



# Justice for All Newsletter

100% Access to Michigan's Civil Justice System

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## Supreme Court Announces Commission Charged with Closing the Justice Gap, Improving Court Access for All Michigianians

Michigan Supreme Court **Chief Justice Bridget M. McCormack** has announced the Court's adoption of [Administrative Order 2021-1](#), creating a new Justice for All (JFA) Commission that will work toward the goal of 100 percent access to our civil justice system. The Commission will lead the implementation of the [JFA Task Force's Strategic Plan](#) (report released in December 2020, details on p. 3) aimed at helping more Michigianians solve civil legal problems such as landlord-tenant issues, family law disputes such as parenting time or custody, and access to benefits.

"All Michigan residents must have equal access to our courts and to resources needed to navigate our justice system, regardless of who they are, what they earn, or where they come from," said Chief Justice McCormack. "With dedicated and diverse members, the JFA Commission has the roadmap, commitment, and focus to close the justice gap in Michigan."

The leadership, direction, and administrative support for the Commission activities will be provided collaboratively by the State Court Administrative Office, State Bar of Michigan, and the Michigan State Bar Foundation. The State Court Administrator, and the executive directors of the State Bar of Michigan and the Michigan State Bar Foundation, or their designees, constitute the Executive Team. **Justice Brian K. Zahra** will serve as chair, and **Angela Tripp**, director of [Michigan Legal Help](#), will serve as vice chair.

Justice Zahra said, "I am honored to steer the Commission and to continue working closely with Angela Tripp, who manages the nation's leading legal self-help program. We are ready to get to work on taking the Justice for All Strategic Plan to the next level and opening the doors of justice wide for our neighbors, our communities, and people statewide."



*(l to r) Angela Tripp, of Michigan Legal Help; Chief Justice McCormack; and Justice Zahra listening to residents and advocates during the Justice for All Town Hall in Grand Rapids, February 2020.*

The Court appointed the following persons to the Justice for All Commission:

For terms ending December 31, 2023:

- SBM Executive Director Janet Welch
- State Court Administrator Thomas Boyd
- Supreme Court Justice Brian K. Zahra
- Michigan State Bar Foundation Executive Director Jennifer Bentley
- Michigan Legal Help Director Angela Tripp
- Michigan Indigent Defense Commission Director Loren Khogali
- Hon. Timothy Kelly (Michigan District Judges Association)
- Hon. Margaret Zuzich Bakker (Michigan Judges Association)
- Hon. Mabel Mayfield (Michigan Probate Judges Association)
- Hon. Allie Maldonado (Michigan Tribal Courts)

*(continued)*



*JFA Commission member Judge Mabel Mayfield (right), of Berrien County Trial Court, speaking with advocates at the Grand Rapids Town Hall.*



*JFA Commission member Jennifer Bentley, of the Michigan State Bar Foundation, at the JFA Town Hall in Detroit, February 2020.*

For terms ending December 31, 2021:

- Rob Buchanan (President, State Bar of Michigan)
- Kevin Bowling (Court Administrators/ Probate Registers)
- Michelle Williams (Michigan Dept. of Education)
- Samantha Ashby (Peter White Public Library in Marquette)
- Lynda Zeller (Michigan Health Care Endowment)
- Deborah Hughes (Kent County Legal Assistance Center)
- Bianca McQueen (Social Worker, Lakeshore Legal Aid Board Member)
- Nicole Huddleston (Detroit Justice Center)
- Elly Jordan (Michigan Coalition to End Sexual and Domestic Violence)
- Brittany Schultz (Ford Motor Company)

Commission member and **SBM President Rob Buchanan** said, “Since its founding in 1935, the State Bar of Michigan has been committed to serving the public, and there’s no better way to advance our calling than ensuring access to justice for everyone. I am delighted the State Bar is part of this extraordinary initiative. Our courtrooms can be daunting and impeding places, even now in the new age of Zoom access. Nobody should be denied resources or equality he or she needs and deserves for a fair outcome.”

The JFA Task Force’s 2020 report highlights important desired outcomes that were identified by stakeholders and the steps needed to achieve those outcomes. Recommended steps include:

- For terms ending December 31, 2022:
- Rep. TC Clements (designated by the Speaker of the House)
  - A state senator designated by the Senate Majority Leader (to be determined)
  - Joshua Rivera (Michigan Dept. of Health and Human Services)
  - Clarence Stone (Michigan State Housing Development Authority)
  - Alicia Moon (Executive Office of Governor Gretchen Whitmer)
  - Carol Siemon (Prosecuting Attorneys Association of Michigan)
  - Bonsitu Kitaba-Gaviglio (State Planning Body)
  - Ashley Lowe (Legal Services Association of Michigan)
  - Yusef Shakur (Michigan Roundtable for Diversity and Inclusion)
  - Hon. Cynthia Ward (Association of Black Judges)

- Simplify, streamline, and create uniform processes to improve the ability to navigate the court system.
- Improve the triage and referral systems through usability testing so that individuals can be connected to the resources they need.
- Provide education for parties on remote access to court resources, expand use of text messaging and other convenient technology, use plain language to explain procedures and processes.
- Test and implement new ways of providing affordable legal services, educate public and stakeholders on available resources.
- Improve technology and access at legal self-help centers and increase public awareness of these tools.

For more information, visit [courts.mi.gov/justiceforall](https://courts.mi.gov/justiceforall). 

# Supreme Court Unveils Report Aimed at Closing the Justice Gap

*Justice for All Task Force working toward 100 percent access to Michigan's civil justice system*

Michigan Supreme Court **Chief Justice Bridget M. McCormack**, **Justice Brian K. Zahra**, and Justice for All (JFA) Task Force released a [report](#) aimed at helping more Michiganders solve civil legal problems such as landlord-tenant issues, family law disputes such as parenting time or custody, and access to benefits. The report was released on Bill of Rights Day (December 15, 2020) highlighting the challenge presented by the fact that the right to a lawyer in the 6th Amendment only refers to criminal cases. The report provides a detailed Strategic Plan to open both the physical and virtual doors of Michigan courts with a goal of 100 percent access to our civil justice system.

In remarks releasing the report, Chief Justice McCormack noted that there are no “one-size-fits-all” solutions and that boosting access sometimes involves technology, including web-based tools, or regulatory reform to help people get exactly the legal services they need at an affordable cost. “Sometimes the answer is procedural – making our legal system simpler, easier to understand, more convenient, and easier to access,” said McCormack. “Courts must be welcoming places where all are treated with dignity and respect. This plan is the map to a future where these ideas and many other detailed in this report are nurtured and where community organizations collaborate to help them bloom over and over again all over Michigan.”

Justice Zahra, who serves as the Court’s liaison to the JFA, focused on the meaning of justice for all: “Justice for all is an idea that brings people together. To a small business owner, justice for all might mean resolving a contract dispute and getting paid so that your workers get paid. To a veteran, justice for all might mean preventing an eviction and homelessness. To a survivor of domestic violence, justice for all might mean help with a personal protection order. And the list of people goes on and on. Justice for all is justice for our neighbors, our communities, and people statewide.”

The JFA Task Force completed a thorough assessment of the Michigan civil justice system through town hall meetings, stakeholder surveys, virtual focus groups, and workgroup summits, including members of the public, court administrators, judges, legal aid agencies,



*(Note: This panel represents a sampling of the wide range of categories covered in the Task Force’s assessment. Other categories: Stakeholder Capacity & Governance; Emerging Practices & Innovations; Consumer Needs & Experience; Community Integration & Prevention; Self-Help Centers; Triage & Referral; Alternative Dispute Resolution; Navigator Services; Full Representation; Limited Scope Representation; Judicial & Court Representation; Plain Language Forms; Courtroom Assistance Services; and Compliance Assistance.)*

community organizations, libraries, and domestic violence shelter advocates.

Both Chief Justice McCormack and Justice Zahra expressed thanks to the Task Force and its workgroups and to hundreds of community stakeholders who came together and contributed to this comprehensive and important project. In particular, they thanked the National Center for State Courts for providing the JFA structure and funding to complete the process.

*For more information, including videos of the JFA town hall meetings, visit [courts.mi.gov/justiceforall](https://courts.mi.gov/justiceforall). *



# Council of Chief Justices Revisits ‘Justice for All’ Resolution

The [Conference of Chief Justices](#) recently reaffirmed [its commitment](#) to the continuum framework that addresses our access to justice crisis.

In 2015, CCJ and the Council of State Court Administrators jointly adopted a resolution urging the creation of a continuum of services that addresses the crisis. The resolution includes a framework that incorporates high-quality, reliable screening to identify an individual’s needs and align them with appropriate resources to identify a legal problem, get information necessary to address the problem, and access appropriate assistance.

As a result of the resolution, the National Center for State Courts [Justice for All initiative](#) began in 2016. **Chief Justice Bridget M. McCormack**, Michigan Supreme Court co-chairs the Justice for All Advisory Committee.

The Justice for All initiative involves a broad range of stakeholders—14 states, including Michigan, and the



District of Columbia—that address the needs of those already in the court process, as well as people with civil legal problems that aren’t yet in the courts.

Since 2016, the JFA initiative has awarded over \$2 million in grants to 14 states to develop and implement comprehensive, statewide action plans toward the goal of achieving 100-percent access to effective assistance for civil legal needs. <sup>47</sup>

*Learn more about the national JFA initiative at [ncsc.org/jfa](https://ncsc.org/jfa).*

## ‘Justice for All’ in the News

[Rep. Clements named to Michigan Justice for All commission - Monroe News \(February 9, 2021\)](#)

[Ashby appointed to justice commission - Mining Journal \(February 6, 2021\)](#)

[Local legal professionals appointed to Justice for All Commission - Grand Rapids Business Journal \(February 3, 2021\)](#)

["Justice for All" aims to ease civil court cases for people without attorneys - Michigan Radio \(January 31, 2021\)](#)

[High court launches Justice For All Commission - Michigan Lawyers Weekly \(January 28, 2021\)](#)

[Allegan judge, Ottawa court admin to serve on justice commission - Holland Sentinel \(January 28, 2021\)](#)

[Supreme Court Announces Commission Charged with Closing the Justice Gap, Improving Court Access for All Michiganders - Legal News \(January 27, 2021\)](#)

