



MICHIGAN COURTS NEWS RELEASE

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Mississippi Child Welfare Delegation Visits to Learn from Michigan Experts

LANSING, MI, December 12, 2017 – The Michigan Supreme Court was honored by a visit from a high-ranking delegation from Mississippi’s top court and state child welfare agency. The delegation – including Supreme Court Justice Dawn Beam and former Justice Randy Pierce, director of the Mississippi Judicial College – journeyed to Michigan to learn about how our state made major reforms to achieve compliance with federal rules regarding funding of children in foster care.

The delegation was invited to Michigan by former Chief Justice Maura Corrigan in her role as an advisor to Casey Family Programs, a national foundation focused on improving the child welfare system. Corrigan also serves as counsel to Butzel Long.

“When I was Chief Justice, Michigan faced similar challenges in making sure local judges and court staff were properly trained so that federal resources were appropriately targeted to help foster children,” said Corrigan. “By sharing our experiences with our colleagues from Mississippi, our goal is to help them maximize federal funding and help more children. I am grateful to the Department of Health and Human Services, to the Governor’s Office, and to Casey Family Programs for making this collaboration possible.”

“By working together, the Michigan Supreme Court and state child welfare officials have made Michigan a national model for getting the fundamentals of foster care funding right,” said Justice Beam. “We are ready to take what we learned back to Mississippi, so that our courts and state officials can put your experiences to work for the children of our state.”

In Michigan, Corrigan left her post as Justice of the Michigan Supreme Court in 2011 when Governor Rick Snyder asked her to become the Director of the Michigan Department of Human Services. Likewise, in Mississippi, Justice David Chandler left their highest court in 2015 to become commissioner of the Mississippi Department of Child Protection Services. Recently, Chandler retired and was replaced by Supreme Court Presiding Justice Jess H. Dickinson.

“Federal Title IV-E funds are a vital resource in our effort to provide a loving home for every child in our care,” said Commissioner Dickinson. “We are grateful to the state of Michigan for its willingness to share its time and experiences to teach us proven methods to improve access to these funds, and former Michigan Supreme Court Justice Maura Corrigan and Casey Family Programs for their effort and resources dedicated to arrange this event. We are also grateful to Justice Dawn Beam, former Justice Randy Pierce, and Judge John Hudson for their willingness to represent our state judiciary at this meeting, and their commitment to lead our state courts in their part of this work.”

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The Mississippi delegation also included: Takesha Darby, Deputy Commissioner of Finance, Mississippi Department of Child Protection Services; the Hon. John Hudson, jurist in residence, Mississippi Supreme Court; and Brian Lewis, Legal Counsel and Director of Contracting and Federal Reporting and Compliance, Department of Child Protection Services.

When Michigan faced challenges regarding federal funding of foster care, Chief Justice Corrigan led a major effort that included: reform of statutes and court rules; statewide training for judges and referees; collaborative discussions between courts and local child welfare officials; implementation of child welfare funding specialists in each county; revised court forms, and broad cross-system collaboration.

Michigan executive branch officials represented at the meeting included: Rich Baird, Transformation Manager, Governor's Office; Paul Smith, Deputy Legal Counsel, Governor's Office; Dr. Herman McCall, Director, Children's Services Agency, MDHHS; Stacie Bladen, Deputy Director, Children's Services Agency, MDHHS; Wendy Campau, Child Welfare Services and Support Director, Children's Services Agency, MDHHS; and Mike Milks, Child Welfare Director, Genesee County MDHHS.

Michigan judicial branch representatives included: Hon. Bridget M. McCormack, MSC Justice; Hon. Beth Clement, MSC Justice; Hon. Elizabeth Gleicher, Judge, Michigan Court of Appeals; Hon. Monte Burmeister, Probate Court Judge, Crawford County; Hon. John Hohman, former State Court Administrator and Probate Judge (ret.), Monroe County; Hon. Elwood Brown, Probate Court Judge, St. Clair County; Tom Clement, MSC General Counsel; Kelly Wagner, Director, Child Welfare Services Division, State Court Administrative Office (SCAO); Steve Capps, Director, Friend of the Court Bureau, SCAO; Casey Anbender, Court Analyst/Title IV-E liaison, Child Welfare Services Division, SCAO; and Elizabeth Henderson, Court Analyst, Child Welfare Services Division, SCAO.

Discussion at the meeting focused on Title IV-E of the Social Security Act, which is an important funding stream for foster care costs. Title IV-E provides for federal reimbursement for a portion of the maintenance and administrative costs of foster care for children who meet specified federal eligibility requirements. The federal funds help offset the state and local costs of providing foster care to children.

To be eligible for Title IV-E funding, the agency must apply federal eligibility and reimbursement standards, and the court is required to make specified judicial findings. Adhering to the federal requirements not only draws down federal funding for the state, but also helps to ensure that the court is making appropriate decisions to prevent the unnecessary removal of children from their homes, achieve timely permanency for children removed from their homes, and provide necessary oversight and accountability of child welfare agency actions.

At the meeting, Corrigan expressed thanks to Casey Family Programs (represented by Lily Oliphant), to Butzel Long, and to State Senator Judy Emmons for their support and assistance.