

# MICHIGAN SUPREME COURT



## *Office of Public Information*

contact: Marcia McBrien | (517) 373-0129

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### **DANIEL J. WRIGHT OF GRAND LEDGE RECEIVES LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD FOR SERVICE TO MICHIGAN CHILDREN**

**Joint annual award by Michigan Supreme Court, Department of Human Services named in his honor; Wright hailed for “dedication, creativity, compassion”**

LANSING, MI, November 22, 2011 – Attorney Daniel J. Wright tackled some of the thorniest issues facing Michigan families and children in crisis: child support, adoption barriers, and the many problems of children in Michigan’s foster care system. Today, his achievements were recognized with a first-time joint award from the Michigan Supreme Court and Michigan Department of Human Services, presented by Governor Rick Snyder.

The Daniel J. Wright Lifetime Achievement Award, established in Wright’s honor, “recognizes an outstanding advocate for Michigan children and families,” said Chief Justice Robert P. Young, Jr. “Children’s welfare is high on the list of the most difficult issues facing our courts; Mr. Wright brought dedication, creativity, and compassion to his very challenging work.”

A Michigan Supreme Court Commissioner for 11 years, Wright was tapped by then-Chief Justice Maura D. Corrigan in 2001 to deal with problems that arose following the state’s effort to convert to the federally-mandated Child Support Enforcement System, a centralized computer system for enforcing child support orders issued by Michigan circuit courts. With Michigan driven by a federal deadline and under the threat of losing millions of dollars in federal aid, Wright’s mission was to get all state circuit courts on board to have their Friend of the Court offices converted to CSES, related Corrigan, now director of the Michigan Department of Human Services.

“Even after Michigan made the conversion, there was still the threat of future federal penalties because of the issues some counties had with CSES; more importantly, we had families that were having to deal with missed support payments because of errors in the system,” Corrigan said. “Dan was absolutely tireless in attacking these problems; he literally crisscrossed the state to hear about these problems first-hand, and he found solutions.”

Wright’s strengths included unflagging energy and communication, said Steve Capps, director of the State Court Administrative Office’s Trial Court Services division. “When we were faced with our biggest challenges in the child support program, Dan was able to bring everyone together. As a result, we were able to accomplish what no one thought was possible: a whirlwind conversion to a single child support system. Michigan saved millions of dollars in penalties, but more importantly, the relationships Dan built during that time endure today and serve as the bedrock for our child support program,” Capps said.

Michigan Lawyers Weekly, which named Wright a “Lawyer of the Year” in 2002, noted that Wright “faced “two tough assignments this year.... overseeing the continuing implementation of a federally mandated child support computer system [and improving] the system’s responsiveness to those who must use it .... [Wright] has been tackling these problems head on .... he’s getting results.”

Because of his experience with CSES and child support issues, Wright was named head of the Friend of the Court Bureau, a division of the State Court Administrative Office, the administrative agency of the Michigan Supreme Court. He later directed both the FOCB and the Child Welfare Services Division of SCAO.

Wright also made important contributions to the state’s child welfare laws and practices, said Kelly Howard, current Child Welfare Services director. “One of Dan’s greatest contributions was his work on creating the state’s ‘Adoption Forums’ started by the Supreme Court in 2008,” Howard said. The Adoption Forums were formed to help address adoption barriers that were stranding children in foster care; in 2009, the forums resulted in the highest-ever number of adoptions in Michigan, Howard explained.

“Dan was also a leader on the permanency options legislative workgroup, looking at ways to move children out of foster care and into permanent, safe homes,” Howard said. “It was important to him that youth have a voice in the permanency process. Thanks to legislation that he worked on, courts now have to consult the child’s wishes when holding a permanency planning hearing.”

Wright served on the Michigan Underground Economy Task Force, which published a report in June 2010 recommending solutions to the problem of parents who hide assets and income to avoid paying child support. He served on the DHS Child Welfare Improvement Task Force from 2008 to 2009, and was also a member of the Child Support Program Leadership Group.

A native of Detroit, Wright graduated in 1970 from Marquette University with a B.A. in journalism. In 1973, he received his law degree from the University of Detroit Law School, where he graduated *magna cum laude*. Before joining the Supreme Court’s staff in 1989, Wright worked as a practicing attorney, including six years with the State Appellate Defender Office in Detroit, representing indigent defendants in felony cases in appeals to the Court of Appeals and the Supreme Court, as well as in post-conviction proceedings in trial courts all over the state. He was also a partner in the Detroit law firm of Gromek, Bendure, & Thomas, where he specialized in appellate work.

A resident of Grand Ledge, Wright is married to Lynne Wright. He has a son, Eamonn, and a daughter, Margaret.

-- MSC --