



MICHIGAN COURTS NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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

LANSING, MI, December 15, 2020 – Michigan Supreme Court Chief Justice Bridget M. McCormack, Justice Brian K. Zahra, and the [Justice for All \(JFA\) Task Force](#) today released a [report](#) 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. The [report](#) was released on Bill of Rights Day, highlighting the challenge presented by the fact that the right to 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,” McCormack added. “Courts must be welcoming places where all are treated with dignity and respect. This report is the map to a future where these ideas and many others 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 [report](#) highlights important desired outcomes that were identified by stakeholders and the steps needed to achieve those outcomes. For example:

- **Outcome:** People across the state feel respected and treated fairly throughout their interactions with the civil justice system, regardless of the result of their case.

Steps: Create convenient access to court records and necessary documents, provide interpreter and language services, and improve access to courthouses for those with disabilities.

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- **Outcome:** All stakeholders understand the importance of their role and provide exceptional service to system users.

Steps: Provide training for court staff on access to justice topics, focus on collaboration and holistic problem-solving.

- **Outcome:** Simplify procedures so that all users—even first-time users—understand processes and their underlying purposes.

Steps: 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.

- **Outcome:** A robust statewide triage and referral system connects people to the right resources for their issues.

Steps: Test and implement new ways of providing affordable legal services, educate public and stakeholders on available resources.

- **Outcome:** Self-Help services exist in every county and are available in many courthouses where people can access self-help materials and, in most cases, in-person assistance.

Steps: Improve technology and access at legal self-help centers and increase public awareness of these tools.

The JFA Task Force completed a thorough assessment of the Michigan civil justice system through town hall meetings, stakeholder surveys, virtual focus groups, and work group summits, including members of the public, court administrators, judges, legal aid agencies, community organizations, libraries, and domestic violence shelter advocates.

Next steps include establishing a Justice for All Commission in 2021 to permanently replace the Task Force and lead implementation of the strategic plan.

Both Chief Justice McCormack and Justice Zahra expressed thanks to the Task Force and its work groups 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 www.courts.mi.gov/justiceforall.

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