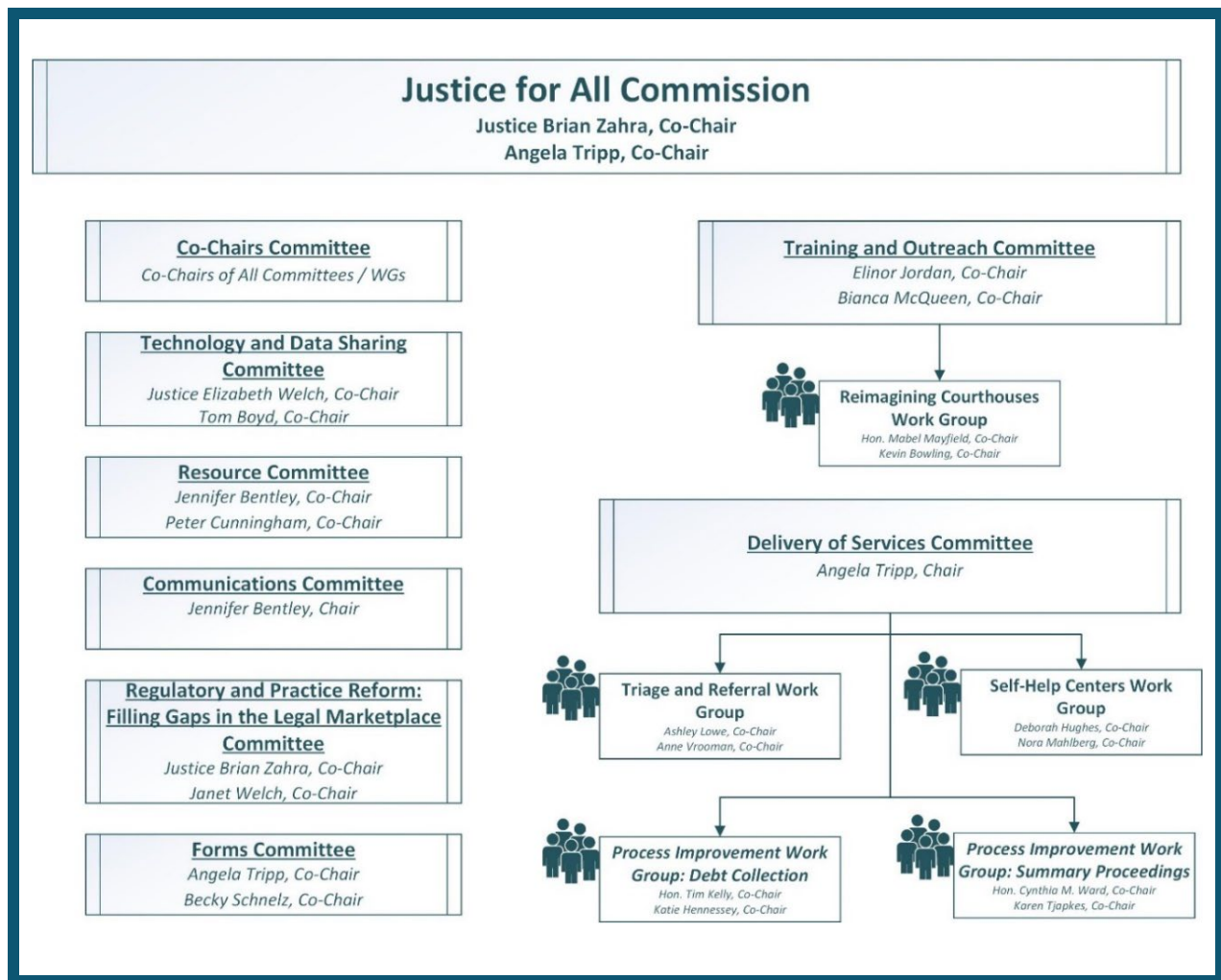
The Commission has created 12 committees and work groups to develop recommendations designed to strengthen these five essential characteristics within Michigan’s civil justice system. Further guiding the committees’ and work groups’ development of actionable recommendations are the four strategic pillars (goals):

1. **A service culture is pervasive across the Michigan civil justice system:** stakeholders are focused on serving and strengthening their communities.
2. **Simplify and streamline processes, rules, and laws:** the civil justice system is easy to navigate, understand, and use to address all legal problems.
3. **People can get what they need when they need it to address their problems:** a spectrum of easy-to-access affordable legal resources to match individual needs is available to everyone.
4. **An inclusive, collaborative network of diverse partners works together to solve problems:** the civil justice system effectively works with and integrates local resources and community-based organizations.

Guided by this framework, the Commission, through its committees and work groups, made great strides in its effort to increase access to justice in Michigan during 2022.

Commission Committee and Work Group Structure

The Commission’s standing committees and issue-specific work groups are outlined below. Each of the committees and work groups are charged with the development of specific recommendations or work products for presentation to the full Commission. The Commissioners will review and determine which recommendations should be adopted as official recommendations of the Commission.



Highlights and Accomplishments

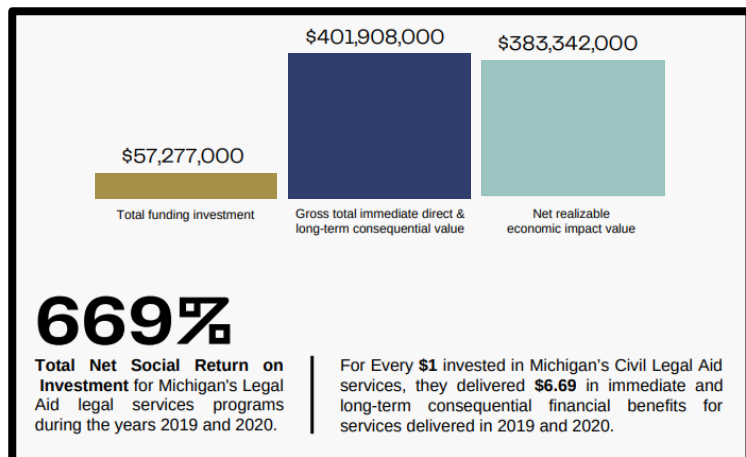
Michigan's Legal Aid Organizations Social Return on Investment Report

The Resource Committee, working with consultant, CSACO Community Services Analysis, LLC evaluated the value and impact of legal aid organizations. In 2022, the committee issued the report [Michigan's Legal Aid Organizations Social Economic Impact and Social Return on Investment](#).

The report examines the social value of legal aid services provided to the people of Michigan during 2019 and 2020. Social value is measured in terms of immediate value to the parties, as well as the long-term consequential value to the community as a whole. The combined immediate and long-term value is then compared to the money invested in legal aid, resulting in a measurement of the Social Return on Investment (SROI). SROI is an internationally standardized and accepted process for measuring and understanding the financial impacts of social services organizations.

Measuring the impact of legal aid services across 2019 and 2020 reveals that Michigan received a 669% social return on its investment in civil legal aid. For every dollar invested, Michigan received \$6.69 in immediate and long-term consequential financial benefits.

This study, demonstrating the effectiveness of civil legal aid, will help drive recommendations for future action and investment. While legal aid services alone will not eliminate the civil justice gap, investment in legal aid services provides a significant benefit not only to individuals navigating the civil justice system, but to all state residents.

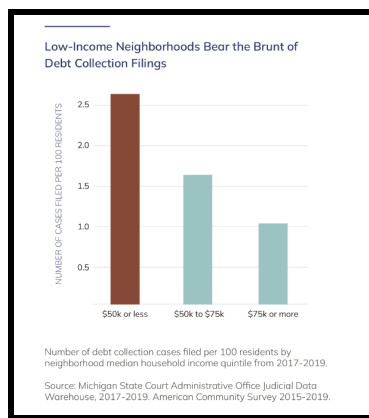
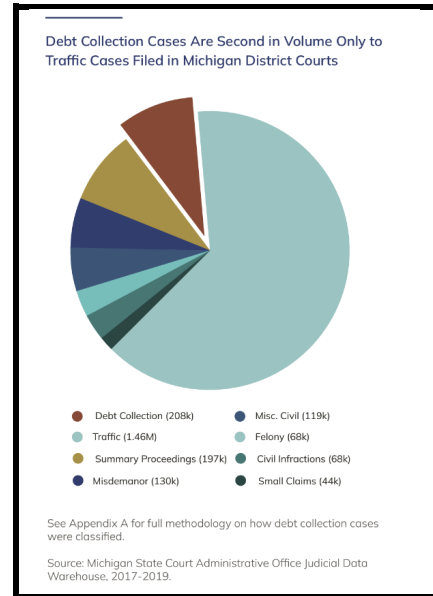


Debt Collection Report: Advancing Justice for All in Debt Collection Lawsuits

The 2019 [Justice for All Task Force Strategic Plan](#) specifically outlined the need for simplifying and improving the debt collection process in Michigan to make it easier for unrepresented debtors to understand and participate in cases filed against them. This led to the creation of the Debt Collection Work Group comprised of members with a wide variety of backgrounds and knowledge.

Throughout the work group’s convenings, members dug deep into the issues defendants, who are often self-represented, face while being sued in debt collection cases. Working with consultants The Pew Charitable Trusts and January Advisors, the work group gathered and analyzed debt collection case data from Michigan’s trial courts covering the period of 2010 to 2021. After extensive analysis and discussion, the group presented their findings and data-driven recommendations in a final [report](#), which was approved and adopted by the Commission in November 2022.

In Michigan, debt collection cases are second to traffic cases in volume of civil or criminal cases filed in district court. While these cases impact many state residents, those living in low-income neighborhoods are



experiencing debt

collection lawsuits at a higher rate. In addition to viewing debt collection cases through a court-centered lens, the committee looked broadly at demographics of those who are systemically being impacted by debt collection case filings.

Recommendations of the work group are designed to improve the court process and include modernizing service of process rules, modifying the requirements for debt collection complaints, increasing awareness of legal rights, and updating court forms with plain language. The work group also included recommendations such as data tracking as a vital step in

continuing to highlight barriers in the civil justice system. These data-driven recommendations will help advance the Commission’s mission of providing 100 percent access to the civil justice system. The Commission will transition to implementation planning with the work group to refine and advance recommendations to the Michigan Supreme Court and others in 2023.



Stakeholder Feedback Process



The Commission values diverse work groups and committees to help facilitate dialogue and the sharing of broad viewpoints. All committees and work groups operating under the Justice for All Commission have active members from various stakeholder groups. Early in the process of developing recommendations it became evident that engaging in an even broader stakeholder feedback process was critical to the quality and success of most

recommendations. This process provides additional stakeholder perspectives to ensure recommendations are framed broadly, are inclusive of a wide range of views, and help to identify any unintentional gaps.

Some of the groups that have participated in this feedback process include the Debt Collection Work Group, the Training and Outreach Committee, and the Triage and Referral Work Group. This process has been well-received and has helped facilitate additional conversation in the committees and work groups to clarify some of the proposed recommendations. The Commission is proud of this effort to obtain insight and support for proposed recommendations.



Creation of Forms Committee and Partnership with NCSC, Transcend, and Suffolk LIT Lab

As identified in the Task Force Report, one of the main Commission priorities is to improve the process for self-represented litigants who are trying to solve their legal problems. Most self-represented litigants rely heavily on the SCAO-approved forms to help them navigate through the justice system. With limited legal understanding and knowledge, these forms are the core of many litigants' interactions with the civil justice system. The civil court forms can be cumbersome, confusing, and difficult to comprehend. One major step towards advancing access to justice includes translating civil forms into plain language.

To tackle this problem, the Commission has partnered with Transcend, a national organization leading in plain language translation and training, the National Center for State Courts (NCSC), and Suffolk Legal & Innovative Technology (LIT) Lab. In 2022, these consultants, along with a newly created Forms Committee, began a multi-year process to simplify and update the SCAO court forms with plain language. The committee includes representatives from key partners in the civil justice system who will help provide guidance for this form simplification project. While the project seems daunting and is a huge undertaking, these changes will be critically important to increasing access to justice.

Committee and Work Group Activities in 2022

It was full steam ahead for the Commission's various work groups and committees as they entered year two. Each group took steps toward advancing the Justice for All Commission's mission of providing 100 percent access to the civil justice system. Here are some snapshots of the progress and accomplishments for each committee and work group.



Communications Committee

The Communications Committee is one of the Commission's newer committees. It was sourced from the Resource Committee because of the specific and separate need to be intentional about how the Justice for All Commission communicated its work to the world at large. This committee helped facilitate the release of the Justice for All Commission's first set of recommendations which arose from the Debt Collection Work Group. Taking an intentional approach, this committee organized an embargoed release of the report to local and national news organizations prior to



releasing the report. Additionally, the Committee helped release three JFA newsletters, which communicate specific activities of the Commission being completed throughout the year. The Communications Committee will continue to make strides in ensuring that the Commission informs and engages the public in their work.



Regulatory and Practice Reform: Filling Gaps in the Legal Marketplace

In 2022, this Committee continued to explore the complex regulatory issues that impact access to justice in Michigan. To aid its work, the Committee partnered with [Stanford Law School's Deborah L. Rhode Center on the Legal Profession](#) to gain a deeper understanding of the potential impacts of regulatory reform and legal services innovations. The Stanford team conducted in-depth research on the emerging impacts of the efforts of two states on the forefront of these regulatory reforms: Arizona and Utah. In late 2022, the Stanford team presented its [findings and report](#) to the Committee. The Committee's three subcommittees: Nonlawyer Activities, Nontraditional Business Model, and Marketing & Advertising finished 2022 with a thoughtful focus on considering the implications of the Stanford report for regulatory reform in Michigan.

In 2023, the Committee anticipates finalizing its initial recommendations to the Commission for filling gaps in the legal marketplace with an initial focus on reform of regulation on nonlawyer legal services. If adopted by the Commission, regulatory reform recommendations will be submitted to the Michigan Supreme Court, the State Bar, and other key partners for further consideration.



Reimagining Courthouses Work Group

The Reimagining Courthouses Work Group was busy in 2022. This group met each month to envision what modern courthouses should look like. The group dove deep into the intricacies of how courthouses can become more welcoming and provide better access to necessary services. Guided by the original Justice for All Task Force Report, this group is comprised of four subgroups with emphasis on user experience, technology advancements, court records, and language access. The work group ended 2022 with a draft set of recommendations that they will work to finalize and present to the Commission in 2023. The work product from this group is going to make impactful changes for those experiencing both physical and virtual courthouses.



Resource Committee

The Resource Committee was established to seek funding and other support for access to justice improvements, including increased funding for legal aid representation of lower-income individuals and increased funding for Self-Help Centers (SHCs). As highlighted above, in 2022, the Committee concluded its project with consultant, CSACO Community Services Analysis, LCC to study the social return



on investment of legal aid services in Michigan. [This study](#), demonstrating the effectiveness of civil legal aid, will help drive recommendations for future action and investment.

In 2022, the advocacy efforts from the Committee assisted in obtaining \$500,000 of funding in fiscal year 2023 for the expansion of self-help center services in Michigan. That funding will be distributed via a [grant program](#) to be administered by the State Court Administrative Office in 2023.



[Self-Help Centers Workgroup](#)

The Self-Help Centers Work Group continued its momentum for 2022. This group maintained a regular monthly meeting cadence, which helped facilitate successful and fruitful conversations. This group divided into subgroups to tackle core areas of need for Self-Help Centers. These areas include guidelines for Self-Help Centers (SHCs), the creation of a Self-Help Center alliance, and direction on how SHCs should collect data and what data points to focus on. The work of the group was aided through Michigan Legal Help’s hiring of a statewide self-help coordinator.

The work group ended 2022 with the completion of an initial draft of recommended guidelines for self-help centers, which will be finalized in early 2023. These guidelines will be helpful as the Commission works with the SCAO to expand self-help center services throughout Michigan. The Self-Help Centers Work Group will build on its momentum for even more successful year in 2023.



[Technology & Data Sharing Committee](#)

The Technology and Data Sharing Committee had many successes in 2022 – notably achieving a goal accomplished through an [SCAO memorandum](#) requiring all courts to report to the Judicial Data Warehouse. One of the main goals of this committee is to increase data validity, specifically civil data. This will help shed light on trends and disparities, which will in turn help inform policy decisions.

The Technology and Data Sharing Committee met monthly to discuss next steps, but like other committees accomplished much of the work in smaller subcommittees. One subcommittee is focusing on a pilot project examining the data overlap of district court summary proceedings data and legal aid data. The focus will help understand the relationship between litigants receiving varying levels of legal assistance and court outcomes. The other subcommittee is working on recommendations designed to incentivize and promote the importance of data collection.



[Training and Outreach Committee](#)

The Training and Outreach Committee had a productive year. During 2022 the group met often to discuss the importance of customer service and its vital role for



court employees in building public trust. Many fruitful conversations stemming from committee members' experiences helped the group develop preliminary recommendations related to training and community engagement, which are designed to improve public trust. In late 2022, the committee presented its recommendations in stakeholder feedback sessions and is currently reviewing the feedback to help inform modifications and improvements to their recommendations. Once finalized, the committee will present their final recommendations to the Commission for approval.



Triage and Referral Work Group

The Triage and Referral Work Group worked diligently throughout 2022. With the instrumental help of consultant Stout Risius Ross, LLC, the work group conducted an evaluation of Michigan's current triage and referral systems used by those seeking legal assistance. Examining the current gaps in service and areas of success is essential to ensuring those who reach out for legal assistance to help solve their legal problem, in fact can receive the assistance they need. The work group's evaluation primarily examined the pathways to receiving legal assistance through Michigan Legal Help, Counsel and Advocacy Law Line (CALL), State Bar Lawyer Referral Service, and 211. This Work Group is close to solidifying recommendations and will continue the work in 2023.

Upcoming Year

The Justice for All Commission remains committed to the mission of providing 100 percent access to the civil justice system. As each year passes, the Commission, and its members, double down on the enthusiasm and motivation to continue in this imperative work. Many of the committees and work groups are at the stage of finalizing recommendations, engaging in the stakeholder feedback process, and presenting final recommendations to the Commissioners. Upon review and approval from the Commissioners, the Commission will start to work on prioritization of the approved recommendations. A significant step in the implementation process for many of the Commission's current and anticipated recommendations will be to obtain the approval and adoption by the Michigan Supreme Court. Each member has committed countless hours toward advancing this work, and everyone is excited to see the recommendations slowly work through the prioritization and implementation process.

Although many committees and work groups may have completed or are very close to completing the initial phase of this work there is still much to be done. In 2023, the Commission, as well as its committees and work groups, will continue to meet regularly to revise and refocus their work to address access to justice issues in Michigan. 2023 will prove to be the best year yet with a renewed sense of passion and optimism.



Conclusion

2022 was full of new beginnings, innovation, and brainstorming. The needle on access to justice issues moved closer to the guiding principle of this Commission and that is an achievement worth noting. Throughout the year the Commission sadly said goodbye to some committee and work group members and happily welcomed new members as well. Each person who contributed to the Commission’s work in 2022 demonstrated a high degree of excellence and great pride in their work. They showed up, handled tough topics with poise, and continued to persevere toward improvement. While much work remains, the Commissioners, work group and committee members, various consulting groups, and the SCAO staff were diligent and successful in advancing the work of this Commission. The contribution, perspective, and expertise of each member is invaluable. As we move into 2023 and continue this work, we want to recognize and extend our gratitude to those individuals who made a significant contribution to the Commission in 2022—thank you all!

Committee and Work Group Members

Executive Team Members

Jennifer Bentley

Angela Tripp

Tom Boyd

Justice Brian K. Zahra

Peter Cunningham

Communications Committee Members

Jennifer Bentley (Chair)

Sarah Leiseca

Lester Bird

John Nevin

Maria Borden

Marjory Raymer

Peter Cunningham

Jessica Reader

Efua Hayford-Wilson

Justice Elizabeth Welch



Delivery of Services Committee Members

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Alicia Moon

Katie Hennessey

Karen Tjapkes

Deborah Hughes

Angela Tripp (Chair)

Hon. Timothy Kelly

Anne Vrooman

Ashley Lowe

Hon. Cynthia Ward

Nora Mahlberg

Forms Committee Members

Christopher Abram

Megan Reynolds

Amy Byrd

Florencia Russ

David Colarusso

Becky Schnelz (Co-Chair)

Hayley Colosky

Quinten Steenhuis

Heather Cramer

Lonni Summers

Nicole Huddleston

Angela Tripp (Co-Chair)

Deborah Hughes

Lucy Viramontes

Kirsten Keilitz

Dawn Wagoner

Emily Kress Miller

Stacy Westra

Sheri Lankheet

Bryce Willey

Julia Lee

Hon. Tracey Yokich

Maria Mindlin

Zach Zarnow



Process Improvement: Debt Collection Work Group Members

Matthew Andres	Joseph Jammal
Lester Bird	Hon. Timothy Kelly (Co-Chair)
Chris Blythe	Natasha Khwaja
Lorray Brown	Kathleen Klaus
Hon. Michael Carpenter	Aaron Levin
Lori Frank	Suzanne McBride
Elisa Gomez	David McClendon
Katie Hennessey (Co-Chair)	Mike Nelson
Nicole Huddleston	Robert Phillips
Tera Jackson-Davis	Jeff Reichman
Hon. Peter Jaklevic	Scott Teter

Process Improvement: Summary Proceedings Work Group Members

Lester Bird	Kelly Rose
James Gibbs	Jim Schaafsma
Mary Kavanaugh-Gahn	Clarence Stone
Natasha Khwaja	Todd Stuart
Jarrett Levine	Karen Tjapkes (Co-Chair)
Kellie Maki Foster	Angela Tripp
Sara Orris	Hon. Cynthia Ward (Co-Chair)
Liza Rios	Michelle Williams
Joshua Rivera	Lynda Zeller

Regulatory and Practice Reform Committee Members

Mark Armitage	Bonsitu Kitaba-Gaviglio
Grace Bergeron	Jennifer Manatine
Amy Billmire	Ken Mogill
Rob Buchanan	Kaity Nicastrì
Charlie Campbell	Dan Quick
Bill Dunn	John Reed
Robin Eagleson	Dan Rodriguez
Cami Fraser	Brittany Schultz
Erin Frisch	Carmen Wargel
Katherine Gardner	Dana Warnez
Rick Hoeg	Janet Welch (Co-Chair)
Deborah Hughes	Justice Brian Zahra (Co-Chair)

Reimagining Courthouses Work Group Members

Kevin Bowling (Co-Chair)	Dennis Mac Donell
Rob Buchanan	Hon. Mabel Mayfield (Co-Chair)
Kristi Cox	Paul Paruk
Kim Cramer	Hon. TJ Phillips (ret)
Nicole Huddleston	Brittany Schultz
Elizabeth Hundley	Sandra Vanderhyde
Bonsitu Kitaba-Gaviglio	

Resource Committee Members

Jennifer Bentley (Co-Chair)	LaDierdre McKinney
Kevin Bowling	Cami Pendell
Peter Cunningham (Co-Chair)	Ann Routt
Pam Hoekwater	Justice Elizabeth Welch

Self-Help Centers Work Group Members

Stephanie Ash	Ashley Lowe
Samantha Ashby	Nora Mahlberg (Co-Chair)
Hon. Margaret Zuzich Bakker	John Nizol
Charlie Campbell	Lynn Reeves
Caitlin Hoag	Hon. Michelle Rick
Deborah Hughes (Co-Chair)	Amy Salminen
Sheri Lankheet	Hon. Matthew Stewart

Technology and Data Sharing Committee Members

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Lester Bird	Harry Sanders
Kevin Bowling	Yusef Shakur
Tom Boyd (Co-Chair)	Jonah Siegel
Rep. T.C. Clements	Katie Strickfaden
Erin Frisch	Angela Tripp
Laura Hutzel	Hon. Ray Voet
Natasha Khwaja	Justice Elizabeth Welch (Co-Chair)

David McClendon

Janet Welch

Jeff Reichman

Lynda Zeller

Training and Outreach Committee Members

Ramzi Badwi

Bianca McQueen (Co-Chair)

Kim Cramer

Jill Nylander

Martha Gonzalez-Cortez

Nick Schroeck

Kara Hart-Negrich

Rebecca Shiemke

Shoshana Hurand (Co-Chair)

Carol Siemon

Elly Jordan (Co-Chair)

Peter Stathakis

Hon. Allie Maldonado

Hon. Cynthia Ward

Dawn McCarty

Michelle Williams

Triage and Referral Work Group Members

Amy Billmire

Bianca McQueen

Tina Burroughs

LeeAnn Mulligan

Samantha DiDomenico

Amanda Puffhausen

Socorro Godoy

Nicole Smithson

Mia Harnos

Kristen Staley

Jennifer Hartke

Neil Steinkamp

Loren Khogali

Sandra Vanderhyde

Ashley Lowe (Co-Chair)

Anne Vrooman (Co-Chair)

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