

Sent on behalf of the Michigan Judicial Council:



MICHIGAN COURTS NEWS RELEASE

John Nevin, Communications Director

Ph: 517-373-0129 Twitter: @MISupremeCourt FB: facebook.com/misupremecourt

A New Era for Michigan's Trial Courts: Transformative Funding Model Proposed

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Michigan Judicial Council unveils comprehensive plan to improve trial court funding, justice, and access

LANSING, MI, November 6, 2025 – In a landmark step toward implementing the 2019 recommendations of the Trial Court Funding Commission, the [Michigan Judicial Council](#) (MJC) today released a concept paper entitled, “[Alternative Funding for Trial Courts: Implementation Recommendations](#),” outlining a bold new blueprint for funding Michigan’s courts. Developed in response to Public Act 47 of 2024 and building on years of bipartisan study, the proposed model aims to eliminate financial conflicts of interest, ensure fair and stable funding, and expand equitable access to justice for all Michiganders.

Background: Addressing Longstanding Challenges

Michigan’s trial court funding system has faced persistent challenges for decades, including excessive dependence on local governments for funding, pressure on judges to generate revenue for operations, and unequal access to justice for vulnerable populations. These issues were brought to the forefront by the 2014 Michigan Supreme Court decision in [People v Cunningham](#), which highlighted constitutional and practical concerns about relying on court assessments to fund daily operations.

In response, the Legislature formed the Trial Court Funding Commission (TCFC), which made key recommendations for a fairer, more sustainable, and more efficient system. The new concept paper, developed by the MJC’s Alternative Funding for Trial Courts Workgroup with input from nearly 40 agencies, provides the implementation roadmap for those transformative recommendations.

Former Chief Justice **Bridget Mary McCormack**, who presided over the Supreme Court when the TCFC released its [recommendations](#) in 2019, said, “This roadmap has been a long time coming, and I anticipate that it will be invaluable when the question of court cost constitutionality inevitably comes before the Court. But I urge the Legislature not to wait that long to consider what a fairer, more efficient funding model could look like.”

Key Features of the Proposed Funding Model

Stable and Balanced Funding Partnership

The [new model](#) establishes a “maintenance of effort” (MOE) requirement, ensuring local governments contribute no more than their historic average to fund Michigan trial courts, with the state supplying additional funds to meet operational needs. The state and local units will share the costs of new court facilities and major renovations, guided by updated safety and accessibility standards. A new Court Facility Grant Program is proposed to support these joint efforts statewide.

Michael Bosanac, Administrator and Chief Financial Officer of Monroe County, captained the Operational Cost Funding Model Implementation Team, which led the development of these recommendations. He said, “For too long, local governments have borne the burden of funding Michigan’s trial courts, with the state contributing less than 15%. Having the state as a more balanced funding partner will reduce pressure on local governments as the primary funding source for trial courts. This will provide local governments with financial predictability and reduce the need for local courts to assess excessive costs on court users to generate revenue. The plan strives to create better outcomes for all stakeholders – especially citizens of this state.”

Centralized Trial Court Fund

All court-generated revenue will be deposited into a new Trial Court Fund managed by the Department of Treasury, then disbursed to local funding units solely for judicial branch functions – based on the costs to run their courts. Local funding units and courts will work with the State Court Administrative Office (SCAO) to develop and approve budgets that reflect the true cost of doing court business, including appropriate staffing for every court.

Julie Bovenschen, court administrator of Macomb County and co-captain of the Funding Distribution Implementation Team that developed these recommendations, said, “We worked hard to put together a budgeting process that worked for local court leaders and funding units, and I am proud of where we landed. We also spent a lot of time building consensus on what should count as a judicial branch function, in order to maintain separation of powers and avoid taxing court users for other government functions.”

Former probate court judge and MJC Project Director **Sue Dobrich**, who also co-captained the Funding Distribution team, said, “This is the first time we’ve gotten a comprehensive and detailed look at how much it costs to fund Michigan’s trial courts – \$1.2 billion! – as well as where the funding comes from and what it is spent on. The data alone provides us with a wealth of information, and we used the data to develop a well-planned roadmap for funding Michigan’s trial courts into the future.”

Uniform Assessments and Indigency Standards

Under the [new model](#), courts will adopt a statewide formula for imposing assessments, ensuring that fines, fees, and costs are imposed fairly and only on those able to pay. Restitution will always remain in place, and judges retain discretion to impose fines or other accountability measures. Costs and fees, on

the other hand, are always waived for people who are found indigent, based on a new standardized process with objective criteria.

Judges **Beth Gibson** (92nd District – Mackinac) and **Paul Stutesman** (45th Circuit – St. Joseph) co-captained the Uniform Assessments and Indigency Determination Implementation Team. “These recommendations balance the need for accountability in the court – which often takes the form of fines and restitution – with the goals of rehabilitation that are undermined by imposing fees and costs that are impossible for some people to pay,” Judge Stutesman said. “And the recommendations relieve the judiciary of the pressure to fund our courts, which is essential for the administration of justice,” added Judge Gibson.

Centralized Collections System

A key component of the model is moving the function of collecting assessments out of local courts and over to the Department of Treasury, streamlining the process and replacing punitive enforcement measures like bench warrants and license suspensions with efficient civil collections tools. The report found that courts collect only about half of all assessments within the first year after they are imposed, and collections rates fall to one percent or less after four years.

Judge **Michelle Appel** (45th District – Oak Park), co-captain of the Collections Systems Implementation Team that worked on these recommendations, said, “As courts, we’re just not very good at collecting money – and why should we be? That’s not our job. Turning it over to the professionals makes so much sense.”

Matthew Clark, director of Treasury’s Collection Services Bureau and the other co-captain, agreed, saying, “Treasury staff are experts on collecting debt and have numerous tools to do so effectively and efficiently. While collecting all of the state’s court debt would be a new and challenging undertaking for us, we’re committed to working through the details with the SCAO, the Legislature, and all stakeholders.”

Transformative Impact for Michigan’s Justice System

The [recommended changes](#) mark a fundamental shift in the administration of justice in Michigan, ensuring that judges are free from revenue-generation pressures and that court funding is both sufficient and predictable. By removing financial barriers, the plan aims to provide equal access to justice and prevent vulnerable individuals from being saddled with debt they cannot pay.

Former Chief Justice **Elizabeth T. Clement**, who chaired the MJC before retiring from the Court to run the National Center for State Courts, said “I am thrilled to see Michigan continuing to make progress on this important issue, enhancing accessibility, transparency, and efficiency – some of my biggest values – in the area of trial court funding.”

The proposed model incorporates lessons from other states and positions Michigan as a national leader in court funding reform. The work was supported with financial data collection and analysis by Maner Costerian, a public accounting firm, and with technical assistance from The Pew Charitable Trusts.

State Court Administrator **Thomas P. Boyd**, who chaired the Alternative Funding for Trial Courts Workgroup, said “We have been working to improve Michigan’s trial court funding system for more than a

decade. This report builds on the work we did on the Trial Court Funding Commission and gets us closer than ever to a vision where the business of funding courts does not interfere with public safety and the administration of justice.”

[Click to find more information about the MJC’s Alternative Funding for Trial Courts Workgroup and to read the final report.](#)