



Michigan  
**Justice for All Commission**

# Reimagining Our Courthouses

Report and Recommendations

DRAFT

# Table of Contents

Overview.....	3
Work Group Activities .....	4
Research and Presentations .....	4
Stakeholder Survey .....	5
Recommendations.....	6
Welcoming Courthouse Guidelines .....	6
Courthouse Operations .....	6
Trial Court Mission Statements .....	7
Courthouse Signage and Wayfinding Standards .....	7
Dedicated Court Greeter .....	8
Enhanced Customer Service Training.....	8
Community Resources and Supports.....	9
Trauma Response Training.....	9
Modernize Docket Management .....	10
Accessing Court Records .....	10
Standardize Access to Court Recordings.....	10
Waive Transcript Fees for Civil Cases .....	11
Court Record Correction Form.....	11
Automatic Redaction Software .....	11
MiCOURT Platform Expansion .....	12
Enhancing Language Access Services .....	12
Online Instructions for Requesting an Interpreter.....	13
Online Tool for Requesting an Interpreter .....	13
Evaluation Standards for Court Interpreter Continuing Education Hours .....	13
Review of Language Access Plans.....	14
Interpreter Request Hotline .....	14
Recognition of Existing Projects and Practices.....	15
Work Group Membership.....	18

# Overview

The Reimagining Courthouses Work Group 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 Work Group 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 Work Group'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.

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

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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.

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***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.*

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The Commission assigned the Reimagining Courthouses Work Group 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 Work Group 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.

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## **Work Group Activities**

### **Research and Presentations**



Work Group 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 Work Group 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 Work Group 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.

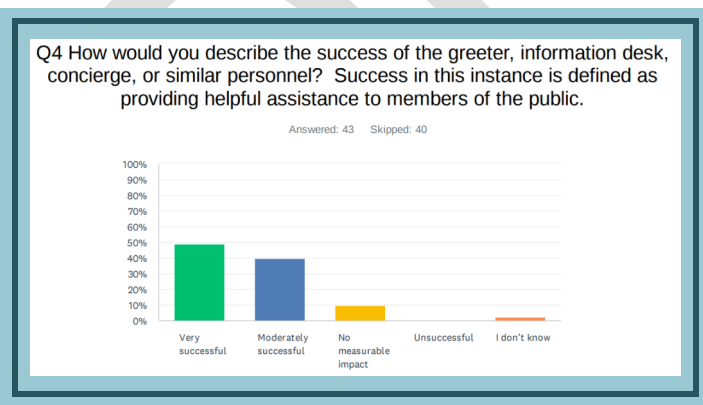
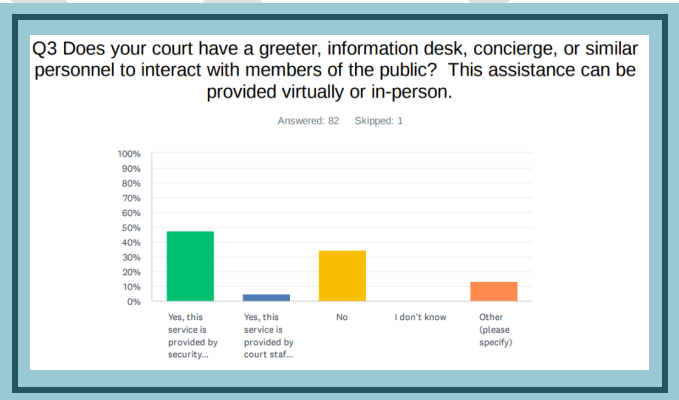


## Stakeholder Survey

Early in 2022, the Work Group 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 Work Group with ongoing efforts to develop recommendations for the Commission's consideration.

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## Recommendations

The Work Group 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 Work Group'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 Work Group members.

Based on the Work Group's discussion, independent research, presentations, survey results, and extensive deliberation we believe 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 Work Group 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 Work Group's proposed Welcoming Courthouses Guidelines<sup>1</sup> 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.

#### □ 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.

## Courthouse Operations

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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;

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<sup>1</sup> Attached as an appendix to this report.

- dedicated court greeter;
- enhanced customer service training for staff;
- community resources and supports;
- trauma training and response;
- modernization of 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.

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#### **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*

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#### **□ Recommendation #2:**

The Michigan Supreme Court should require each trial court to develop and adopt a mission statement, if they have not already done so. Additionally, each court should be required to include their mission statement on their website.

### 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 and negatively impact the court user's experience. These emotions may be mitigated if the court user is able to easily navigate the courthouse. Good signage can answer questions before they are asked and promotes goodwill with the public. It also eliminates the need for people 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.

## Dedicated Court Greeter

Currently, and often by design, the public's first contact with a courthouse is usually with a uniformed—and possibly armed—security guard. Security guards play a vital role in courthouse settings, but placing these individuals on the front line of customer service does a disservice to both litigants and security personnel. Moreover, for litigants, this presence at the outset could trigger a negative experience or an experience that does not promote a welcoming, warm, or inviting environment. When seeking information, litigants may also get a hurried or incomplete response from security, who are rightfully maintaining their primary focus on court security. Expanding upon traditional court employed staffing should be explored. For example, partnering with paralegal program interns or allowing attorneys to receive the pro bono credit for volunteering to serve as a dedicated greeter.

### □ Recommendation #4:

The Michigan Supreme Court should require each trial court to designate non-security personnel within the courthouse to serve as a dedicated court greeter who promotes a friendly, inviting, non-judgmental experience for users of the court. When a greeter must be placed after security, there should be ample signage to reassure visitors that they will find a greeter after the security process.



## Enhanced Customer Service Training

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. Providing an excellent customer experience is integral to maintaining an environment where court users feel that they can positively and successfully interact with the court system.

### □ Recommendation #5:

In addition to the technical and substantive topics necessary to successfully meet the demands of their role, court staff should also receive enhanced customer service training. The training should be designed to equip staff with the skills and knowledge necessary to deliver an excellent customer service experience. This Work Group encourages the Commission to adopt the JFA Commission Training and Outreach Committee's proposed court staff training recommendations. If adopted, the Michigan Supreme Court and the SCAO should allocate the necessary and appropriate resources for successful implementation of the recommendations.



## **Community Resources and Supports**

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. To provide this warm handoff, 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 develop and maintain a community resource repository that is updated annually. Courts are encouraged to tailor the repository to fit the needs of the community, but the repository should minimally include information regarding:

- crisis and suicide lifeline;
- local homeless 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;
- local personal protection order and victim services offices.

Each trial court should designate an employee to be the court's trauma coordinator or liaison, who is responsible for maintaining accuracy of the repository.

## **Trauma Response Training**

Court users may be brought to court as the result of experiencing a traumatic event, or could experience trauma during a court proceeding, where orders of the court can present life-changing circumstances that affect court users. Court staff should be equipped with a basic understanding and working knowledge of trauma and its effects on interpersonal interactions. In conjunction, staff should be trained on appropriate trauma-informed responses to successfully engage with a user who may be experiencing a trauma. The Justice for All Commission's Training and Outreach Committee Training Standards also recommends all court staff participate in such training.

### **□ Recommendation #7:**

The Michigan Supreme Court and the SCAO should allocate sufficient resources to ensure all trial court staff receive the training outlined in the Training and Outreach Committee Training Standards, which include trauma-informed training.

## Modernize Docket Management

Many courts have historically operated under a traditional docketing management principle, which is frequently referred to as “cattle calls”. The COVID-19 pandemic revealed this conventional docketing style as ineffective when courts transitioned to operating on a virtual platform. While this docketing style was previously effective at managing court schedules, the pandemic unveiled that courthouses were operating in an unwelcoming and unaccommodating manner. Prior to COVID-19, it would not be unusual for a court user to not have their hearing until hours after their scheduled time. To promote a more positive user experience, scheduling cases in a time-certain manner, to the best extent possible, minimizes constituent wait time and maintains a balanced, predictable schedule for court operations. It should be noted, similar sentiments were referenced by the Lessons Learned Committee in their 2021 [report](#). In addition, the Justice for All Commission’s Summary Proceedings Work Group is proposing a similar recommendation to eliminate this type of bulk scheduling, albeit specific for summary proceedings, the principle maintains.



### □ **Recommendation #8:**

The SCAO should establish a Work Group, 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;
- waive transcript fees for civil cases;
- court record correction form;
- automatic redaction software;
- MiCOURT platform app and expansion.

## Standardize Access to Court Recordings

The audio and video recordings of the courtroom proceedings are not subject to general public access rules.<sup>2</sup> 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 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 important and needs to be balanced with trial court concerns regarding the inappropriate manipulation of official recordings.

<sup>2</sup> See MCR 8.119(D) and (F).

### □ Recommendation #9:

The views and opinions of Work Group members range from complete and open access to all, to providing limited access to all litigants, attorneys, interested persons. We recommend that the Michigan Supreme Court further consider the issue of access to court recordings and implement a standard policy across all trial courts.

### Waive Transcript Fees for Civil Cases

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. 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.

### □ Recommendation #10:

The Michigan Supreme Court and the SCAO should establish a transcript fee waiver process for civil cases and explore adequate funding to compensate the production of requested transcripts.

### 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 #11:

The SCAO should develop and release an approved form for use when an individual requests the court correct an existing record.



### 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.<sup>3</sup> 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 exacerbates the challenge. Courts need effective and efficient tools to meet this challenge now and in the future.

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

### □ Recommendation #12:

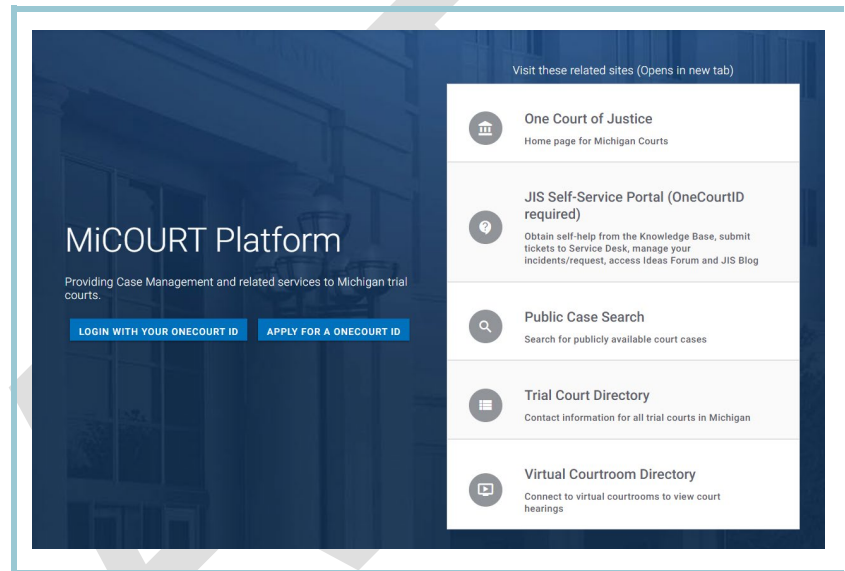
The SCAO should incorporate “sniffer” tools into its electronic filing and document management system ([MiFILE](#)) that can aid in the automatic detection and redaction of protected personal identifying information and other confidential data from court records.

### 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.



### □ Recommendation #13:

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.

## Enhancing Language Access Services

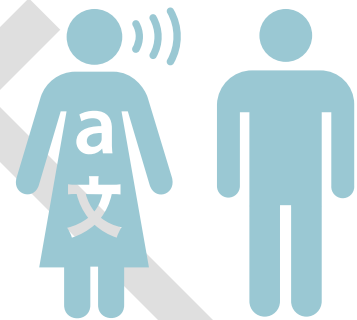
Providing language access services for court users who do not proficiently speak English is imperative to safeguarding their rights and guaranteeing they can meaningfully participate in the judicial system. The following reforms will aid in ensuring that individuals have access to quality language access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

- online instructions for requesting an interpreter;

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

### 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 as a way to understand how to request an interpreter may be confusing and frustrating for some users.



#### ❑ **Recommendation #14:**

The SCAO should amend the Michigan Trial Court Standards and Guidelines for Websites and Social Media to require trial courts state explicitly how to make a request for a foreign language interpreter directly on the trial court’s website.

### Online Tool for Requesting an Interpreter

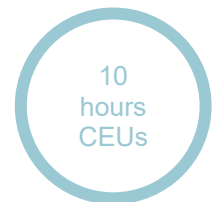
Depending on when the request is made, arranging for the provision of foreign language interpreter services may result in some delay to court proceedings. Therefore, it is beneficial to the court and parties that language access needs are communicated to the court in advance, when possible. The SCAO currently provides a “[Request and Order for Interpreter](#)” court form in a variety of languages to make this request. Requests for language access services are also often made when individuals appear at the court and the language barrier is identified—which may result in delay.

#### ❑ **Recommendation #15:**

The SCAO should work with trial courts to implement a process for litigants in need of language access services to easily request an interpreter via an online request of which the trial court is notified.

### 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.



### □ Recommendation #16:

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. Therefore, the Board of Review should develop and recommend a process and/or criteria 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. 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 these. 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 #17:

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.

## 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 same 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 the 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 #18:

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. Due to the expected cost of establishing and maintain such a service, sources of funding and support should also be explored.

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## Recognition of Existing Projects and Practices

The Work Group would like to acknowledge and endorse support on several projects in active implementation that overlap with the charge of the Work Group. 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 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,”<sup>4</sup> 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.

## 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 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

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



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 SCAO to revise their website to communicate the availability and process more clearly for such certification.

## Self-Help Center Expansion

There are currently 27 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, the Michigan Legislature appropriated \$500,000 to the SCAO earmarked for self-help center expansion. With these funds the SCAO established a grant program to help disburse this money to support existing centers and stand-up new self-help centers around the state. We support the continued expansion of self-help centers to ensure each constituent around the state has reasonable access to a self-help center.



## Promise of Procedural Fairness

The Reimagining Courthouses Work Group 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 work group's charge of reforming courthouses to become welcoming environments. We support the future dissemination of this Promise however the Michigan Judicial Council sees fit.

## Civic Education

The MJJ 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 [MJJ 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 MJJ Learning Center as they continue to create age-appropriate content for young Michigan residents.

## Work Group Membership

The Michigan Justice for All Executive Team appointed a diverse group of Commissioners and practitioners with varied opinions to the Reimagining Courthouses Work Group. 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

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

**Sandra Vanderhyde**, Co-Chair  
JFA Commissioner  
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**Rob Buchanan**  
Attorney, Buchanan Firm

**Kristi Cox**  
Chief Deputy County Clerk, Livingston County

**Kim Cramer**  
Staff Attorney, Michigan Legal Help

**Nicole Huddleston**  
JFA Commissioner  
Managing Director, Detroit Justice Center,

**Elizabeth Hundley**  
County Clerk, Livingston County

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

**Dennis MacDonell**  
Court Security Specialist,  
Michigan Supreme Court

**Paul Paruk**  
Regional Administrator,  
State Court Administrative Office

**Brittany Schultz**  
JFA Commissioner  
In House Counsel, Ford Motor Company

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

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

Appendix

WELCOMING COURTHOUSE GUIDELINES ONCE FINALIZED

DRAFT