

Definition



A state **judge** is an elected official given authority to make decisions in civil and criminal proceedings in a court of justice.

To serve in the state's judicial branch of government, a judge must be

admitted to the practice of law for at least 5 years, and be less than 70 years old at the time of election or appointment (to fill a vacancy).

A judge of the Supreme Court is called a Justice.

Play the Judge

[A Day in Court](#) Game*



Analyze different types of questions to decide whether the attorneys are following the rules in a trial.

* For modern desktop browsers, including Chromebooks.

Judges

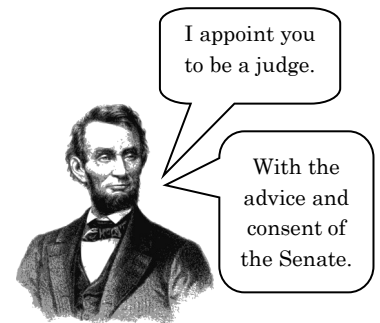
State Judges in Michigan

Elected by the people for terms of office on the nonpartisan ballot – 8-year terms for the Supreme Court and 6-year terms for lower courts. In the event of a vacancy, the Governor appoints a successor who must run for retention for the remainder of the unexpired term in the next judicial election. Judges must be less than 70 years of age at the time of election or appointment. [Const 1963, art 6](#).



Federal Judges

Appointed by the President with the advice and consent of the U.S. Senate. During good behavior, federal judges serve until resignation, retirement, or death. [US Const, art III, § 1](#). Upon attaining certain age and service requirements, judges may take “[senior status](#),” which enables them to hear cases under a reduced workload.



Gavel



The modern-day judges' gavel finds its origin in Scandinavian mythology. Thor, a god of the people and patron of justice, was a friend of landowner and peasant alike. His oath-ring sealed contracts, and he carried a magical hammer as a symbol of his power and authority.

Why Do Judges Wear Robes?

A judge's robe is like a uniform. It shows that the judge represents the judicial branch of government. The robe reminds everyone that the judge interprets the law and makes decisions according to the law. Today, every state judge in Michigan wears a black robe in the courtroom.

"When acting in his or her official capacity in the courtroom, a judge shall wear a black robe."
[MCR 8.115\(B\)](#).

In the early United States most judges did not wear robes, except for the justices of the U.S. Supreme Court. Judicial robes reminded the founders of being ruled by England, since English judges wore robes and wigs in court and for other ceremonies.

At the beginning of the 20th century, judges across the U.S. began to change their minds. They started to think of the

robe as an important symbol of justice. By 1909 justices of the Michigan Supreme Court wore judicial robes when they met in the courtroom at the State Capitol in Lansing.

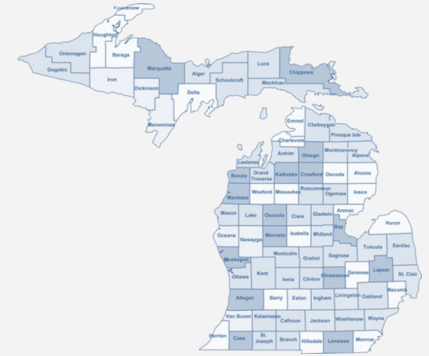
It took many years before all trial court judges wore robes in court. Many preferred to wear business suits instead of judicial robes. Some said that robes were too hot in summer. Others thought that wearing a robe did not automatically make a person a good judge.

Over time, more and more judges believed that robes added dignity to the courtroom. In 1973 a court rule was adopted that said all judges and justices must wear a judicial robe while on the bench. There is a similar rule today.



The Michigan Supreme Court wore robes in the courtroom at the State Capitol in 1909. (Note that the Court included eight members then. This [court composition chart](#) shows how the number has changed over time.)

Local Courts & Judges



The [Michigan Trial Court Directory](#) lists all the courts and judges by county.

Select your county and click on Location to find courts and contact information.

Inviting Guest Speakers

Judges may be willing to meet with students, and the experience can be especially meaningful on or around these dates.

Constitution Day (Sept. 17)
The U.S. Constitution was signed on this date in 1787.

Law Day (May 1) | Law Day celebrates the role of law in our society and cultivates a deeper understanding of the legal profession. [lawday.org](#)

Tips

- Contact potential guest speakers as early as possible. Court schedules are often set far in advance.
- Judges are addressed "Judge [Last Name]" or "Your Honor."

Why Every Vote Matters: Judicial Elections

The temporary exhibit *Why Every Vote Matters: Judicial Elections* was created to celebrate Law Day 2014. The exhibit illustrated how judicial campaigns differ from races for other political offices. It contrasted campaign literature from Justice G. Mennen Williams' judicial and gubernatorial bids.

Judicial Election Ethics

In contrast to federal judges who are appointed for life by the president, judges and justices in the Michigan court system must run for election. Judges and candidates for judicial office are held to higher ethical standards than candidates for other offices.

These strict rules, called canons, appear in the [Michigan Code of Judicial Conduct](#). They are intended to maintain the public's confidence in the judiciary. Many of the actions and behaviors allowed in other political races are forbidden under the judicial canons.

Both successful and unsuccessful candidates face discipline for judicial campaign misconduct. The [Attorney Grievance Commission](#), [Attorney Discipline Board](#), and [Judicial Tenure Commission](#) are involved in the investigation, prosecution, and adjudication of such matters. The Michigan Supreme Court oversees all three bodies.

Judicial Candidates

Must

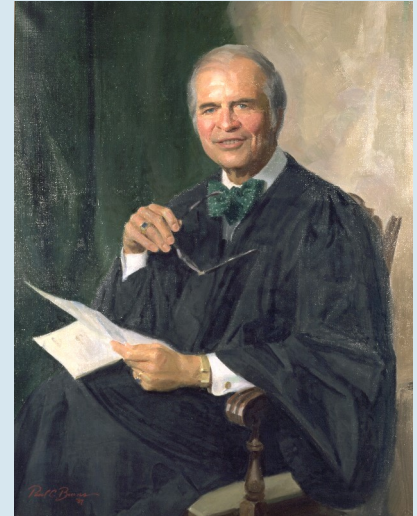
- Be truthful in all advertising.
- Follow restrictions on campaign funds, including rules about asking for and accepting money.

May Not

- Make pledges or promises of conduct in office other than the faithful and impartial performance of judicial duties.
- Hold office in a political party.
- Publicly endorse a non-judicial candidate.
- Allow family members or staff to do something the candidate is forbidden to do.
- Ask for campaign funds personally.



Campaigns: Governor, Justice



Michigan Supreme Court Historical Society

[G. Mennen "Soapy" Williams](#) served as Governor of Michigan (1949-1960) and as a Justice of the Michigan Supreme Court (1971-1986).

Arguably, he was one of Michigan's most successful political campaigners, winning a record six gubernatorial races. During these campaigns he made promises like "Extra Dollars to State's Farmers," and he worked hard to invigorate the Democratic Party.

When Justice Williams ran on the non-partisan ballot for the Michigan Supreme Court, he had to change his strategy to stay within the rules outlined by the [Michigan Judicial Code of Conduct](#). He could no longer make specific campaign promises or promote a political party.

Many remember his green bowtie, which he wore throughout his political career.