



MICHIGAN COURTS NEWS RELEASE

John Nevin, Communications Director

Ph: 517-373-0129 Twitter: @MISupremeCourt FB: facebook.com/misupremecourt

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Justice for All Taskforce Sets Goal of 100 Percent Access to Civil Justice System

First step will be to inventory resources, identify gaps

LANSING, MI, May 22, 2019 – The Michigan Supreme Court today announced the launch of the Justice for All Taskforce with Justice Brian K. Zahra representing the Court. The purpose of the new taskforce is to reduce the gap between the civil legal needs of Michigan residents and available resources. Civil legal concerns include health insurance not paying for medically-needed care, access to veterans benefits, disputes regarding children and custody, and landlord-tenant matters, among others.

“One-hundred percent access to our civil justice system is a goal we can all embrace,” said Justice Zahra. “With input from stakeholders all across Michigan, the taskforce will first inventory the resources currently available, identify gaps, and then make recommendations in a strategic plan to fill those gaps.”

“Many Americans don’t realize that our constitutional right to a lawyer only applies in criminal cases,” said Chief Justice Bridget M. McCormack. “Our courthouse doors must be open wide to help all residents get the information and assistance they need when they need it.”

In 2017, the Legal Services Corporation reported on the “justice gap” and identified several key challenges with respect to low-income households. For example, more than seven out of ten low-income households reported at least one civil legal problem in the last year. In nearly nine out of ten legal problems reported, low-income Americans received inadequate or no legal help. In Michigan, more than 20 percent of the population are at or below 125 percent of the Federal Poverty Level.

Forming the taskforce follows up on recommendations by the Conference of Chief Justices and the Conference of State Court Administrators promoting the Justice for All Project. A key element of the initiative is the recognition that no one program is the answer to achieve 100 percent access, but rather, a comprehensive approach developed with all stakeholders at the table is needed.

Planning Team Members

Justice Brian Zahra
Jennifer Bentley, Michigan State Bar Foundation
Kevin Bowling, Ottawa County Court Administrator
Katie Hennessey, State Bar of Michigan
Dawn Monk, State Court Administrative Office
Angela Tripp, Michigan Legal Help
Janet Welch, State Bar of Michigan

Additional Taskforce Members

Sonja Bonnett, Detroit Justice Center
Martha Gonzalez-Cortez, Kalamazoo Community Foundation
Elly Jordan, Michigan Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence
Kim Koscielniak, Library of Michigan
Ashley Lowe, Lakeshore Legal Aid
Hon. Mabel Johnson Mayfield, Berrien Probate
Jill Nylander, Legal Services of Eastern Michigan
Hon. Matthew Stewart, Shiawassee Circuit Court
Hon. Raymond Voet, 64A District Court (Ionia)

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