



Michigan Justice for All Task Force

Issue 1, February 2020

"Our courthouse doors must be open wide to help all residents get the information and assistance they need when they need it."

-Chief Justice Bridget M. McCormack



Chief Justice Bridget Mary McCormack and Justice Brian Zahra speaking in June 2019 to Mikenzie Frost of WWMT about Task Force goals.

The Challenge

The right to a lawyer applies only in criminal cases — every other time you go to court, you have to hire your own lawyer.

7 out of 10 low-income households had at least one civil (non-criminal) legal problem in the last year. Due to funding limitations, legal aid agencies must turn away **over half** of those who seek their help.

In **75%** of civil cases, at least one side represents themselves in court because they can't afford to pay an attorney.

Only 10% of people with civil legal problems recognize that their issue has a legal component that may be solved by the civil justice system. That is why raising public awareness is critically important.

People who have done nothing wrong can lose their case in court because they do not have the legal information or help they need. **This is the Civil Justice Gap.**

What is Michigan doing to address this challenge?

The Michigan Supreme Court created the Justice for All Task Force to achieve 100% access to our civil justice system. Michigan Supreme Court Justice Brian K. Zahra and key stakeholders are collecting an inventory of the civil justice landscape, identifying gaps and barriers to access, and developing and implementing a plan to fill gaps and eliminate barriers.

With 100% access to justice in Michigan, some of the areas that people can get help with include:

- Family law issues
- Eviction
- Guardianship
- Small claims
- Drivers' license issues
- Credit card lawsuits

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Upcoming Events

Town Hall Meeting in Grand Rapids

*Open to the Public

When: Friday, February 14, 2020
10:00 a.m. to Noon

Where: Grand Rapids Center for Community Transformation
1530 Madison Avenue SE
Grand Rapids, Michigan 49507

Town Hall Meeting in Detroit

*Open to the Public

When: Monday, February 24, 2020
6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.

Where: International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Union Hall
1358 Abbott Street
Detroit, Michigan 48226

Public input is needed to help assess the extent of the problem and the impact of the civil justice gap on Michigan families and businesses.

Members of the public, local officials, and representatives of community service organizations are invited to share their views.

Public testimony will be moderated by Chief Justice McCormack and Justice Zahra.

Task Force Planning Team Members

Justice Brian Zahra, Michigan Supreme Court
Jennifer Bentley, Michigan State Bar Foundation
Kevin Bowling, Ottawa County Circuit Court Administrator
Lee Ann Gaspar, State Court Administrative Office
Katie Hennessey, State Bar of Michigan
Thomas Myers, State Court Administrative Office
Angela Tripp, Michigan Legal Help
Jennifer Warner, State Court Administrative Office
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Additional Task Force Team Members

Honorable Mabel J. Mayfield, Berrien County Trial Courts
Honorable Matthew Stewart, Shiawassee County Circuit Court
Honorable Raymond Voet, Ionia County District Court
Sonja Bonnett, Detroit Justice Center
Martha Gonzalez-Cortez, Kalamazoo Community Foundation
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Contact Information

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