

Customer service at 25th District Court gets favorable ruling from residents

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In a statewide effort to measure the performance of Michigan's trial courts, the public was given the chance to render a verdict on how well they were served by the 25th District Court and the rulings were quite favorable.

Late last year, a survey was given to court users asking the Lincoln Park, Ecorse and River Rouge residents served by the 25th District Court to rate timeliness, fairness, politeness of staff and other factors that shaped their experience. The results, released in March, showed that 95% of court users felt they were treated with courtesy and respect by court staff and 90% said they felt they were treated with courtesy and respect from the judge or magistrate in the case - both just above the statewide average for other trial courts.

The survey was mandated by the Michigan Supreme Court to determine what courts are doing well and where improvement needs to be made. Questions were modeled after the National Center for State Courts' survey template and the survey was made available to everyone leaving the courthouse during a five-day period.

Courts were instructed to "obtain a representative sample of persons served by the court" and the anonymous surveys were mailed to State Court Administrative Office where they were scanned, verified and analyzed. More than 26,000 people's responses were recorded in the state.

According to 25th District Court Administrator Teri Michael, the survey was first conducted in 2013, but on a smaller scale, capturing fewer results in the couple days it was administered. The 2014 survey was answered by nearly three times as many people over the course of an entire week, she explained.

"We want all people who step into our court to be satisfied with how they were treated," Michael said. "Successful businesses constantly ask their customers how they can do better and we plan to keep on asking and keep on getting better."

Michael said the results of the survey may help determine court staff sizes as they prepare the next budget - a critical issue in serving the public efficiently.

"Our biggest complaint is filing time. There's not enough staff to process it (quickly)," she said, citing the consolidation of River Rouge and Ecorse's court in 2012 and the physical consolidation of all three courts in 2013. "When we consolidated, I only had three clerical staff and two more cities to handle."

The 25th District Court has 11 full time staff, including the two judges, one probation officer, seven clerical workers and Michael. There are 16 part time staff members, including six court officers.

Michael said the funding is determined based on the caseload for each city, which is 56% Lincoln Park, 19%

Ecorse and 26% River Rouge. Last year the court saw 32,376 cases, down from 2013's 34,766 cases, she added.

Judge Greg Clifton said he was proud that the public reported high customer satisfaction in the court, especially since the court experience often has negative implications.

"These are difficult circumstances for a lot of people and we really emphasize that people should be treated with courtesy and respect," Clifton said. "It's gratifying to know 95% of people think that is the case."

The survey also showed that 79% of respondents said their case was handled fair; 10% remained neutral and 11% disagreed.

Officials say the survey will be administered annually at the 25th District Court to continue measuring the court's performance and improve its service to the public. For more information on how Michigan's trial courts ranked last year, visit www.courts.mi.gov.

25th District Court Customer Satisfaction Survey Results