



MICHIGAN COURTS NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Judicial Leaders Gather to Mark Historic Achievement

LANSING, MI, June 18, 2018 – The leaders of the Michigan Judges Association (MJA), the Michigan District Judges Association (MDJA), the Michigan Probate Judges Association (MPJA), and the Judicial Section Council (JSC) of the State Bar of Michigan convened recently at the Michigan Hall of Justice along with Michigan Supreme Court Chief Justice Stephen J. Markman to acknowledge that, for the first time in state history, all four judicial association heads are women.

“This milestone is of considerable interest to all members of the legal profession in Michigan,” said Chief Justice Markman. “The rise of these four outstanding judges to their respective roles of leadership makes this a remarkably noteworthy occasion.”

These four associations serve and assist different segments of the judicial community in Michigan: MJA was founded in 1927 and serves circuit and appellate court judges; MDJA was founded in 1969 and serves district court judges; MPJA was founded in 1879 and serves probate court judges; and the JSC serves all current and retired judges who are State Bar members. The assistance of these groups often includes commenting on changes to administrative and court rules, working with the Legislature on reforms, professional support, and more.

MJA President Judge Tracey A. Yokich, Macomb County Circuit Court: “It is an extraordinary time for women who choose to serve in public office. Very early in my career, I had the opportunity to serve in the Michigan House of Representatives. As a result, it became eminently clear that women don’t bring a better perspective to the problem solving table—just a different one.

“Good government happens when its public servants are a reflection of the community it serves. It opens the door for a diversity of background, experiences, and interests. It has only been relatively recently that so many talented and capable women have had the opportunity to serve their communities as jurists. We are finally starting to walk in greater numbers through the door that was opened by some extraordinary women before us: Chief Justice Mary S. Coleman; Chief Justice Dorothy Comstock Riley; Justice Patricia Boyle; and Judge Hilda Gage, to name a few.

“Having the confidence of those I serve is probably the greatest reward I could ask for. Just as I have followed in others’ footsteps, I hope to inspire those who will follow in my footsteps to serve their communities with grace, compassion, and humility.”

MDJA President Chief Judge Shelia R. Johnson, 46th District Court in Southfield: “It is both an honor and a privilege to be the President of the Michigan District Judges Association and to serve along with three other remarkable women jurists as leaders of the major judicial associations in this state: Dorene Allen, President of Michigan Probate Judges Association; Annette Berry, Chairperson of the State Bar Judicial Council; and Tracey Yokich, President of the Michigan Judges Association.

“Historically, the practice of law was for the most part a career that was dominated by males, and, therefore, the judiciary was similarly dominated. Although in 1872, Sarah Killgore Wertman became the first woman to graduate from the University of Michigan Law School and the first woman to practice law in Michigan, women did not become a part of the judiciary in Michigan until Ella Eggleston was appointed as the first female probate judge in 1919. It was not until almost 50 years later in 1967, with the appointment of Judge Geraldine Bledsoe Ford, did an African-American female have the opportunity to serve as a jurist in Michigan.

“It is therefore significant that the four major judicial associations, at this pivotal point in time, have elected four women, one whom is of color, as their leaders. These judicial associations are uniquely positioned to positively impact the administration of justice in the courts and for the citizens of our state. It is truly a historical moment that women, who had previously been barred from the bench in Michigan, now in tandem are leading the charge to craft and mold the course of justice for the future. I am honored to be a part of this extraordinary moment.”

MPJA President Chief Judge Dorene S. Allen, Midland County Probate Court: “This event for our Michigan judiciary is reflective of a trend in our society in general. And it’s a good thing. Women bring their own strength, talents, perspective, and experiences to the bench. Access has not been there historically, and certainly was not there when I started 37 years ago. I often had to explain that I was the attorney and not the secretary. Women’s inclusion has been steadily increasing during my career.

“And yet, when my husband and I are at events and ‘Judge Allen’ is introduced, people of all ages still assume that my husband is the judge. While it is kind of fun to watch their faces when they realize I am the judge, it’s still an indication of the assumption that leadership positions are still expected to be held by men.

“These changes of inclusion of women in the law are past due. I am very fortunate to have experienced only acceptance by our wonderful probate judges. I am humbled to celebrate this historical moment with Tracey Yokich, President of Michigan Judges Association; Shelia Johnson, President of the Michigan District Judges Association; and Annette Berry, Chairperson of the Judicial Section of the State of Michigan. They are all outstanding judges and leaders of their respective associations. This is a true moment in time to remember.”

JSC Chairperson Judge Annette J. Berry, Wayne County Circuit Court: “It is a tremendous honor and privilege to serve as Chair of the Judicial Section Council for the State Bar of Michigan and alongside Judges Tracey Yokich, Dorene Allen, and Shelia Johnson. Together, we share our achievements by opening doors for other women judges, by collectively setting leadership examples with fairness, openness, and respect for all members of the Michigan Judiciary.

“As Associate Justice of the United States Supreme Court Sandra Day O’Connor once said, ‘We don’t accomplish anything in this world alone.’ This is a momentous occasion and one of which I am truly grateful to share with such esteemed Jurists.”

To download a high resolution photo of the judges, click [here](#).

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