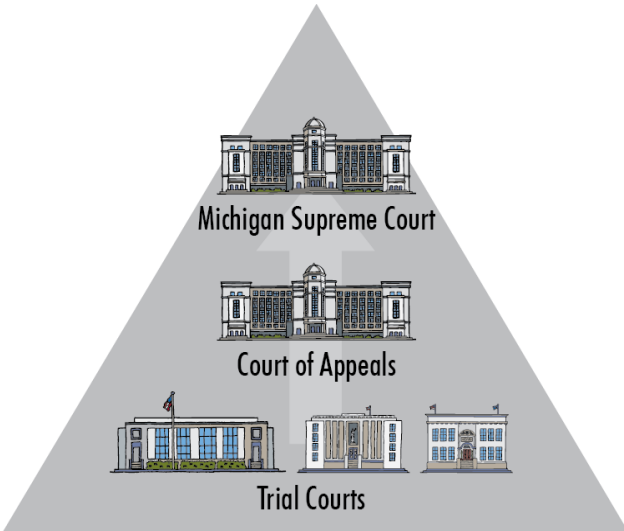


Michigan's Judicial Branch of Government



One Court of Justice

Michigan's constitution calls for "[one court of justice](#)." This allows the judicial branch of government, often called the "court system" to work as a single unit made up of different courts, each performing its own role.

Michigan's court system is set up like a triangle. Cases begin in a trial court. Trial courts are found in every county in Michigan. They have different names, depending on their responsibilities. Most cases end with a solution at the trial court. Very few cases move up to the Court of Appeals, and even fewer go all the way to the Michigan Supreme Court.

[Learn About the Judicial Branch of Government](#) | [Download the Infographic](#)



Hall of Justice – By the Numbers

- 6 stories
- 16-foot-high skylight dome
- 224 windows
- 1,200 interior doors
- 2,930 tons of steel
- 14,000 pieces of limestone
- 16,000 cubic yards of concrete
- 280,000 square feet

Judicial Branch Headquarters

The Hall of Justice, dedicated in 2002, is headquarters for the state's judicial branch of government. Built of limestone and capped by a glass dome, the six-story building stands at the west end of the Capitol Complex in Lansing. Facing the State Capitol, it stands independent yet in relation to the location of the executive and legislative branches of government, symbolic of how Michigan's government works. The [Learning Center](#) is located on the first floor.

A Day in Court Games

Playing [A Day in Court](#) games (for modern desktop browsers including Chromebooks) is a fun way to learn more about state's judicial branch. The Court Overview features more information about courts and legal careers.

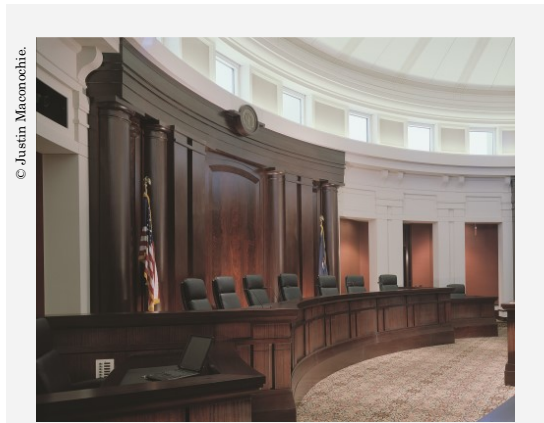


Supreme Court

The [Michigan Supreme Court](#) is the state's highest court. The Court hears cases at its discretion and receives about 2,000 "applications for leave to appeal" per year. Each justice reviews every case to determine whether leave should be granted. Less than 10 percent of cases are granted leave.

Cases may be decided by order, with or without an opinion, a written explanation of the decision. These orders may affirm or reverse the Michigan Court of Appeals, remand (send back) a case to a lower court, or adopt a correct Court of Appeals opinion.

The Court [hears oral arguments](#) in about 100 cases, October–May of each term. Opinions are released throughout the term (August 1–July 31), following oral arguments.



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About the Supreme Court

- Established by the Michigan Constitution of 1835.
- Decisions determined by a majority of the entire Court.
- Seven justices, elected to eight-year terms.

Oral Arguments

In appellate courts like the Michigan Supreme Court, courtroom proceedings related to cases are called "oral arguments." This is the only occasion the attorneys speak directly to the seven justices hearing the case. Oral arguments are like a formal conversation in which the attorneys state what they believe is the proper outcome and the justices ask questions to clarify issues.

The appellant – the party attempting to persuade the Court the Court of Appeals decision is wrong – speaks first and can reserve time for rebuttal. This allows the appellant to speak after the other side – the appellee – has argued. Arguments are strictly timed.

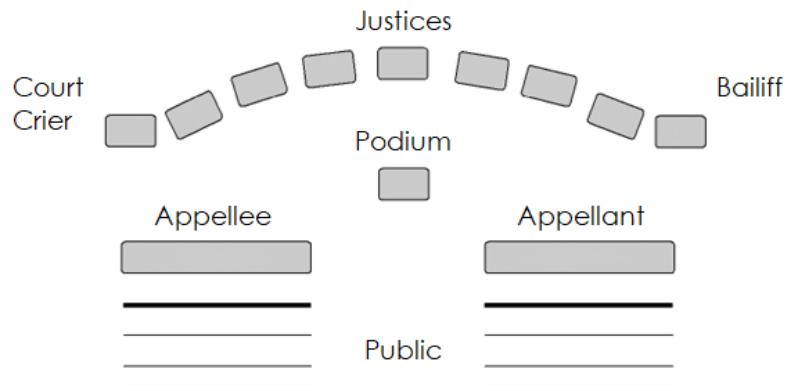
Only the attorneys for the appellant and the appellee sit at the counsel tables. Because the arguments concern matters established by records of the courts below, there is no need for the attorneys to consult with their clients.

In addition, no witnesses are called to testify and no exhibits are offered. Those events have already occurred at the trial court level.

Unlike proceedings in the trial courts, arguments are never interrupted by the opposing attorney. Each side in turn has the undivided attention of the Court.

At the conclusion of the arguments, no decision is stated by the Court. Opinions are only stated in writing and may take until July 31, the Court's yearly deadline for issuing opinions.

Courtroom Layout



Court of Appeals

The [Court of Appeals](#) is the state's intermediate appellate court, serving between the trial courts and the Michigan Supreme Court. The Court of Appeals heard its first cases in January 1965 after being created by the Michigan Constitution of 1963.

The Court of Appeals hears criminal and civil cases from the trial courts, and reviews decisions of administrative tribunals (e.g. tax tribunal). Each year, it receives about 6,000 appeals.

Unlike the Michigan Supreme Court, which selects which applications to hear, most cases at the Court of Appeals are heard "by right." (In other words, the case must be heard.) In fact, the Court of Appeals helps to fulfill the Michigan Constitution's guarantee that "In every criminal prosecution, the accused shall . . . have an appeal as a matter of right." ([Const 1963, Art 1, Sec 20](#))

Judges of the Court of Appeals sit state-wide, although they are elected or appointed from one of four election districts. Hearings are held year-round in courtrooms in Detroit, Lansing, and Grand Rapids. Hearings are also scheduled in Marquette and in a northern Lower Peninsula location in the spring and fall of each year.

Cases are argued before three-judge panels. As with other appellate courts, there are no juries or witnesses. Instead, lawyers for each side argue whether errors occurred at the trial court. Then, the judges issue a written opinion. At least two of the three judges on a panel must agree on the ruling for it to be binding. Decisions of the Court of Appeals may generally be appealed to the Michigan Supreme Court.

Similar to other courts, hearings of the Court of Appeals are open to the public. See the [case call](#) list for scheduling.

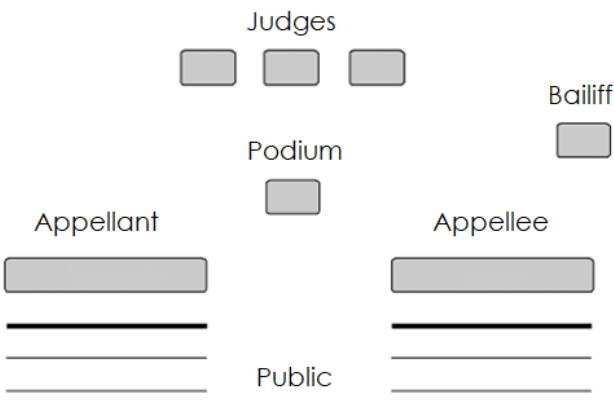


About the Court of Appeals

- Established by the Michigan Constitution of 1963.
- Decisions determined by a majority of a three-judge panel.
- Judges are elected to six-year terms.
- Most cases are heard "by right." The Court of Appeals must hear the case.
- Court of Claims is located in the Court of Appeals.



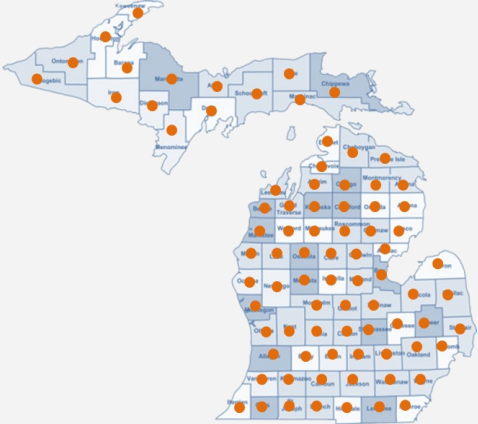
Courtroom Layout



Trial Courts

Trial courts are the types of courts familiar to most people. Almost all cases start here, and the majority of cases are resolved at this level.

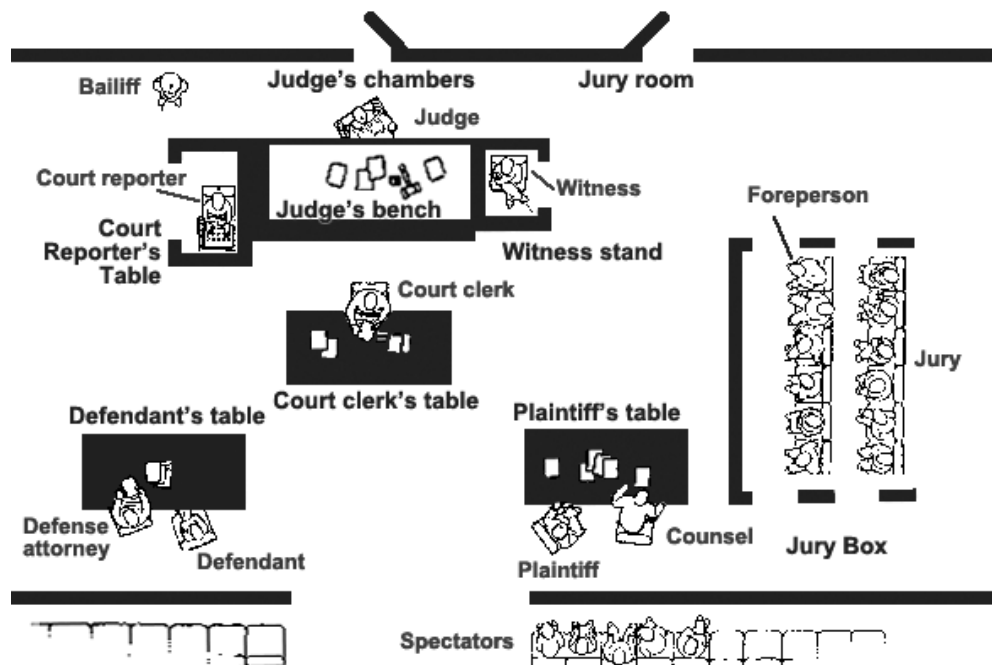
- **Circuit Court** handles civil lawsuits for more than \$25,000 and criminal cases that involve felony charges. Family issues, like divorce and adoption, are also handled here.
- **Probate Court** handles wills, administers estates and trusts, orders treatment for mentally ill persons, and appoints guardians and conservators.
- **District (or Municipal) Court** handles civil suits involving up to \$25,000; adult criminal misdemeanor offenses; small claims; ordinance and charter violations; and land contract forfeitures. Additionally, all criminal proceedings being here. In carrying out this function, it issues arrest and search warrants, sets bail, accepts bonds, conducts arraignments and probable cause conferences, and presides over preliminary examinations.



About Trial Courts

Trial courts are located in every county across the state. The One Court of Justice [Trial Court Directory](#) lists locations, judges, websites, and contact information.

Example Courtroom Layout



Answers for Court Matching (page 5): 1. E; 2. F; 3. C; 4. G; 5. H; 6. D; 7. A; 8. B; 9. I.

Michigan Courts Matching

Directions: Test your knowledge of Michigan courts and their responsibilities by writing the correct letter in the box.

- | | |
|--|--|
| <p><input type="checkbox"/> 1. Find the court that tries lawsuits against the State of Michigan.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 2. Identify the court that reviews decisions from the Circuit Court. This court's decisions can be overruled by the Michigan Supreme Court.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 3. Which court handles criminal cases punishable by less than one year in jail, as well as traffic violations?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 4. Which division of Circuit Court has jurisdiction over family cases?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 5. Where are cases involving parenting time, custody, and child support issues.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 6. Which court is the highest court in the state?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 7. Find the court that tries civil cases in which more than \$25,000 is sought from a party, and also serious criminal cases.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 8. Where are civil cases for specified smaller amounts of money filed?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 9. Find the court that deals with wills, estates, treatment of the mentally ill, and appoints/reviews guardianships.</p> | <p>A. Circuit Court hears cases involving serious criminal offenses with a possible sentence of more than a year imprisonment, civil matters for more than \$25,000, and appeals from lower courts.</p> <p>B. Small Claims Court is the division of District Court which hears civil cases of specified smaller amounts of money.</p> <p>C. District Court hears traffic matters, criminal cases in which the punishment is less than a year in jail, and civil cases in which no more than \$25,000 is sought.</p> <p>D. The Supreme Court is the state's highest court. Decisions of the Michigan Court of Appeals can be appealed here. No Michigan court can overrule a Supreme Court decision.</p> <p>E. The Court of Claims hears lawsuits against the State of Michigan.</p> <p>F. The Court of Appeals reviews decisions by lower Michigan courts. Only the Michigan Supreme Court can overrule decisions from the Court of Appeals.</p> <p>G. The Family Division of Circuit Court hears cases about family matters, such as paternity, adoption, personal protection orders, delinquency, divorce, and more.</p> <p>H. The Friend of the Court Office is part of the Family Division of Circuit Court. It handles parenting time, custody, and child support issues.</p> <p>I. Probate Court handles wills, estates, orders treatment for the mentally ill, and appoints guardians.</p> |
|--|--|



Answers on page 4.