

...CHIEF JUDGE FREDDIE BURTON, JR.

Wayne County Judge Burton's Passion and Hometown Commitment Give Hope to Local Families

"I can't think of a case where I thought it was hopeless."

So says Wayne County Probate Court Chief Judge Freddie Burton, Jr.

Throughout his time on the bench he has handled thousands of cases and his proudest accomplishment to date is ensuring the safety of the people who appear before him.

"I am proud of our work in protecting people, getting them into homes—particularly kids and incapacitated adults, and seniors," said Judge Burton. "I derive great pleasure in seeing that they're safe and that they're comfortable."

Chief Judge Burton describes what sets probate court dockets apart from other court dockets.

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"It's not a criminal court; it's a civil court," he explained. "It is really focused on family. If a person passes away, this court has responsibility for probate administration. With guardianship, conservatorship, trust, or civil actions, it's this court's responsibility each time, and it affects all family members, so we think that the culture of probate court is what makes it unique."

Chief Judge Burton explained why he thinks probate court is so important to our judicial system.

"The probate culture is designed to protect those in our society who can't protect themselves," remarked Chief Judge Burton. "So in a nutshell, anything that we do is related to family. And since there's been tremendous breakdown in the family



in our country, I think probate court is perfectly situated to facilitate families coming together and giving them the assistance that they need to go forward.”

Currently, Chief Judge Burton and Judge Timothy M. Kenny, the Wayne County Circuit Court Chief Judge Pro Tem and Presiding Judge of the Criminal Division, have been working together on a plan to address how to decriminalize mental illness.

“The national prison population is going down, but the percentage of persons in the prison system who are mentally ill is going up,” he explained.

Despite having great dedication for his job, Chief Judge Burton never initially planned to become a

judge. But after earning his law degree from Wayne State University School of Law, someone eventually suggested that he put his hat in the ring for appointment in 1987, and he’s been on the Wayne County Probate bench ever since.

Adding to the passion he has for helping vulnerable citizens, Judge Burton is also very committed to improving the city of Detroit.

“I’m a native Detroiter. I went to public high school here at Martin Luther King Jr. Senior High School, and I’m committed to the people of Wayne County and Detroit to ensure that we continue to make progress,” said Chief Judge Burton. “I’m very pleased about where we are and where we are heading.”

FACTS ABOUT MICHIGAN PROBATE COURTS:

- The probate court has jurisdiction over admission of wills, administration of estates and trusts, guardianships, conservatorships, and the treatment of mentally ill and developmentally disabled persons.
- Each county has its own probate court, with the exception of 10 northern counties that have consolidated to form five probate court districts. Each of those probate court districts has one judge. Other probate courts have one or more judges, depending on that court’s caseload. There are 78 probate courts in Michigan.
- Probate judges are elected to six-year terms on a nonpartisan ballot; a candidate must be a qualified elector, a resident of the judicial circuit, a lawyer admitted to practice for five years, and under 70 years of age at the time of election. The Legislature sets probate judges’ salaries, currently at \$145,557.