



MICHIGAN COURTS NEWS RELEASE

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Tribal State Federal Judicial Forum Meeting to Kick Off Events Focusing on ‘Tribal Justice’

LANSING, MI, October 29, 2018 – Members of Michigan’s tribal, state, and federal court systems, including Michigan Supreme Court Justice Bridget M. McCormack, are assembling in Shelbyville today to begin a two-day meeting of the Michigan Tribal State Federal Judicial Forum. Pokagon Band of Potawatomi Indians Chief Judge Michael Petoskey will host the Forum. This meeting is sponsored by the Gun Lake Band of Pottawatomi Indians and the Casey Family Programs.

“This Forum facilitates an interdependent relationship between Michigan’s tribal, state, and federal jurisdictions, and promotes statewide efficiency through collaboration,” said Justice McCormack, who is the MSC liaison on tribal issues. “Working together through the Forum ensures that the needs of Michigan’s Native American community are being addressed and met.”

The meeting will primarily focus on issues that are shared among all three jurisdictions, such as tribal custody orders and the child welfare system. Other topics on the agenda include implicit bias and judicial fatigue. The Forum will also welcome a special guest: Judge Abby Abinanti, who was featured in the documentary film “Tribal Justice.”

The Forum consists of tribal judges from each of Michigan’s 12 federally-recognized tribes, 10 state court judges, and federal judges and officials. The current Forum co-chairs are Chief Judge Jocelyn K. Fabry of the Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians, and Chief Judge Susan L. Dobrich of the Cass County Circuit Court, Cass County Probate Court, and 4th District Court.

Although the Forum was formally established in 2014 by the Michigan Supreme Court, the spirit of cooperation between Michigan’s differing court systems dates back to 1992, when then-Chief Justice Michael F. Cavanagh, who continues to serve on the Forum, worked with state tribes to create the one-year Michigan Indian Tribal Court/State Tribal Court Forum. In the years that followed, further collaborative measures were enacted, including the formation of the Michigan Indian Judicial Association and an increase in tribal court enforcement of state court rulings.

Read more about the work of the Forum [here](#).

Judge Abinanti will also speak at a screening of “[Tribal Justice](#)” and panel discussion on October 31 at the Michigan Supreme Court in Lansing for state judges, tribal judges, attorneys, and court personnel associated with both systems of child welfare. Panelists will include these Forum members: Judge Timothy Connors, Washtenaw County Circuit Court; Chief Judge Allie Greenleaf Maldonado, Little Traverse Bay Bands of Odawa Indians; Chief Judge Petoskey; Judge Robert Butts, Cheboygan County Probate Court; and Chief Judge Dobrich. The program will include a tribal drum performance and blessing from the Pokagon Band.

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