



MICHIGAN COURTS NEWS RELEASE

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National Court Experts Say Transformation of 36th District is “Remarkable” Report says improvements provide a “sound foundation for the future”

DETROIT, MI, June 17, 2014 – In a report released today, experts from the National Center for State Courts (NCSC) hailed improvements made over the past year in the operation of Detroit’s 36th District Court. “The implementation of comprehensive reforms to the operation of the 36th District Court over the past 12 months and the court’s transformation has indeed been remarkable,” the report said.

One of the largest limited jurisdiction courts in the nation, the 36th District Court had been plagued with budget overruns, lack of leadership, inadequate customer service, poor case processing practices and other problems identified in an NCSC report published one year ago. “Our review and analysis of current operations within the court reveals a substantial, positive transformation in all of these areas,” the report noted.

“The people of Detroit deserve a well-run and efficient court system dedicated to the fair and timely administration of justice and superior service to the public,” said Michigan Supreme Court Chief Justice Robert P. Young, Jr. “The successful transformation of the 36th District Court is a direct result of the vision, hard work and tough decisions made by Judge Mike Talbot and his new leadership team. The challenge now is for the Court’s new leadership team to maintain that momentum and continue to focus on providing even better service to the public.”

A year ago, the first step in addressing the leadership issue was the selection of Court of Appeals Judge Michael Talbot as special administrator. The Hon. Nancy Blount was named chief judge in August of 2013 to lead the 31-member bench and spearhead the reorganization. In addition, a new court administrator, Kelli Moore Owen, was named to manage all of the operations of the court which processes approximately 500,000 cases each year.

In particular, the report highlighted changes implemented to improve fiscal accountability. This included balancing the budget, stabilizing funding, significant staff cuts, and a ten percent reduction in workforce compensation. A landmark labor agreement also restructures job titles to allow for more flexibility, changes hiring processes to focus on merit rather than seniority and implements caps on health care costs. “The transformation to more cost-effective operations and competent hands-on management is significant and encouraging,” the report explained.

With respect to revenue improvement initiatives, the report noted that monthly collections have risen from an average of \$1.1 million to more than \$1.8 million, a 63 percent increase. In addition, a recent amnesty program for traffic violator scofflaws resulted in the collection of nearly \$2 million more than average traffic payments.

The 2013 NCSC report identified serious customer service deficiencies that have since been addressed. As the report notes, "...we found significant improvements to customer service...long lines have been reduced significantly."

Steps to reduce delays and improve customer service include:

- designation of four judges to handle felony preliminary examinations, reducing adjournments and backlogs;
- designation of assigned courtrooms so the public can receive notice of assignments prior to arriving at court;
- installation of electronic docket display monitors on all floors, listing litigants and courtroom assignments

The report concluded: "...today the 36th District Court is on a sound foundation for the future. With a rigorous adherence to the principles that have led to the court's transformation, the 36th District Court has the potential of becoming one of the best limited jurisdiction courts in both the state and country."

The NCSC is a public benefit corporation targeting the improvement of courts nationwide and around the world. The report was written by the Hon. Glenn Grant, Acting Administrative Director, New Jersey Courts and Gordon M. Griller, Principal Consultant, NCSC.

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Editor's Note: The complete NCSC report is available [here](#).