



Reimagining Our Courthouses

Report and Recommendations

Adopted December 2023

NOTICE OF DISCLAIMER:

The Michigan Supreme Court established the Justice for All Commission by Administrative Order 2021-1 to develop recommendations and projects to expand access to and enhance the quality of the civil justice system in Michigan. The opinions and recommendations contained in this document are those of the Justice for All Commission and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the Michigan Supreme Court or State Court Administrative Office.

The remainder of this page is intentionally blank.

Table of Contents

Overview	4
Workgroup Activities	5
Research and Presentations	5
Stakeholder Survey	6
Recommendations	7
<i>Welcoming Courthouse Guidelines</i>	7
<i>Courthouse Operations</i>	8
Trial Court Mission Statements	8
Courthouse Signage and Wayfinding Standards	8
Dedicated Court Greeter	9
Courthouse Security Training.....	10
Community Resources and Supports.....	10
Modernize Docket Management	11
<i>Accessing Court Records</i>	11
Standardize Access to Court Recordings.....	12
Clerical Error Court Record Correction Form	12
Automatic Redaction Software	12
<i>Enhancing Language Access Services</i>	13
Online Instructions for Requesting an Interpreter.....	13
Online Tool for Requesting an Interpreter	13
Interpreter Request Hotline	14
Evaluation Standards for Court Interpreter Continuing Education Hours	14
Review of Language Access Plans.....	15
Recognition of Existing Projects and Practices	15
Workgroup Membership	20
Appendix	22

Overview

The Reimagining Courthouses Workgroup was tasked with examining barriers in trial court operations and recommending improvements to help provide 100 percent access to the civil justice system in Michigan. During the past two years this Workgroup coalesced into an active team, studying access issues, surveying stakeholders, learning from subject matter experts, and ultimately producing several recommendations to assist the Justice for All Commission in reaching its goals.

The Workgroup's charge originated from the Justice for All Task Force, the predecessor to the Justice for All Commission. The Task Force established the framework and foundation on which the Commission will take action to enhance access to the civil justice system in Michigan. The [Strategic Plan and Inventory Report](#) outlined four strategic pillars to root the work of the Commission moving forward. Strategic Pillar 1 explicitly outlines the necessity to examine the culture surrounding how courts operate, striving toward a more service oriented and passion driven civil justice system.

***Pillar 1**—A service culture is pervasive across the Michigan civil justice system: stakeholders are focused on serving and strengthening their communities.*

Trial courts are where most court users engage with the judiciary, thus special attention and focus on how those spaces impact court users and shape experiences is important. Subsequently, the Task Force established an outcome measure to inform and guide the work of the Commission.

***Pillar 1, Outcome Measure 1**—People across the state feel respected and treated fairly throughout their interactions with the civil justice system, regardless of the outcome of their case.*

The Commission assigned the Reimagining Courthouses Workgroup three important themes to consider as they embarked on how to reimagine what courthouses could and should resemble as institutions designed to serve the public. The breadth of these topic areas was woven deeply into each convening of the Workgroup and helped craft the roadmap to the recommendations put forth in this report. Those themes are:



Welcoming and Safe Courthouses

Courthouses, both physical and virtual, should be welcoming, safe places where people can easily find where they need to go, and get the services they need.



Access to Court Records

Court records and documents should be easily accessible for parties and members of the public.



Access to Quality Interpreter and Language Services

Access to quality interpreter and language services should be expanded across the civil justice system.

These topics only skim the surface of providing better access to Michigan trial courts. Eliminating the barriers and filling the gaps, both physical and social, can help remove the veil of discomfort surrounding a court experience and should continue to be the cornerstone of this imperative work.

Workgroup Activities

Research and Presentations



Workgroup members invested significant time into reviewing and updating the initial workplan, then offering suggestions and insights regarding innovative civil justice system improvements. Members explored concepts on various topics. The Group focused special attention on improving courthouse signage and customer service, drawing inspiration from leadership and hospitality principles.

In addition, members examined how courts could become more family friendly, develop robust concierge services, and use innovative technology trends, including the shift to remote court proceedings. The Workgroup also reviewed the [Courtroom 21 Project \(now Center for Legal & Court Technology\) at William & Mary Law School](#) and Model Courtroom at the National Judicial College to inspire progressive ideas on modernizing Michigan's courthouses and courtrooms to improve access to civil justice.

During the information gathering stage, the Workgroup heard from two National Center for State Courts (NCSC) staff. Architect and Senior Court Planning Consultant, Allison B. McKenzie, AIA, NCARB and, Nathan Hall, LEED AP Certified Registered Architect and Courthouse Management Consultant, presented on overlapping concepts of the NCSC and access to justice initiatives. They elaborated on continued efforts to expand both physical and virtual spaces with a posture toward increased access. Additionally, the NCSC provided a team of subject matter experts to showcase interpreter models used in various jurisdiction throughout the United States to assist in refining recommendations surrounding interpreter needs.

Paul McManus of Advanced Robot Solutions provided a presentation regarding the creative use of robots and automated kiosks to enhance court accessibility. As digital natives (i.e. individuals born during the age of digital technology) become a larger portion of court users, it is important to provide court access in various electronic formats which they expect to use when interacting with public services. Artificial intelligence (AI) has been successfully used in

some jurisdictions to assist with wayfinding of courthouses, notifications for court dates, and scheduling court hearings.

Court Administrator Nicole Evans from 54-B District Court presented an overview of the court’s [Virtual Court Counter](#) program. This innovation, born of the COVID pandemic, has proven to be a successful technique in how the court serves the community. It is an important illustration of how a trial court can significantly improve public access with minimal investment. This innovative way to offer customer service removes many barriers litigants may face when attempting to access the court.

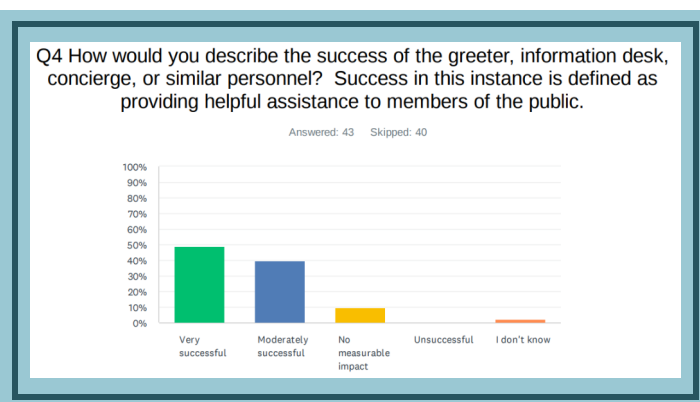
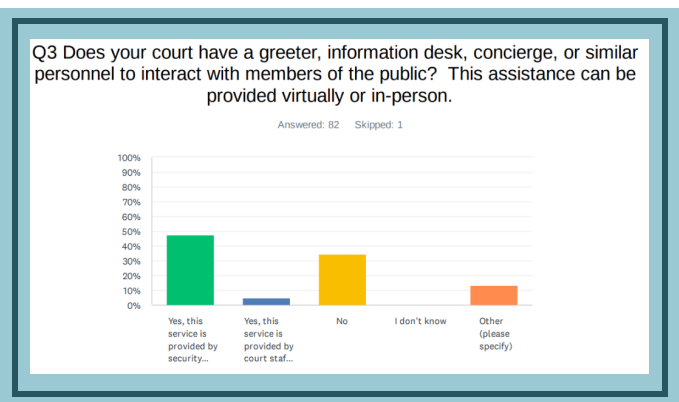


Stakeholder Survey

Early in 2022, the Workgroup prepared and distributed a survey to Michigan Court Administrators and Probate Registers. The survey was intended to share information about the work of the Commission and to determine what efforts, if any, have already been implemented in Michigan trial courts to improve access to civil justice. Moreover, survey participants were asked to identify any specific barriers that inhibit 100 percent access to the civil justice system.

Results

Survey responses highlighted that most trial courts lack a court greeter, an information desk, or concierge service to help direct court users. 34% of respondents indicated no court personnel were assigned such duties and less than 5% of respondents indicated there were dedicated staff (other than security personnel) who were available to assist the public when attempting to navigate the courthouse. Nearly 48% of respondents indicated this task is assumed by security personnel, even though it is not considered a best practice and may divert attention from critical security issues. Lack of adequate staffing/resources was frequently cited as a barrier to providing this important service.



Respondents identified many different important and successful strategies to improve access to justice. Some notable and highlighted topics include court greeters, ongoing customer service training, prompt attention to inquiries from the public, judicial leadership, and showing courtesy and respect to the public. Other emerging themes included appropriate courthouse signage, updated website information, and well-trained staff as practices to meet public needs and

expectations. It was clear from the survey results that most court administrators value recent technological advances that may help improve public access to the courts, however, a blend of technology and human interaction are essential to fully meet public expectations. Analysis of the survey results assisted the Workgroup with ongoing efforts to develop recommendations for the Commission’s consideration.

Recommendations

The Workgroup split into four separate task teams: 1) user experience, 2) technology, 3) court records access, and 4) interpreter needs. Each team was charged with addressing a small portion of the Workgroup’s workplan. Once the individual task team members developed consensus on the content of the recommendations and provided explanatory details, the recommendations were reviewed, discussed, and adopted by all Workgroup members. The Workgroup recognizes that some of the recommendations outlined below will require funding for successful implementation. We recommend the Commission advocate for resources necessary to help trial court implements these recommendations.

Based on the Workgroup’s discussion, independent research, presentations, survey results, and extensive deliberation, it is the belief that, once implemented, the recommendations will move the Michigan’s judiciary closer to the goal of 100 percent access to the Michigan civil justice system. While these initial recommendations are a start, they will not eliminate the access to justice gap. Therefore, it is anticipated that the Workgroup will continue examining issues and developing additional recommendations to address the evolving needs of court users and Michigan’s trial courts.

Welcoming Courthouse Guidelines

The Workgroup’s proposed Welcoming Courthouses Guidelines¹ outline various voluntary strategies that trial courts can adopt to promote a safe and welcoming courthouse. Successful and widespread adoption of these strategies will likely require additional details, resources, and technical support. Specific consideration should be given as to how courts may be incentivized to implement some, or all the strategies outlined in the guidelines document.

□ Recommendation #1:

The State Court Administrative Office (SCAO) should help provide technical assistance to trial courts who wish to implement one or more of the strategies outlined in the Welcoming Courthouse Guidelines. When appropriate, the SCAO should work in collaboration with the Commission on the development of additional resources and toolkits to aid in the delivery of technical support.

¹ Attached as an appendix to this report.

Courthouse Operations

As we look to reimagine Michigan trial courts as spaces where users feel safe and welcomed, several courthouse operation reforms are essential to promote these characteristics. These reforms include:

- trial court mission statements;
- courthouse signage and wayfinding standards;
- courthouse concierge;
- courthouse security training;
- community resources and supports;
- modernize docket management.

Trial Court Mission Statements

In 2021, the Michigan Supreme Court established the Michigan Judicial Council (MJC) to aid in the strategic planning for the judiciary. One of the first orders of business for the MJC was to establish a mission statement (see "Mission") to intentionally guide the development of its efforts, as well as communicate its role and commitments to the public. This explicit articulation of a mission statement serves as a "North Star" to drive strategic decision making. In addition, it aids in building a coalition of individuals to identify and advance organizational goals in service of the mission.

MISSION
Michigan's One Court of Justice delivers justice for all by providing access, protecting rights, resolving disputes, and applying the law under the Constitution.

** from MJC 2022-2025 Strategic Agenda*

□ Recommendation #2:

The Michigan Supreme Court should require each trial court to develop and adopt a mission statement, if the trial court does not already have one. The mission statement should represent the community the trial court serves and should be in harmony with the MJC's mission statement. Additionally, the SCAO should amend Section 1(D) of the Michigan Trial Court Standards and Guidelines for Websites and Social Media to include the addition of "trial court mission statement" to the mandated standards of web content.

Courthouse Signage and Wayfinding Standards

When an individual enters a courthouse, it may be their first time in the building. The uneasy feeling of walking into an unknown space, on top of the underlying anxieties of being inside a courthouse, can bring heightened nervousness. Acute feelings like these can have residual and spill-over effects on a court user's overall experience with the judicial system.

These negative emotions may be mitigated with effective signage. Productive signage establishes an expectation for court users and then communicates that expectation for the individual to consume. Our national partners at the NCSC succinctly state, “Good signage can answer questions before they are asked and promotes goodwill with the public.” To further this point, clear and directional signage also minimizes confusion and tendency to ask for directions or instructions from busy court staff.

Recommendation #3:

The SCAO should develop and adopt courthouse signage and wayfinding standards to promote consistent, inviting, and clear signage across all of Michigan’s trial courts. The standards should be mindful of multijurisdictional buildings and provide courts the ability to accommodate based on individual court needs and security concerns. The standards should draw inspiration from national partners, such as the [Red Hook Community Justice Center](#) and the Center for Court Innovation, with special consideration given to cognitive psychology theories such as Gestalt Psychology.

Courthouse Concierge

Currently, and often by design, the public’s first point of contact with a person inside a courthouse is usually with a uniformed—and possibly armed—security guard. Security guards play a vital role in courthouse settings, but they often play the de facto role of answering questions from the public because they are the first physical body a court user interacts with. Placing the sole burden on security to serve as the front line of customer service does a disservice to both litigants and security personnel. When seeking information, litigants may also get a hurried or incomplete response from security, who are rightfully maintaining their primary focus on court security.

The Workgroup acknowledges the diversity of each trial court and is not expecting uniformity in practice of what a courthouse concierge is. As such, the Group encourages creativity to implement this concept as there are a myriad of avenues to adopting this principle. Trial courts should consider expanding upon traditional court employed staffing. Some examples include, partnering with paralegal program interns, or allowing attorneys to receive the pro bono credit for volunteering to serve as a concierge.

Recommendation #4:

The Michigan Supreme Court should require each trial court to designate non-security personnel within the courthouse to serve as the court concierge, where court users may be directed for assistance after entering the courthouse. The concierge would serve as someone who promotes a friendly, inviting, non-judgmental experience for users of the court including wayfinding assistance.



Courthouse Security Training

A welcoming and safe courthouse also includes physical safety, for both the public and court staff. Currently, the SCAO requires each trial court to submit a local administrative order for security policies for court facilities and for the establishment of court security committees. While these are good steps to ensuring courthouse safety, an updated review of courthouse security best practices should be conducted, especially since some of the [guidance](#) has not been updated in over 20 years.

□ Recommendation #5:

The SCAO should revise and update its Michigan Court Security Guidelines, specifically addressing situations relating to an active shooter.

Community Resources and Supports

Many court visitors have legal issues that impact their lives in major ways and would benefit from referrals to organizations that can help beyond what court staff are able to provide. While courts can't always prevent the negative impacts that a case has on litigants, they can help by providing information about resources in the community. Courts should maintain relationships with local organizations so that they have referrals on hand for litigants needing support. A common thread often woven in the lives of many court users is the notion that what brought them to court is not the only area that could benefit from additional resources or assistance. Courts should serve as places that facilitate warm hand offs to community agencies who can assist users with non-court related issues. Courts should be equipped with readymade information regarding available resources in the community that staff can readily provide to a court user in need.

□ Recommendation #6:

The Michigan Supreme Court should require trial courts to submit a community resource plan, which should include maintaining a community resource list. Courts are encouraged to tailor the list to fit the needs of the community, but the list should minimally include information regarding:

- crisis and suicide lifeline;
- temporary housing and shelters;
- mental health resources;
- Michigan Legal Help and local legal self-help resources;
- Michigan 2-1-1;
- local housing assessment and resource agency;
- local food pantries;
- local domestic violence agencies and shelters;
- local personal protection order and victim services offices.

Modernize Docket Management

Many courts have historically operated under a traditional docketing management principle, which is frequently referred to as “cattle calls” or bulk-scheduling. Before the pandemic, individuals may have found themselves sitting in a courthouse lobby or common area amongst a sea of others who received the same time on their Notice to Appear paperwork, also waiting for their case to be called next. It would not be unusual for court users to spend most of a morning or afternoon, sometimes a full day, waiting for their turn to go in front of a judicial officer. While this docketing style may have previously appeared, at face value, to be effective at managing court schedules, the pandemic unveiled that courthouses were operating in an unwelcoming, unaccommodating, and inaccessible manner.



From a practical standpoint, during the early months of the pandemic, it became evident that the traditional method of docketing cases was not effective as the trial courts transitioned to virtual platforms. The often-chaotic scene of court staff or judicial officers attempting to manage the pre-pandemic bulk dockets became grossly overwhelming. In turn, many courts began scheduling cases in a time-certain manner to efficiently handle each case. Scheduling cases in a time certain manner, to the best extent possible, helps promote a more positive user experience, minimizes constituent wait time, while maintaining a balanced, predictable schedule for court operations.

Let not the imperative lessons learned surrounding bulk-scheduling be lost and become reserved only for use when dispensing justice through a virtual platform. These two tools do not, and should not, be mutually exclusive. It should be noted, similar sentiments revolving around the use of time-certain scheduling were referenced by the Lessons Learned Committee in their 2021 [report](#). In addition, the Justice for All Commission’s Summary Proceedings Workgroup is proposing a similar recommendation to eliminate this type of bulk scheduling, albeit specific for summary proceedings, the principle maintains.

□ Recommendation #7:

The SCAO should establish a Workgroup, including all necessary stakeholders, dedicated to examining the intricacies of effective, efficient, and modern docket management and produce a robust set of guidelines and best practices for the Michigan Supreme Court to consider.

Accessing Court Records

Access to court records is crucial to reinforcing the principle that the court, including its records, is open, transparent, and accessible to the public. The court is the people’s court, and improving access to records is one way to demonstrate this value. The following reforms are recommended to increase access to court records:

- standardize access to court recordings;
- clerical error court record correction form;

- automatic redaction software.

Standardize Access to Court Recordings

The audio and video recordings of the courtroom proceedings are not subject to general public access rules.² Instead, under [MCR 8.119\(H\)\(8\)](#), each trial court is permitted to set its own policy via a local administrative order granting or restricting access to court recordings. As a result, the level of access to court recordings varies significantly across the trial courts—and sometimes even across judges within the same courthouse. Access to the official court record is vital to building the public’s trust in the judiciary and needs to be balanced against legitimate trial court concerns regarding the inappropriate manipulation of official recordings. This concern is especially heightened in the new digital age of artificial intelligence.

□ Recommendation #8:

The views and opinions of Workgroup members range from complete and open access to all, to providing limited access to all litigants, attorneys, and interested persons. In alignment with Michigan’s One Court of Justice, we recommend that the Michigan Supreme Court further consider the issue of access to trial court recordings and implement a standard policy across all trial courts to promote consistency for court users throughout the State of Michigan.

Clerical Error Court Record Correction Form

Sometimes mistakes happen and information contained within the court file can be inaccurate. Michigan Court Rule [2.612\(A\)](#) recognizes this reality and allows for a party to ask the court to correct the clerical mistakes contained in the record. Currently, there is no readily identifiable court form available for parties to use when making this request. The absence of such resources may result in confusion, frustration, and inaccurate court records.

□ Recommendation #9:

The SCAO should develop and release an approved form for use when an individual requests the court correct a clerical mistake on an existing record, which would also include an easy way for clerks to mark a denial reason, such as a check box or similar method.



Automatic Redaction Software

The trial courts are increasingly facing the challenge of providing open access to court records while protecting confidential and personal identifying information.³ While this tension has always existed to some degree, the increasing digitization of the courts and the public’s expectation for online access to many, if not all, services exacerbate the challenge. Courts need effective and efficient tools to meet this challenge now and in the future.

□ Recommendation #10:

² See MCR 8.119(D) and (F).

³ See [MCR 8.119\(H\)](#) limiting access to records until protected personal identifying information is redacted.

The SCAO should incorporate “sniffer” tools into its electronic filing and document management system ([MiFILE](#)), and the statewide case management system ([JIS](#)) to aid in the automatic detection and redaction of protected personal identifying information and other confidential data when court records are available for public viewing.

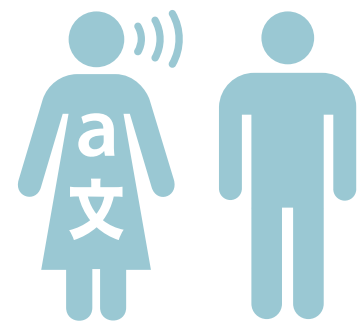
Enhancing Language Access Services

Providing language access services for court users who do not proficiently speak English is imperative to safeguarding their rights and guaranteeing they can meaningfully participate in the judicial system. The following reforms will aid in ensuring that individuals have access to quality language access services:

- online instructions for requesting an interpreter;
- online tool for requesting an interpreter;
- interpreter request hotline;
- evaluation standards for court interpreter continuing education hours;
- review of language access plans.

Online Instructions for Requesting an Interpreter

Litigants in need of foreign language interpreter services should have easy access to information on how to request such services with the court. The current [Michigan Trial Court Standards and Guidelines for Websites and Social Media](#) requires trial courts to link “language access” information which directs litigants to the SCAO website. However, the redirection of users to another site to understand how to request an interpreter may be confusing and frustrating for some users.



❑ Recommendation #11:

The SCAO should amend Section 1(D), Mandated Standards of the *Michigan Trial Court Standards and Guidelines for Websites and Social Media* to include the addition of SCAO-approved form [MC 81](#) (Request and Order for Interpreter) as a minimum element. Additionally, the link to the [SCAO Request for Interpreter Forms](#), where variations of form MC 81 are available in other languages, should be added as a minimum element.

Online Tool for Requesting an Interpreter

Depending on when the request is made, arranging for the provision of foreign language interpreter services may result in some delay to court proceedings. Therefore, advanced

communication is beneficial to the court and parties if a language access request is needed. The SCAO currently provides a “[Request and Order for Interpreter](#)” court form in a variety of languages to make this request. The form must be completed and physically returned to the court either in person or delivered by mail. Requests for language access services can also be made when individuals appear at the court and a language barrier is identified—which may result in further delays.

□ Recommendation #12:

The SCAO should work with trial courts to develop a process for streamlining interpreter requests via a centralized, online submission tool which would expedite a litigant’s request and alert the trial court that a request was made.



Interpreter Request Hotline

Currently, the SCAO has made available online an interpreter request form, translated in six languages, by which court users can access, print, and submit the form to trial courts. Relying on the assumption that all court users have the equitable access to this resource is an oversight and leaves a large gap of people unable to access this resource. While it’s unrealistic to create a form for all languages, it is important to highlight that the court serves users who speak languages outside of the six that the form is currently translated into. Additionally, there is a very present and prevalent digital divide in various communities around the state where court users have varying levels of access to reliable internet and technology. The internet should not be the exclusive avenue, outside of physically making the request in a courthouse, to request an interpreter. Coupling these principles with the notion that not all court users are able to navigate an English based website to access the form, reinforces the need to provide an alternative.

□ Recommendation #13:

Models for establishing and operating a foreign language interpreter request hotline should be explored. Possible operating partners for such a hotline could include the SCAO, Michigan Legal Help, United Way 211 Services, etc.

Evaluation Standards for Court Interpreter Continuing Education Hours

In Michigan, foreign language interpreters are required to submit an annual renewal of their certification to the SCAO. As part of the annual renewal, applicants must provide proof of 10 hours of “continuing education relevant to court interpreting.” Canon 9: Professional Development, of the [Code of Professional Conduct for Interpreters in Michigan Courts](#) requires interpreters to engage in continuing education, but does not set any standards or criteria for the qualification of continuing education opportunities. Under MCR 8.127, the Foreign Language Board of Review is to make recommendations to the State Court Administrator as to the Michigan Code of Professional Reasonability for Court Interpreters, as well as initial and renewal registration requirements.



□ Recommendation #14:

The Foreign Language Board of Review should develop and recommend a process and/or criteria to the State Court Administrator for the substantive evaluation and approval of annual continuing education hours.

Review of Language Access Plans

[Administrative Order 2013-8](#) requires each trial court to adopt a language access plan to be submitted and approved by the SCAO as a local administrative order (LAO). These plans should largely conform to the [model language access plan](#) provided by the SCAO. However, there is currently no requirement for trial courts to review or update their LAO. Additionally, the model language access plan was last reviewed and revised in 2016. The purpose of these plans is to ensure that trial courts are taking the necessary steps to provide meaningful access to limited English proficient persons.

□ Recommendation #15:

The SCAO should undertake a review of its own model language access plan and make necessary revisions. Additionally, the SCAO should conduct ongoing reviews/audits of the language access plans developed by each trial court, including whether they are posted on the court's website as required by the [Michigan Trial Court Standards and Guidelines for Websites and Social Media](#). If the model language access plan is revised, trial courts should review, revise, and resubmit their language access plans for approval.

Recognition of Existing Projects and Practices

The Workgroup would like to acknowledge and endorse support on several projects in active implementation that overlap with the charge of the Workgroup. Each project encapsulates a piece of creating more welcoming courthouses, increased access to court records, and improved access to language services.

Online Dispute Resolution Tools

Online Dispute Resolution (ODR) encompasses a broad array of technologies used to resolve a growing variety of business and consumer disputes throughout the world. ODR presents opportunities for courts to expand services while simultaneously reducing costs and improving customer experience and satisfaction. As a mechanism to promote better access, ODR offers a meaningful balance between resolving disputes and leveraging technology to meet the needs of court users.

The Office of Dispute Resolution within the SCAO has developed the online dispute resolution platform, Mi-Resolve. The platform was originally launched to handle [civil](#) cases only, but has just recently expanded to also provide mediation of [family](#) matters. We encourage the continued use, support, and expansion of online dispute resolution tools such as Mi-Resolve and Court Innovations to help deliver on the Commission’s promise of 100 percent access to justice.



1) [Mi-Resolve](#)

[MI-Resolve](#) is an online system where parties can have a text-based conversation along with a trained mediator in attempt to resolve the matter. Mediators are trained through programs approved by the SCAO and assist all parties in synthesizing potential solutions to resolve the dispute. If parties agree on a particular resolution, the system will produce an agreement, which is signed by all parties through the platform and ultimately creates a binding contract. The system also produces any necessary forms for filing in court.

2) [Court Innovations](#)

[Court Innovations](#) is utilized by many district and circuit courts around the state of Michigan to offer and manage mediation services to their constituents. Many district courts leverage this emerging software for online traffic ticket disputes, whilst circuit courts use the program for dispute resolution surrounding family related issues such as parenting time or other custody related matters.

Implementation of E-Filing (MiFILE) and Electronic Document Management Systems Implementation



The [MiFILE system](#) makes access to courts easier, provides flexibility to litigants, and makes courts more efficient. The online filing platform brings the courthouse to the litigant wherever they are—whenever they need it. Providing this level of accessibility will be revolutionary for the way that many interact and experience the courthouse. The MiFILE system will help reduce feelings of stress and intimidation that can arise when navigating a physically imposing and bustling courthouse.

Litigants will also have the flexibility to file documents on their own time instead of being constrained to traditional business hours—which can be a significant barrier to some litigants.

In addition to the filer facing interface, the MiFILE platform also provides an opportunity for a standardized electronic document management system (EDMS) across the trial courts. Using an EDMS will bring efficiencies in courthouse workflows, as well as provide easier retrieval of

court records. With paper files, public access to court records may be hampered by delays in the location and retrieval of records. While these challenges can be mitigated with the use of bar codes or “out-cards,”⁴ an EDMS will eliminate these challenges. Moreover, the widespread implementation and use of an EDMS will aid in taking steps towards the possible future of online record access.

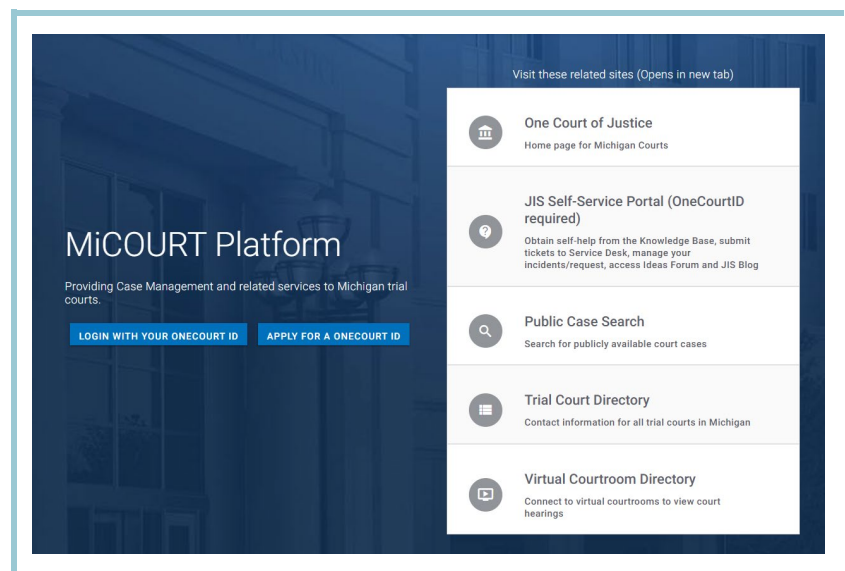
As of the time drafting this report, only 21 of Michigan’s courts are on the MiFILE e-filing platform, with an addition 20 courts scheduled for implementation in early 2023. We support and encourage the allocation of the resources necessary for a timely implementation of MiFILE to all Michigan’s trial courts. A uniform statewide e-filing process will allow easier access to filing and records.

MiCOURT Platform Expansion

The increasing digitalization of how individuals obtain access to services and information across the many aspects of their life is creating an expectation for courts to provide similar access.

Historically, Michigan’s lack of a unified court system presents challenges in the standardization of electronic access and user experience. However, the SCAO’s Judicial Information Services (JIS) has begun to tackle this challenge with its online MiCOURT Platform.

Through the site, individuals can access a statewide trial court directory with location and contact information, virtual courtroom directory, and public case search for those courts utilizing the JIS case management system. While this platform represents a significant step forward, continued progress is necessary to meet the accessibility expectations of court users. The SCAO and its JIS division should continue expansion of its current online MiCOURT Platform to promote a consistent experience for court users and ease of access when looking for information for courts across the state.



Unified Statewide Case Management System and Data Standards

Michigan’s trial courts currently use 20 different case management systems. The use of different case management systems in the trial courts presents a barrier to consistent data gathering and reporting, data driven decision making, and implementation of supplemental technology infrastructure across the judiciary—all of which impact the ability to advance the

⁴ See [Michigan Trial Court Records Management Standards, p29](#).

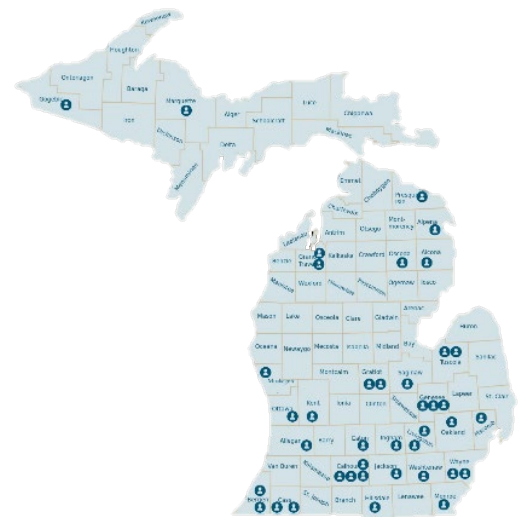
promise of 100 percent access to justice. Furthermore, uniform training on data entry by clerks is essential to maintaining clean and accurate data, which is at the core of data validity. In 2019, the [Trial Court Funding Commission](#) recommended the implementation (and funding) of a statewide case management system. The [Michigan Judicial Council](#) also identified the implementation and funding of a unified case management system as a strategic initiative. We support and encourage the continued efforts to secure funding and resources for the implementation of a statewide unified case management system. As part of these development and implementation efforts, we encourage the adoption of national data standards.

Foreign Language Interpreter Reciprocity

The availability of foreign language interpreters is critical to the ability to provide litigants with meaningful language access services. The SCAO and the [Foreign Language Board of Review](#) are responsible for managing the examination and registration process for interpreters in Michigan. Under [MCR 8.127](#), individuals who have taken other approved state or federal examinations are eligible to seek reciprocal foreign language interpret certification in Michigan. Several individuals have applied for and been granted such reciprocal certification. While the traditional qualifications and certification process are outlined on the [SCAO website](#), the information regarding reciprocal certification is not readily apparent. We support the continued use of reciprocal certification for foreign language interpreters and encourage the SCAO to revise their website to communicate the availability and process more clearly for such certification.

Self-Help Center Expansion

There are currently 40 self-help centers scattered around the 83 counties that makeup Michigan. The centers' services range from robust staff-employed centers to un-staffed kiosk centers where litigants simply have access to a computer. These various centers are a step in the right direction to increase access to the overwhelming legal need for self-represented litigants, but a gap in necessary services remains prevalent. In fiscal year 2023 and 2024, the Michigan Legislature appropriated \$500,000 to the SCAO earmarked for self-help center expansion. With these funds the SCAO has established a [grant program](#) to help disburse this money to support existing centers and stand-up new self-help centers around the state. The JFA also helped support the expansion of a [remote navigator pilot program](#), where litigants in select counties may be able to connect with a navigator who can help address their legal problem. We support the continued expansion of self-help centers to ensure each constituent around the state has reasonable access to a self-help center.



Waiver of Transcript Fees for Civil Appeals

Access to trial court proceedings via written transcripts should not hinge upon a monetary amount for litigants who are requesting a copy of transcript of a civil case. Financial status should not be the determining factor for those seeking to file an appeal in the civil justice system. Thus, the Workgroup supports the proposed court rule [amendments](#) to MCR 2.002 and 7.109. Although the expense would not come at the cost to the litigant, the cost to produce the transcript must be paid by a funding source, as the individuals producing the transcripts are entitled to receive compensation for their work. While balancing the need to expand access to transcripts, it is also worth mentioning the constrained accessibility of individuals who can produce these transcripts. Exploration of other civil transcript barriers and resource constraints should also be explored.

Promise of Procedural Fairness

The Reimagining Courthouses Workgroup would like to acknowledge and applaud the work of the Michigan Judicial Council and its [Promise of Procedural Fairness](#). This Promise echoes similar sentiments of this workgroup's charge of reforming courthouses to become welcoming environments. We support the future dissemination of this Promise however the Michigan Judicial Council sees fit.

Training for Court Personnel

Court staff who are rooted in the understanding that each interaction with the public can influence someone's idea of judicial system is essential to promoting positive court interactions. Equipping staff with the knowledge and skills to meet the technical challenges of their job, as well as the various needs of court users, is critical to ensuring the delivery of excellent customer service. It helps provide a space where court users feel that they can positively and successfully interact with the court system, ultimately creating a welcoming courthouse.

In addition to a general court user experience, it's important to acknowledge that court users come to a courthouse for a variety of reasons, including events that may have been traumatic. There is also a possibility that a court user could experience trauma during a visit to the courthouse or during a court proceeding because some orders of the court can present life-changing circumstances that affect court users. As a result, court staff should be equipped with a basic understanding and working knowledge of trauma and its effects on interpersonal interactions. Staff should also be trained on appropriate trauma-informed responses to successfully engage with a user who may be experiencing a trauma.

As described above, a welcoming courthouse can be marked by staff who provide excellent customer service and are individuals who are trauma informed. These topics are succinctly presented in the Justice for All Commission's adopted recommendations on [Training Standards for Court Personnel](#). Recognizing its vital importance to cultivating a welcoming courthouse environment, trial court administration should send staff to refresher courses to continually enhance the customer experience. As such, this Workgroup acknowledges and commends the work dedicated to creating these standards and asks the Michigan Supreme Court and the SCAO allocate the necessary and appropriate resources for successful

implementation.

Civic Education

The MJL Learning Center has produced a plethora of resource materials surrounding civic education to help young people understand the role of the judiciary and more specifically, the Michigan court system. These resources are easily accessible by educators around the state through the [MJL website](#). Noteworthy resources include the Justitia E-Newsletter, court simulation modules, and court related worksheets. These resources are essential to educating the future generations and help to reinforce the importance and essential role of the judicial branch of government. We support the continued efforts and resources produced by the MJL Learning Center as they continue to create age-appropriate content for young Michigan residents.

Workgroup Membership

The Michigan Justice for All Executive Team appointed a diverse group of Commissioners and practitioners with varied opinions to the Reimagining Courthouses Workgroup. To produce holistic and robust recommendations, it was important to invite various stakeholder groups to participate in the discussion, including judges, court leaders, practicing attorneys, and several representatives of different community partners. This report and recommendations wouldn't exist without their efforts and dedication to this project. The Justice for All Commission greatly appreciates their work.

Hon. Mabel Mayfield, Co-Chair
JFA Commissioner
Berrien County Trial Court

Elizabeth Hundley
County Clerk, Livingston County

Kevin Bowling, Co-Chair*
JFA Commissioner
Ottawa County Circuit Court Administrator (Ret.)

Bonsitu Kitaba-Gaviglio
JFA Commissioner
Deputy Legal Director, American Civil Liberties Union of Michigan

Sandra Vanderhyde, Co-Chair
JFA Commissioner
Kent County Deputy Circuit Court Administrator

Dennis Mac Donell
Court Security Specialist, Michigan Supreme Court

Rob Buchanan*
Attorney, Buchanan Firm

Paul Paruk*
Regional Administrator (Ret.), State Court
Administrative Office

Kristi Cox
Chief Deputy County Clerk, Livingston County

Brittany Schultz
JFA Commissioner
In House Counsel, Ford Motor Company

Kim Cramer
Staff Attorney, Michigan Legal Help

Nicole Huddleston
JFA Commissioner
Managing Director, Detroit Justice Center

** Individuals were involved with the development of the findings and recommendations in this report but are no longer active workgroup members.*

Special assistance was provided by Noah Bradow, Samantha Bigelow, and Andrea Reenders.

Appendix

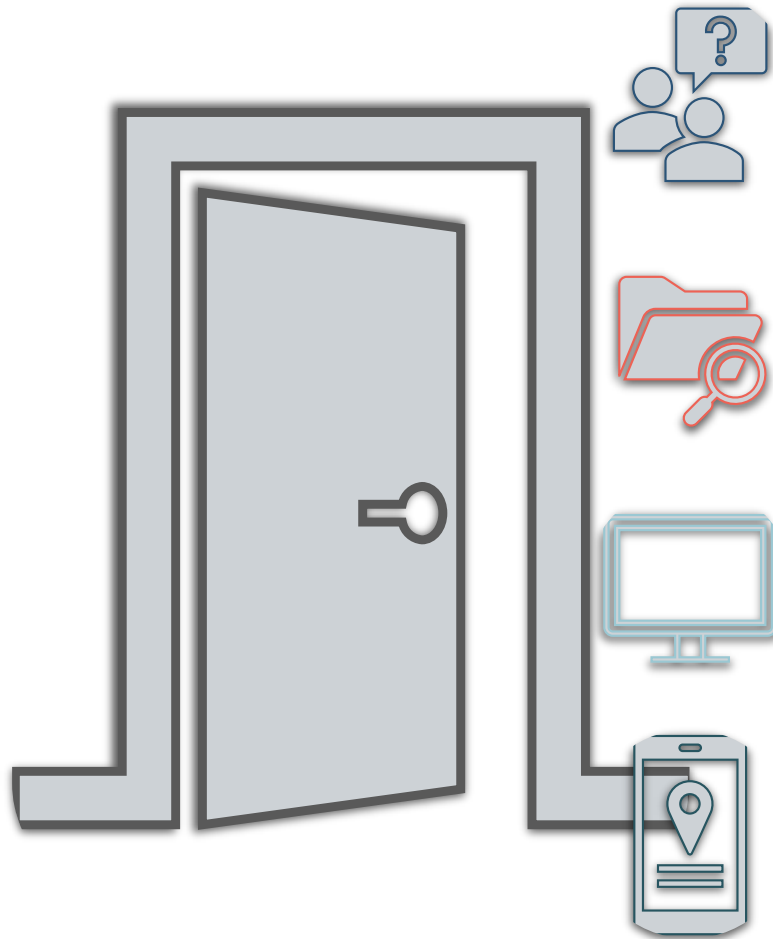
Welcoming Courthouses Guidelines



Michigan **Justice for All** Commission

Welcoming Courthouse Guidelines

Strategies To Creating a Welcoming Courthouse



Adopted December 2023

NOTICE OF DISCLAIMER:

The Michigan Supreme Court established the Justice for All Commission by Administrative Order 2021-1 to develop recommendations and projects to expand access to and enhance the quality of the civil justice system in Michigan. The opinions and recommendations contained in this document are those of the Justice for All Commission and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the Michigan Supreme Court or State Court Administrative Office.

The remainder of this page is intentionally blank.

Table of Contents

Introduction	4
Mission Statement.....	5
Concierge.....	6
Technology Access Points	8
Check-In Process.....	9
Signage	10
Visual Experience	11
Virtual Clerk.....	11
Scheduling Software	12
Time Certain Scheduling.....	13
Court Reminders	14
Training	14
Resource List	16

Introduction

Generally, people come into a courthouse to address matters that are not particularly pleasant, and their lives could fundamentally change after they leave a courthouse. Layered on top of that underlying principle is the notion that courthouses have not historically been designed to be welcoming and inviting. Given these factors, it is essential for trial courts to examine, through the lens of a court user, how their interaction with the court may impact their perception of the judicial system. Many trial courts have already taken an inventory of their processes and revolutionized the experience of their court users by modernizing some court practices. The implementation of innovative and reformative processes can help promote court spaces that are accessible to all and trusted by all. To fully embody this concept, it is important to remember that court users are not just individuals directly involved in a court case. Anyone who enters the courthouse, regardless of the reason for visiting, is considered a court user, including general members of the public.

In its final [report](#), the Justice for All Task Force, which was the forerunner to the Justice for All Commission, explicitly cited the profound need to reform Michigan's civil justice system to ensure it reflects the characteristics of being welcoming, understandable, collaborative, adaptive, and trusted. This vision, coupled with the guiding principles of the Strategic Pillars, specifically Strategic Pillar 1, guides the Reimagining Courthouses Workgroup. The Workgroup was tasked to reimagine courthouses as spaces that are welcoming and safe places where people can easily locate where they need to go and get the services they need.

Michigan courts have a unique opportunity to strategically engage with courthouse users, so they feel welcomed, invited, and supported when entering the space to address their legal needs. Small, discrete changes in the environment over time can promote a shift in the how court users interact with and feel about the court system. The Court, as an institution is designed to serve the public, and therefore has a duty ensure people feel valued and respected when users leave a courthouse. Eliminating barriers and gaps, both physical and social, can help remove the discomfort surrounding a court experience and increase access to justice in our court system.

The principle of procedural fairness is an integral component of creating a welcoming courthouse. Court users should see the courthouse as a place that is fair and impartial, regardless of where in Michigan they may be interacting with the court system. This practice is succinctly displayed in the Michigan Judicial Council's [Promise of Procedural Fairness](#).

The Workgroup recognizes and commends many Michigan trial courts and their staff who provide exceptional customer service to those who visit their courthouse. It is the Workgroup's goal to ensure each court user has a similar experience no matter what trial court they interact with, and proliferate the various strategies outlined in this document. Additionally, the Workgroup's vision for this document is to serve as a living

resource for trial courts to easily pull from as they look to reimagine their own courthouse. Moreover, the Workgroup encourages trial courts, who have already embraced new and innovative access to justice concepts, to submit their strategies for the Commission to consider adding to this document.

A Welcoming Courthouse is

a place where court users...



GREETED

are greeted without judgment, and treated with dignity and respect



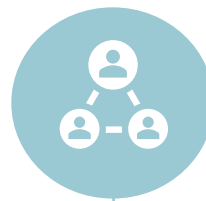
LEGAL

can have their legal needs met and addressed



NAVIGATION

can navigate the courthouse easily



RESOURCES

can receive additional community resources and referrals



COMPREHEND

understand the outcome of their court proceeding and next steps

Below are several strategies, many of which are no-to-low-cost implementation, that a trial court can voluntarily implement to help create a welcoming courthouse.

01 Mission Statement

Articulate the mission, vision, and values for the court while representing the community in which the court is located and reflecting the centrality of public service.

One strategy for promoting a culture of public service throughout the court is to ensure court staff can succinctly articulate the reason a court exists. A concise and coherent purpose establishes the expectations and guiding principles for both court users and court staff. A simple, yet definitive way a courthouse can be more welcoming includes a

court-specific mission statement which reflects and represents the community the court serves.

Implementation Tips

- **Examples to Draw Inspiration.** Many courts around the state have inspiring mission statements, the following are a few samples to help illustrate this principle.
 - [Michigan Judicial Council](#)
 - [36th District Court](#)
 - [22nd Circuit Court](#)
 - [Kalamazoo County Probate Court](#)
 - [Berrien County Trial Courts](#)
- **Communication Channels.** It is important to promote and publicize the mission of the court, so everyone has similar expectations. The following are some ways to communicate the mission statement.
 - Court's website
 - Plaque / sign(s) located in various areas around the courthouse
 - Printed letterhead
 - Business cards

02 Concierge

Establish a court concierge who promotes a welcoming, friendly, inviting, non-judgmental experience for users of the court.

Litigants who are nervous about finding where they need to go might reasonably reach out to that first individual encountered upon arrival to the court. Currently, and often by design, the public's first contact with a courthouse is usually with a uniformed, and possibly armed, security guard. For the public, this initial encounter could trigger a negative experience or reinforce that this experience is not welcoming, warm, or inviting. Visitors may also get a hurried or incomplete response from security, who are rightfully maintaining their primary focus on court security.

With these considerations in mind, a trial court seeking to reinforce a welcoming courthouse should establish a **courthouse concierge** who promotes a friendly, inviting, non-judgmental experience for users of the court. Where practical and safe, the concierge should be located outside of any court security screening area to establish a distinct court user experience and provide an opportunity to engage with

members of public prior to security screening. If the concierge is placed after security, there should be ample signage to reassure visitors that they will find a concierge assistance after the security process. Security staff should be aware of this resource so they can accurately direct visitors.

Implementation Tips

- **Identifying a Concierge.** While the best practice may be to have concierge services performed by court staff, we recognize that some courts may face staffing challenges implementing this strategy. Courts, who may be facing staffing challenges to carry out key operational activities, can look to alternative staffing sources such as the following:
 - Volunteers / AmeriCorp
 - Local law students
 - Interns
 - Robotic / technology-based

- **Scope of Concierge Activities.** The concierge's activities would include greeting visitors, assisting with directional navigation of the court, and answering general court-related questions.

- **Training a Concierge.** An asynchronous training module should be used to facilitate consistency when onboarding new concierges. The module topic areas should minimally include:
 - Key locations within the courthouse (EX: Courtrooms, bathrooms, jury rooms, offices that interact with the public, self-help centers, zoom rooms, etc.)
 - Expected demeanor
 - Sample script when welcoming court users
 - Location of a check-in kiosk and other wayfinding resources (if applicable)
 - Basic functions performed by court clerks, self-help centers, and other resources in the court so that they can refer visitors correctly
 - Knowledge and awareness of 'I speak' cards, in conjunction with the court's Language Access Plan information for who or where to direct LEP court users

- **Additional Resources.** The following resources may be helpful in your implementation efforts for this strategy.
 - [Sample Volunteer Posting](#)
 - [Ottawa County CORA](#)

03 Technology Access Points

Leverage technology access points throughout a courthouse to facilitate a seamless wayfinding court experience.

Leveraging various available technologies, such as kiosks, electronic docket boards, and other wayfinding systems, is an efficient way to provide access and limited services to court users. One example may include being able to pay a court fine or traffic ticket at a payment station, like those found at local Secretary of State offices, instead of waiting in line to pay at a clerk counter. In addition, using interactive wayfinding stations can help display the court layout so users may easily identify and locate various areas around the courthouse. A characteristic of a welcoming and inviting court includes multiple **technology access points** scattered throughout the courthouse. This will engage the public in user-friendly navigation of the space and aid in an efficient and timely court experience.

Implementation Tips

- **Electronic Boards.** Electronic boards are an easy way to display and update information in a readily accessible manner.
 - Court dockets
 - Important court announcements
 - Subtitled general TV programming
- **Kiosks.** Freestanding kiosks in areas of high foot traffic offer court users an informal way of interacting with the court.
 - Make payments for court fines / fees
 - Check-in for a court hearing
 - Schedule a court date
 - Interactive '*you are here*' blueprint of courthouse
 - Access to court records / MiFILE
 - Access to Michigan Legal Help
- **Self-Help Centers.** Courts may want to consider adding a self-help center in the court. Self-help centers provide computer access with trained navigators to help people find legal information.
 - [Michigan Legal Help](#) has resources and training available for courts that would like to open a new self-help center.
- **Virtual Court Appearances.** Courts should reserve a private space and provide technology access for a litigant to participate in a virtual court proceeding.

- **Additional Resources.** The following resources may be helpful in your implementation efforts for this strategy.
 - [National Center for State Courts Space Planning](#)

04 Check-In Process

Simplify the process for litigants to check-in for court hearings by implementing a user-friendly technology-based check-in system.

Another area of confusion in many courts, especially in high volume courts, is the process of checking in for a court hearing. Courts can minimize this confusion and streamline the process by implementing a **simplified check-in system**. Courts should assess their needs and tailor the system in a manner that best fits their desires. Clear signage should be posted to direct court visitors where and how to check in for a hearing. Additionally, there should be a follow-up digital message or signage that provides the litigant with specific direction and next steps as to what they can expect and where they should go when being called into the courtroom.

Implementation Tips

- **Check-in Kiosk.** Designate a specific check-in kiosk in the main lobby, close to the entrance of the courthouse.
- **Mobile Check-in.** If applicable, enable the option to check-in from a mobile device to mitigate congestion at a kiosk station.
- **Mobile Check-in via QR code.** Print a QR code (or provide a supplemental attachment) on Notice to Appear paperwork to allow litigants to check in via mobile device upon arrival at the courthouse.
- **Juror Software.** Leverage specialized software for prospective jurors.
- **Additional Resources.** The following resources may be helpful in your implementation efforts for this strategy.
 - [Five Point Payments](#) (interfaces with JIS)
 - [Jury Management Software](#)

05 Signage

Ensure there is clear and accurate signage to help court users easily navigate through the courthouse to their desired destination.

When an individual enters a courthouse, it may be their first time in the building. The uneasy feeling of walking into an unknown space, on top of the underlying anxieties of being inside a courthouse, can bring heightened nervousness and negatively impact the court user's experience. These emotions may be mitigated if the court user is able to easily navigate the courthouse. Easy-to-understand directions, information and communications should be posted to assist court users on where to go and how to get there. A court seeking to reinforce a welcoming courthouse can ensure there is **clear and accurate signage** that provides the court user a seamless navigation throughout the court space. This can be accomplished using printed material or electronic signage.

Implementation Tips

- **Clear Signage:**
 - Avoid hand lettered signs, except as a temporary measure
 - Use multi-lingual signage with languages prevalent in regional areas
 - Use universally recognized symbols and icons

- **Areas of the courthouse that should be clearly labeled:**
 - Attorney-Client Rooms
 - Clerk's Office
 - Courtroom(s)
 - Friend of the Court
 - Jury Assembly Room
 - Probation Area
 - Greeter
 - Security
 - Bathrooms

- **Additional Resources.** The following additional resources may be helpful in your implementation efforts for this strategy.
 - [Center for Court Innovation – Improving Courthouse Signage](#)
 - [National Center for State Courts – Language Access Signage](#)
 - SCAO Administrative Memorandum – [ADA Signage](#)

06 Visual Experience

Carefully choosing the art and other visual experiences in a court is an important way to make the space feel more inclusive and welcoming.

The visual aesthetic and physical environment can have an impact on a court user's experience. To promote a sense of acceptance, courts should intentionally consider the **visual experience** of the courthouse, including the display of signage, art, and the even the color of the walls. Written materials should be printed large enough to read easily and written in plain language. Art should be inclusive and should reflect the diversity of the community the court serves. An inviting lobby or waiting area can offer litigants and visitors a space to convene and provide a reprieve before or after a court experience.

Implementation Tips

Examples to Draw Inspiration. Some courts around the state and other resources provide a few samples to help illustrate this principle.

- Washtenaw County [RE:CLAIM Project](#)
- Van Buren County [Art Contest](#)
- The Urban Institute: [How Public Art Can Improve Quality of Life and Advance Equity](#)
- National Assembly of State Arts Agencies: [Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in State Arts Agency Public Art Programs](#)
- Western District of Pennsylvania: [Rotating Schedule of Art Displays](#)

07 Virtual Clerk

Provide a clerk accessible to the public on a virtual platform such as Zoom.

The COVID-19 pandemic taught the courts many things that should remain in the post-pandemic era including innovative ways to serve the community. Courts should not revert to traditional ways of operating court business in pre-pandemic fashion, but rather embrace technological advances to serve court users and the public more efficiently and effectively. Many courts pioneered new ways to serve the public, and one of those ways includes access to a **virtual court clerk**. Providing remote access to the

Clerk's Office gives litigants an alternative way to conduct court business and ask questions face-to-face without needing to physically travel to the courthouse.

Implementation Tips

- **Necessities.** Below are some resources that will help a court stand up a virtual clerk counter.
 - Exclusive Zoom license
 - Dedicated staff schedule for coverage
 - Market availability of virtual clerk on website and signage throughout courthouse
- **Additional Resources.** The following resources may be helpful in your implementation efforts for this strategy.
 - [54-B District Court](#)
 - [40th District Court](#)
 - National Center for State Courts - [Tiny Chat](#)

08 Scheduling Software

Use scheduling software for a subset of hearing types, where court users can pick a court date and time from a predetermined list as a means of promoting litigant preference.

One way that courts can become more welcoming and inviting includes considering litigant preference when scheduling court hearings where it is practical and feasible. Allowing litigants to choose a time that works for their schedule increases the likelihood of appearances and helps to reassure litigants that the court values litigant needs and preferences. To streamline this possibility, a service of a welcoming courthouse may include **scheduling software** where litigants can choose from a list of available dates and times for court hearings. Courts should examine the possibility of scheduling software for hearing types where court dates are automatically set to accommodate and encourage litigant preference. Implementing this technology, especially in high volume courts, may also alleviate some of the burden clerks feel when inundated with scheduling hearing dates, such as that of traffic informal hearings.

Implementation Tips

- **Software Programs.** Below are some scheduling software programs that could help you implement this strategy.

- [Calendly](#)
- [Doodle](#)
- **Additional Resources.** The following resources may be helpful in your implementation efforts for this strategy.
 - 36th District Court Traffic Civil Infraction [Online Scheduling Service](#)
 - Salt Lake City Justice Court – [Book your Arraignment](#)

09 Time Certain Scheduling

Eliminate, to the extent possible, the practice of bulk scheduling court cases.

The COVID-19 pandemic revealed the need to modernize docket management and shift away from conventional docketing styles, such as “cattle calls”. The ineffective nature of these scheduling styles was highlighted when courts transitioned to operating virtually. Bulk scheduling does not promote a welcoming courthouse. It was not unusual, prior to the pandemic, for a court user to wait many hours between the hearing time on a notice to when their case was called. To promote a more positive user experience and minimize wait times, **cases should be scheduled in a time-certain manner** to the extent possible. This practice also helps maintain a balanced and predictable schedule for court operations.

Implementation Tips

- **Clustering.** To the extent possible, courts should consider clustering similar type cases together. Clustering should not be exclusive to case types. Courts should consider identifying other types of characteristics or themes that make cases similar and cluster based on what works best for the trial court.
 - **Characteristics to consider for possible clustering:**
 - In-custody cases
 - Type of hearing (motions, review hearings, etc.)
 - Lawyers vs. self-represented litigants
- **Scheduling Process.** Some trial courts in Michigan are already using a scheduling process. Judges or administrators should consider reaching out to other courts or judges to learn more about efficient and effective scheduling practices.
- **Additional Resources.** The following resources may be helpful in your implementation efforts for this strategy.

- Post-Pandemic Lessons Learned 2021 [Report](#)

10 Court Reminders

Send notifications for court hearings and other court related reminders to encourage litigant participation.

Appointment reminders are a great way to provide consumers with prompt notice of an upcoming obligation, like reminder messages that various medical offices employ. Leveraging a reminder system that sends notices to a user's cell phone is another way to promote a system that welcomes users to meaningfully participate. A way to encourage court appearance is to offer **text message reminders** for litigants. Automated text messages can be easy to implement and may increase the appearance rates in civil cases.

Implementation Tips

- MiCOURT Text Message [Reminders](#)
- National Center for State Courts – [Text Reminders](#)

11 Training

Ensure court staff receive robust ongoing training to meet the needs of court users and deliver outstanding customer service.

Court staff who are rooted in the understanding that each interaction with the public can influence someone's idea of our justice system is essential to promoting positive court interactions. Court staff exist to serve the public and court users. Providing an excellent customer experience is integral to maintaining an environment where court users feel that they can freely interact with the court system. Therefore, a court seeking to strengthen a welcoming courthouse should support ongoing **customer service training** for court staff to meet the needs of court users and deliver outstanding customer service. In coordination with the JFA Training and Outreach Committee training recommendations, this type of training may include, but is not limited to,

interpersonal customer service training, trauma-informed training, technology training, legal information vs. legal advice, etc. When court staff interact with court users, they should feel confident in their ability to meet the customer's needs. Equipping staff with the knowledge and skills to meet the technical challenges of their job, as well as the various needs of court users, is critical to building staff assurance.

Implementation Tips

- **Michigan Judicial Institute Court Support Staff Certification.** The purpose of court support staff certification is to assure that front-line clerks, deputy clerks, clerks/typists, receptionists, and other support staff have the knowledge and specialized skills necessary to perform their jobs with a high degree of competence. *For more information, visit the [MJJ website](#).*
- **Michigan Judicial Institute Resources.** Michigan Judicial Institute has many recorded webinars to provide asynchronous training opportunities, which staff can watch at any time. *For more information, visit [MJJ's videos and webinars page](#).*
 - [Verbal Diffusion](#)
- **National Center for State Courts Webinars.** The National Center for State Court is continuously releasing updated training videos for court staff that may be relevant to the everyday work of staff. *For more information, visit [NCSC's webinar website](#) as well as [NCSC's proceduralfairness.org website](#).*

Specific Training Topic Areas

- **Providing Legal Information.** Court staff are often inundated with court users inquiring about various legal questions, including, sometimes without realizing, asking for legal advice. Court staff should be trained on providing a high level of public service, including providing legal information whenever possible. Court staff should be trained on the difference between information and advice, including how to provide information when a visitor asks for legal advice, and various resources available to help connect a court user with legal assistance.
 - [Employee Guide to Legal Advice](#) | [Quick Reference Guide](#)
- **Court Records.** Court staff should understand what court records are considered public information. Conversely, staff should be aware of what records are restricted, to what degree are the records restricted, and the authority to which allows for restriction. This awareness will help promote consistent messaging when users may be denied access to case information.
 - [Nonpublic and Limited-Access Court Records Guide](#)
 - [Trial Court Case Record Management Standards](#)
 - [Administrative Order 2006-2](#) – Privacy Policy and Access to Court Records

- **Personal Identifying Information.** Similar to that of court records, court staff should be appraised of what personal identifying information is, and how to ensure they are not releasing information that is protected.
 - Michigan Judicial Institute PII [Webinar](#)

12 Resource List

A robust resource repository is necessary to meet the needs of court users, even for issues that did not bring them to court.

In many cases, court users are often dealing with issues outside of what brought that person to court. These individuals could benefit from referrals to community resources to help address their non-court related issues. Court staff can decrease the trauma of some legal outcomes by maintaining a **resource list**, where court staff can connect individuals with resources that could assist court users. Resources should be expanded beyond those related to domestic violence.

Implementation Tips

- **Method of Communication.** Maintaining a central robust list of resources that any court staff could refer to if they encounter a court user in need of additional community resources. An infographic of highly requested information is one way to easily disseminate information to court users.
- **Coordinator.** Having a point person whose responsibility it is to maintain, collect, and update this information, at least annually, may help ensure the resource list is accurate and up to date.
- **Topic Areas.** The list could include:
 - Crisis and suicide lifeline
 - Temporary and emergency shelters
 - Mental health resources
 - Michigan Legal Help
 - 211
 - Local Housing Assessment and Resource Agency
 - Local food pantries
 - Local domestic violence agencies and shelters
 - Local personal protection order and victim services offices
- **Additional Resources.** The following resources may be helpful in your implementation efforts for this strategy.
 - Example of a [court food pantry](#)