

Judge Michelle Rick: Shining the Light of Knowledge

“Being a judge is much more than just presiding in a courtroom in a black robe. A judge is a public servant.”

For 29th Circuit Court Judge Michelle Rick, this philosophy provides the inspiration for her work on and off the bench. Although the court serves Clinton and Gratiot Counties, her volunteer efforts have extended far beyond the area.

Appointed to the Michigan Human Trafficking Commission in 2014, which operates under the Office of the Attorney General, Judge Rick represents judges and courts. The two main goals of the Commission are to assess the threat human trafficking poses to Michigan residents and develop policy recommendations to promote its exposure and prevention.

To that end, Judge Rick participates in human trafficking trainings for courts, law enforcement, and other stakeholder groups. She also frequently presents at community events around the state, and has pushed for a local trafficking task force in Clinton County.

Some of these events have included several screenings of the Michigan-based documentary film, “Break the Chain,” which aims to raise awareness of the pervasive problem of human trafficking—in Michigan and beyond. Judge Rick helped to bring a screening of the film to the Michigan Hall of Justice in Lansing for justices, judges, and others working in the court system.

In addition to her efforts to shine the spotlight on the issue of human trafficking, Judge Rick says she is committed to teaching kids and young adults about career opportunities in the legal profession. Through her position on the board of the National Association of Women Judges (NAWJ), Judge Rick has been instrumental in bringing “MentorJet” events to Michigan law schools with a “speed dating” approach—spending several allotted minutes with each mentor before moving to a different station—and starting a similar mentoring program with the State Bar of Michigan called “Face of Justice.”

The Face of Justice Program is based on the NAWJ “Color of Justice” program, which encourages young women and minorities to consider legal and judicial careers.

“The program encourages high school students to see themselves as a face of justice,” Judge Rick explained. “By connecting with youth and law students regarding the practicing of law, we are promoting diversity, equality, and fairness. This is a great opportunity to excite and influence those up-and-coming lawyers.”

Face of Justice events have been held across the state at the Michigan Hall of Justice in Lansing and at 36th District Court in Detroit. In addition to lawyers and judges, other

mentors include law enforcement officers and others affiliated with the criminal justice system.

Judge Rick believes community involvement is vital, no matter the topic.

“By engaging in community events,” she shared, “judges build confidence and trust with the public.”