



November 2022

# MICHIGAN SUPREME COURT ADOPTION DAY REPORT



State Court Administrative Office  
Child Welfare Services

# OVERVIEW

## A Very Special Day at the Hall of Justice

Michigan Adoption Day, usually held on the Tuesday before Thanksgiving each year, has become a holiday tradition, highlighting the importance of adoption and the needs of children in foster care. On Adoption Day, courtrooms throughout the state are filled with happiness and celebration. Each year about 30 counties participate, and more than 100 adoptions are finalized.

The Michigan Supreme Court held a special event at the Hall of Justice to celebrate the 20th Michigan Adoption Day. The event featured adoption finalizations from Judge Terence J. Ackert, Kent County Probate Court and Chief Judge Jeffrey C. Nellis, Mason County Courts. Chief Judge Angela Sherigan, Little River Band of Ottawa Indians Tribal Court, presided alongside MSC child welfare co-liaisons Chief Justice Elizabeth T. Clement and Justice Megan K. Cavanagh. The special event also featured remarks from child welfare agency partners and concluded with presentations of the Daniel J. Wright Lifetime Achievement Award and the Maura D. Corrigan Foster Family Lifetime Achievement Award.



## 20th Adoption Day

For Two Decades, the Supreme Court Has Brought Families Together on Adoption Day

GIVING THANKS FOR FAMILIES





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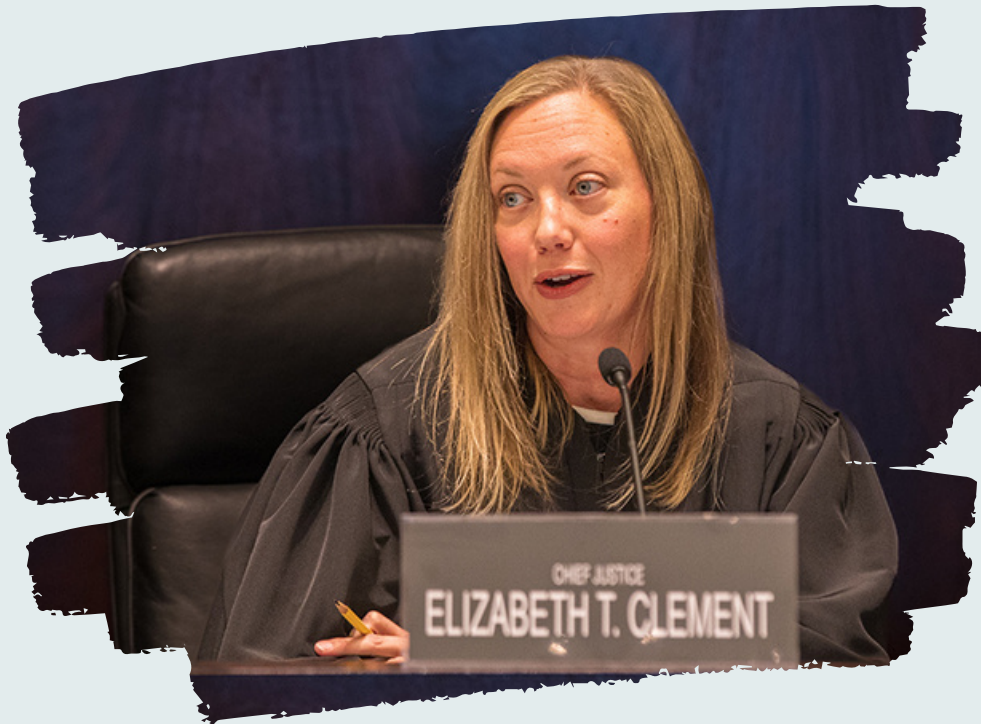
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# MICHIGAN SUPREME COURT



Newly-minted MSC Chief Justice Elizabeth T. Clement welcomed a packed courtroom with gratitude and this heartfelt reminder: "Adoption Day is about creating new families and the security and permanence they give to children. It's about opening homes, but more importantly, opening hearts to children. We commend all foster and adoptive parents, brothers and sisters, the Department of Health and Human Services, and our private agency partners."

Chief Justice Clement serves as the Court's co-liaison to the SCAO Child Welfare Services (CWS) division with Justice Cavanagh. CWS provides assistance to circuit court family divisions on child welfare matters, including child protective proceedings, foster care, adoption, termination of parental rights, permanency outcomes, and data collection and analysis. CWS also administers the Michigan Court Improvement Program and the Foster Care Review Board Program and provides numerous multi-disciplinary trainings each year on a variety of child welfare issues.



# THE IMPORTANCE OF TRIBAL COURTS

During her opening remarks, Justice Megan K. Cavanagh, co-liaison to CWS, and liaison to tribal courts, addressed issues of individuals at the intersection of tribal governance and child welfare. Justice Cavanagh poignantly stated, "As tribal sovereignty is strengthened, we must also support each other equally in delivering justice. Share in solidarity with our court's sacred bond and shared responsibility to all Michigan's youth, including indigenous youth."



Earlier this year, Justice Cavanagh extended a state-wide invitation to tribal courts to celebrate Adoption Day with the MSC. Committed to strengthening the bond between jurisdictions, Justice Cavanagh welcomed Chief Judge Angela Sherigan, of the Little River Band of Ottawa Indians in Manistee, to preside alongside her during each adoption proceeding.

Justice Elizabeth M. Welch also presided on the bench alongside her colleagues at the Hall of Justice. She had one of the most important roles of all, handing out teddy bears (donated by the Michigan Adoption Resource Exchange) to each of the newly-adopted children.



# ADOPTIONS IN THE COURTROOM

The Hall of Justice saw five adoption finalizations between Chief Judge Jeffrey C. Nellis, Mason County Courts and Judge Terence J. Ackert, Kent County Probate Court. Adding levity to an emotional set of proceedings, Judge Ackert gifted Chief Justice Clement and Justice Cavanagh, their own teddy bears in appreciation for their work on child welfare he believed often went unnoticed. Being selfless advocates, they quickly relinquished their gifts to a fussy toddler ready for lunch.





# Adoptions Across the State

Chief Justice Clement also recognized courts across the state that publicly finalized adoptions and the colleagues and judges that attended. Justice David F. Viviano attended Berrien County adoption proceedings. Justice Richard H. Bernstein attended Wayne County adoption day proceedings immediately after joining Michigan Court of Appeals Judge Kristina Garrett in Oakland County. Court of Appeals Judge Sima Patel attended the Ottawa County celebration. Twenty-one adoptions were finalized between all of them.



Pictured left: Michigan Court of Appeals Judge Kristina Robinson Garrett, Justice Richard H. Bernstein, Oakland County Circuit Court Judge Lorie N. Savin.



Oakland County Circuit Court Judge Kameshia D. Gant and Justice Bernstein



Wayne County Circuit Court Chief Judge Timothy M. Kenny

For more information about the many courts celebrating Adoption Day across Michigan, visit the [MSC Adoption Day webpage](#).

# CHILD WELFARE AGENCY PARTNERS

As part of the MSC Adoption Day tradition, we welcomed key partners from agencies such as the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS)--Elizabeth Hertel, Director, MDHHS; and Demetrius Starling, Executive Director, MDHHS Children's Services Agency--as well as Janet Reynolds Snyder, Executive Director, Michigan Federation for Children and Families. "Our department plays a role in both foster care and a portion of adoptions in this state, and adoption has played a special role in my own family," said Hertel. "My husband adopted my son. I remember how much that day meant, and still means, to all of us."

Reynolds Snyder, followed Hertel's remarks with how her organization

aids Michigan's children. "The Federation is a statewide nonprofit association whose more than 60 member agencies, all private nonprofit community-based organizations, work through contract with the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services to provide supportive services to children and their families throughout all 83 counties in Michigan."

Starling, concluded, "In Michigan, an estimated 2,100 children in foster care have the goal of adoption and are legally ready to be adopted. In Fiscal Year 2022, our department and partners helped find forever families for approximately 1,600 children through adoption."



**Elizabeth Hertel**

Director of the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services



**Demetrius Starling**

Executive Director of the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services



**Janet Reynolds Snyder**

Executive Director of the Michigan Federation for Children and Families



# MICHIGAN ADOPTION DAY

The ceremony concluded with presentations of the Maura D. Corrigan Foster Family Lifetime Achievement Award and the Daniel J. Wright Lifetime Achievement Award.



## AWARD CEREMONY



# MAURA D. CORRIGAN FOSTER FAMILY LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

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Justice Maura D. Corrigan

Former Chief Justice, Maura Corrigan, returned to present her eponymous Award. Sponsored by the Michigan Supreme Court, the Award was established in honor of finding forever homes for children in foster care. While at MDHHS, Justice Corrigan was responsible for serving some of Michigan's most vulnerable citizens and has been widely credited with updating and improving Michigan's child welfare system.

The Award was presented to Stephen and Rhonda Wurtz for their outstanding dedication to fostering over 330 children. Former Chief Justice Corrigan invited Antrim County Probate Court Judge Norman R. Hayes to share why he nominated the Wurtz Family, "When the Wurtz family goes on vacation, they do not outsource the care of their children. Every child living at their residence goes with them. Vacations have included trips to Orlando, Washington D.C., San Francisco, Thailand, London, Paris, Rome, and Switzerland."



Judge Norman R. Hayes



# STEPHEN & RHONDA WURTZ

Licensed foster parents from Kalkaska



Pictured right: Judge Hayes, Justice Corrigan, Rhonda and Stephen Wurtz.



Pictured left: Stephen, Rhonda and their daughter.

# DANIEL J. WRIGHT

## LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

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University of Michigan Law School Professor Vivek Sankaran took the podium to present the Daniel J. Wright Lifetime Achievement Award for Exemplary Service to Michigan's Families and Children to Richard Smart, former Deputy Court Administrator of Wayne County Circuit Court – Juvenile Division, in recognition of his 24 years of dedicated service to youth in metropolitan Detroit. Professor Sankaran, who also nominated Smart, stated, “I wanted to nominate Richard for this award a few years back. But when I reached out to him to seek his permission, he quickly told me not to do so because he had too much important work to do on behalf of kids and their families and didn’t want any distractions.”



# RICHARD SMART

Smart accepted the Award in memory of his father, whom his family had laid to rest the day before: "Dad, I know that you are smiling down upon us today, and, knowing you, you are bragging to the other angels in heaven. But you should know that this would not have been possible without you and your example. It is because of you and the example that you set throughout your life that made me want to serve others. Thank you, Dad, for being such a wonderful man."



Richard Smart, pictured with his wife, mother, and two daughters.



# Acknowledgments



- Michigan Adoption Resource Exchange
- Laura Baldwin, Adoption & Guardianship Program Analyst, MDHHS
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- Richard Browne, Photographer
- MSC Public Information Office
- SCAO Child Welfare Services



On behalf of the MSC, Chief Justice Clement and Justice Cavanagh presented framed resolutions to all participating judges.



# THANK YOU



# Adoption Day Fact Sheet

Michigan Department of Health and Human Services

## Michigan Adoption Facts 2022

The goal of Michigan's Adoption Services Program is to place children with forever families through adoption following termination of parental rights. The Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) contracts with 47 child placing agencies (CPAs) to provide adoption services to children and their families before and after the adoption.

As of November 2022, approximately 10,300 children are in foster care in Michigan, including about 250 children who are in need a forever family through adoption. More than 1,600 children were adopted from Michigan's child welfare system in fiscal year 2022.

Michigan's Adoption Assistance Program provides financial support to families who adopt children from foster care through the Michigan public child welfare system. Each year, that amount totals about \$200 million. Based on each child's situation or needs, one or more adoption assistance benefits may be available to support the adoption. Approximately 95 percent of children who are available for adoption qualify for Michigan's adoption assistance program. There are approximately 24,000 children who were adopted who are receiving ongoing adoption assistance. Additionally, Michigan's Adoption Medical Subsidy Program assists in the reimbursement of certain physical or behavioral health services for children adopted through the Michigan public child welfare system who have an identified physical, mental or emotional condition which existed, or the cause of which existed, before the adoption petition was filed.

Michigan is committed to responding to the needs of children and families who adopt them and understands the value of post-adoption services to families. Post-adoption services are available statewide through eight Post Adoption Resource Centers (PARCs) and offer: case management, including short-term and emergency in-home intervention; coordination of community services; information dissemination; education; training; advocacy; and family recreational activities and support.

For more information about adopting in Michigan, visit [MDHHS Child Services Agency website](#).





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Michigan Adoption Day

# 20th Adoption Day



FOR MORE INFORMATION ON ADOPTION DAY  
PLEASE VISIT THE [MSC MICHIGAN ADOPTION DAY WEBPAGE](#)

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Ravynne Gilmore  
MSC Court Relations Program Coordinator