

WELCOME TO THE
MICHIGAN SUPREME COURT



MICHIGAN ADOPTION DAY
GIVING THANKS FOR FAMILIES

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 23, 2021

Sponsored by
Michigan Supreme Court
Michigan Department of Health and Human Services
SCAO Child Welfare Services
Michigan Adoption Resource Exchange

MICHIGAN ADOPTION DAY

November 23, 2021 – 10:00 a.m.

WELCOME

Honorable Elizabeth T. Clement
Justice, Michigan Supreme Court

Honorable Megan K. Cavanagh
Justice, Michigan Supreme Court

GUEST SPEAKER REMARKS

Elizabeth Hertel, Director
Michigan Department of Health and Human Services

Demetrius Starling, Executive Director
Children’s Services Agency
Michigan Department of Health and Human Services

MAURA D. CORRIGAN FOSTER FAMILY LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

Presenter: Former Chief Justice Maura D. Corrigan
Recipients: Mark and Debbie Berlin, Licensed Foster Parents

DANIEL J. WRIGHT LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

Presenter: Honorable Allie Greenleaf Maldonado
Recipient: Honorable Timothy P. Connors, Washtenaw County Peacemaking Court

CLOSING REMARKS

Justice Clement

VIEWING

Michigan Adoption Resource Exchange
“Heart Gallery” Video

MAURA D. CORRIGAN
FOSTER FAMILY LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD
JACKSON COUNTY LICENSED FOSTER FAMILY
MARK & DEBBIE BERLIN

Mark and Debbie Berlin have been fostering since they were first licensed by Jackson County Community Mental Health (now LifeWays) in 1999. They transferred their license to Jackson County DHHS in 2005, when LifeWays ceased licensing foster homes. They have always chosen to foster children that are medically fragile or have significant mental health and/or developmental needs. Their life's work has been to care for children and adults who are difficult to place because they believe that all people deserve to have a loving, nurturing home. They have adopted all of the children that could not be reunited with their parents, and several of these children are now adults that continue to live with Mark and Debbie.

Mark and Debbie Berlin have accepted placement of children that they knew would likely pass away in their care because their compassion knows no bounds. Any time they had space in their



home, they accepted medically fragile children that faced being placed in institutional care. Mark and Debbie employ professional staff to assist with medical care so that they can focus on the emotional and social support of the children. Mark and Debbie regularly plan trips with their motor home so that everyone that is able to travel can have as normal a life experience as possible. Debbie recently took the "girls" in the home on a Color Run along with some of her staff. Two of the girls are wheelchair-bound, so this was a challenge. But Debbie and her staff "wouldn't have missed it for the world." Debbie shared during her last

annual review visit with me: "If you could have seen the look on their faces, AND MINE!" Debbie laughed while telling this story, and she shed a few tears of joy, as well.

Mark and Debbie Berlin will be closing their foster home license after the last of their foster children is adopted this year. Retiring is bittersweet for them, because they know there will be

more medically fragile children in need of care. They have left a legacy for other foster parents to emulate, and they have mentored many foster parents that are committed to picking up the torch that has been passed to them.

Mark and Debbie Berlin remind me every day what true love and compassion can mean to a child. I feel honored to be their licensing worker, and their friend.

--Jean Lee, Children's Foster Home Licensing Specialist
Jackson County Department of Health and Human Services

DANIEL J. WRIGHT LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD
WASHTENAW COUNTY PEACEMAKING COURT
HON. TIMOTHY P. CONNORS



Judge Tim Connors has been a state court judge since 1991. For 11 of those years he served as a Chief Judge. He has served by appointment as Judge Pro Tem for the Little Traverse Bay Bands of Odawa Indians. Judge Connors is the Presiding Judge of the Washtenaw County Peacemaking Court. He also presides over cases in the Civil and Domestic Divisions of the Washtenaw County Trial Court and handles the Neglect and Abuse docket for the Juvenile Court, a position for which he volunteered so he could serve Washtenaw's children and families.

Judge Connors presides on the bench so he can help make struggling families stronger. Never content with the status quo, after mastering the typical role of judge in Juvenile Court, he sought a better way. His imagination is as big as his heart. When he learned about traditional peacemaking in Native Communities, he saw the positive difference it made in the lives of Native American families. Despite the endless obstacles and the odds against him, he ventured to bring peacemaking to Native and non-Native families engaged with the Washtenaw Juvenile Court. It took the buy-in of many people, most of whom had never heard of peacemaking, to create the program. It took funding, for which he wrote a grant and won. It took a commitment to the huge expenditure of resources at the front of a case, all of which might be for nothing. In the end, he established a wonderful, successful program that has kept struggling families together and forever changed lives. He dared to reimagine child welfare in Washtenaw, and succeeded in creating a better option for struggling families.

Judge Connors has authored several articles regarding ICWA (federal Indian Child Welfare Act) and Peacemaking to increase awareness in Michigan. He is the author of “Our Children are Sacred, Why the Indian Child Welfare Act Matters” (American Bar Association Judges Journal, Spring 2011); and “Crow Dogs vs. Spotted Tail: Case Closed?” (Michigan Bar Journal, July 2010). He co-authored “Tribal Court Peacemaking: A Model for the Michigan State Court System” (Michigan Bar Journal, June 2015).

He has been the recipient of numerous, well-deserved awards. In 2016, Judge Connors was given the Reverend Thomas H. Smith Humanitarian Service Award from the Brown Chapel African Methodist Episcopal Church. In 2015, Judge Connors received the Hilda Gage Judicial Excellence Award from the Michigan Judges Association. The award “honors judges who serve their profession and their communities with integrity, skill, and courage every day.” Judge Connors is a three-time recipient of the Justice Blair Moody Award for Significant Contributions to Judicial Excellence. In 2014, Judge Connors was awarded the Child Welfare Jurist of the Year Award by the Foster Care Review Board.

He also received the Peace Builder Award on behalf of the Washtenaw County Peacemaking Court from the Dispute Resolution Center. This award was given “in recognition of outstanding commitment to the practice of just and humane resolution of social conflict.” Further in 2014, Detroit’s Premier Business Journal recognized Judge Connors as one of the “top circuit court judges” in Southeast Michigan. This recognition was based on integrity, knowledge of the law, efficiency and judicial temperament.

Judge Connors was awarded the Tecumseh Peacekeeping Award for Dedicated Service to Protecting the Rights of American Indians from the Michigan State Bar Indian Law Section. Judge Connors was presented with the Patriot Award for Outstanding Service to the Bench, the Bar, and the Community from the Washtenaw County Bar Association in 2009.

Judge Connors serves on several boards that seek to improve child welfare in Michigan. Judge Connors is the Chair of the SCAO Tribal Court Improvement Program. He is the former Co-Chair and a current member of the Tribal State Federal Judicial Forum. Judge Connors is also a member of the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges Tribal Leadership Forum. For his bravery, humility, and creativity, he deserves the Daniel Wright Award honoring service to Michigan families and children.

--Honorable Allie Greenleaf Maldonado, Chief Judge
Little Traverse Bay Bands of Odawa Indians Tribal Court