



Levels of Michigan's Judicial Branch of Government

Brief Reading
Maps
Matching Cards
Glossary

Social Studies
Grade Level Content Expectation
3 – C3.0.4



Michigan Supreme Court Learning Center
925 W. Ottawa St.
P.O. Box 30205
Lansing, MI 48909

<http://courts.mi.gov/education/learning-center/> • 517-373-7171

Michigan's Judicial Branch of Government

There are three levels to Michigan's judicial branch of government. Each level has a different responsibility.

1 **Trial courts** decide cases to resolve disputes. Most cases start and finish here. There is one judge, witnesses, and a jury.



A trial court courtroom.

2 If one of the sides in the case thinks the trial court made mistakes, that side may ask the **Michigan Court of Appeals** to hear the case. Three judges listen to the lawyers and then decide. This is called an "appeal."



© Justin Macconochie

A Court of Appeals courtroom.

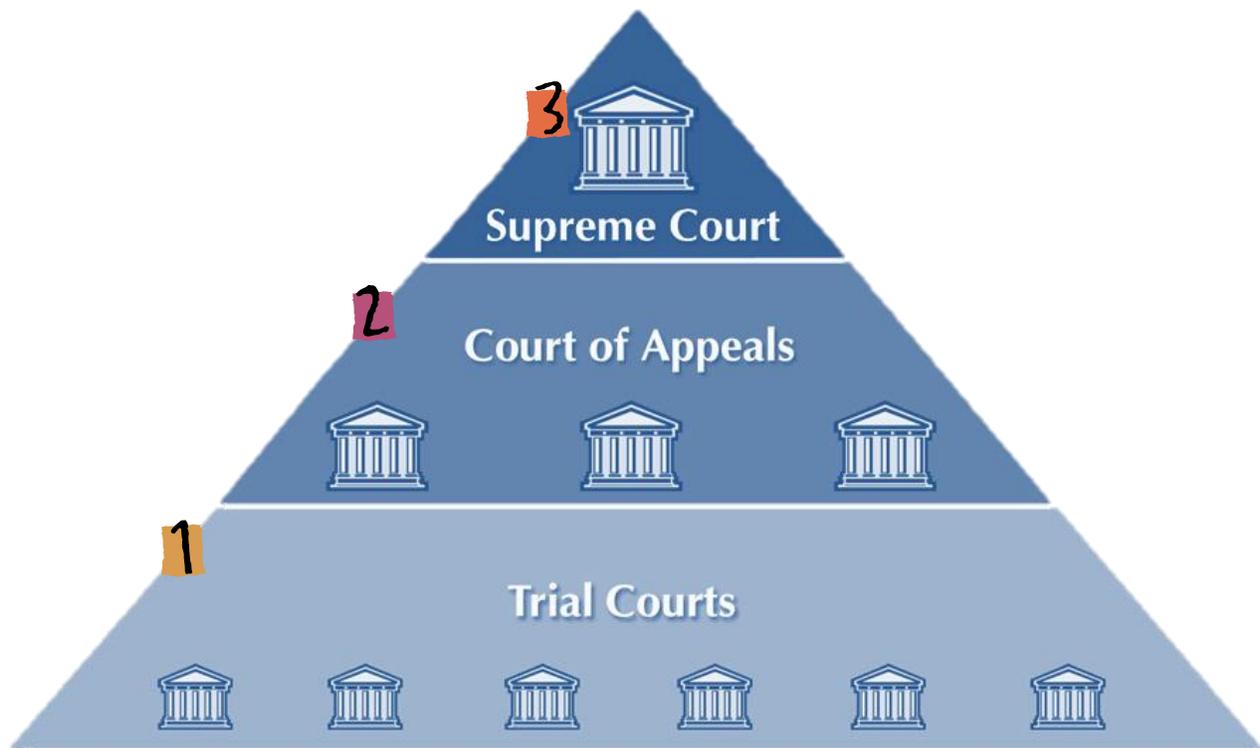
3 If one of the sides thinks the answer still is not fair according to the law, they may ask the **Michigan Supreme Court** to make a final decision. Seven justices listen to the lawyers and then decide the case.



© Justin Macconochie

The Michigan Supreme Court courtroom.

How the Judicial Branch Is Organized



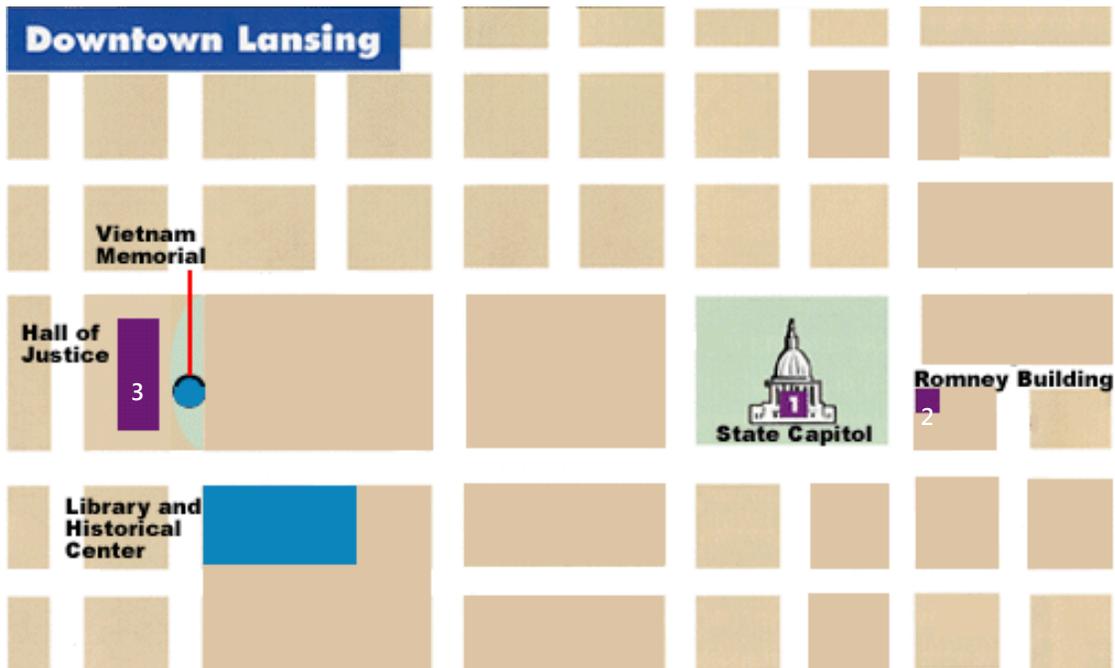
A triangle can be used to show how Michigan's judicial branch of government is organized.

- There are many trial courts, fewer Court of Appeals locations, and only one Supreme Court.
- There are many court cases at the trial courts. Only some of those cases go to the Court of Appeals. Even fewer are at the Supreme Court.
- For a court case to go to the Supreme Court, it must start at a trial court and be appealed to the Court of Appeals first.

Where Courts Are Located



Trial courts are in many places in the state, including your county. The Court of Appeals has courtrooms in Lansing, Grand Rapids, and Detroit. It sometimes meets in northern Michigan.



The Michigan Supreme Court meets at the Hall of Justice in downtown Lansing.

Michigan's Judicial Branch of Government – Draw a picture to represent each type of court on the card on the left. Then, cut out the cards and practice matching each court to its responsibility.

Decide cases.



Trial Courts

Was it fair?



Court of Appeals

Final review.



Supreme Court

Glossary – Michigan’s Judicial Branch of Government

Appeal – To ask a court to look at a decision again. The court then decides if it was fair according to the law.

Case – A problem or question that is brought to a court because two sides do not agree. They ask the court to resolve their dispute.

Court of Appeals – The second highest court in Michigan. It listens to appeals of trial court decisions. About 6,000 cases go to this level each year.

Courthouse – A court building is sometimes called a courthouse. There are courthouses in every county in Michigan.

Courtroom – A room in a courthouse where courts have trials and other hearings.

Dispute – A disagreement; when people do not agree.

Hearing – A time when information about a case is heard in court.

Interpret – To decide what a law means, if it is fair, and how it applies in a particular case. For example, a judge may interpret a law about telephones to apply to cell phones, too.

Judge – The person in a court case that represents the judicial branch of government. He or she make decisions that interpret and apply laws. In Michigan, judges must be lawyers first. They are elected by the people.

Judicial – Having to do with judges and their decisions.

Judicial Branch of Government – The branch of government that interprets laws. It is led by the Supreme Court.

Jury – Citizens of a community called to make a decision in a case. For example, if someone is accused of a crime, jurors decide if the person is “guilty” or “not guilty.” Serving on a jury is a civic responsibility.

Justice – (1) The title used for a judge of a Supreme Court. (2) A Core Democratic Value having to do with fairness.

Laws – Rules to help keep people safe and know right from wrong. For example, drivers stop at a stop sign because that is the law.

Lawyer – An expert in the law that went to school and passed a test called the bar exam. Lawyers help people solve legal problems. They are sometimes called “attorneys.”

Supreme Court – The highest court. It has the final word on the law. Less than 100 cases each year are accepted and decided by the Supreme Court each year.

Trial – A court hearing that ends in a decision about a case.

Trial Court – The type of court where all cases start and most cases finish. In Michigan, trial courts hear about 3,000,000 cases each year. District court, probate court, and circuit court are trial courts in Michigan.

Witness – Someone who has first-hand information about a case who testifies (talks about it) during a trial. For example, a police officer might talk about what she saw when she stopped at a car accident.