

# Michigan Supreme Court 2014 Accomplishments

## IMPLEMENTING TECHNOLOGY TO WORK SMARTER

### **Videoconferencing Saves Time and Resources**

Videoconferencing equipment has now been installed in every courtroom in 77 counties. With more than 350 courtrooms now equipped to allow for video arraignments from jail or testimony from prison, jurisdictions at all levels are saving time and resources. For example, the Michigan Department of Corrections saved more than \$2.6 million in FY 2014 because they were able to conduct 4,058 “video” transports. Similarly, Michigan State Police lab technicians were able to focus more time on analyzing evidence and less time traveling to testify.

### **Judicial Data Warehouse Provides Access to Critical Information**

Virtually every court in Michigan now provides data to supplement the more than 45 million records in the Judicial Data Warehouse. Over the past year, this database of court records was accessed more than 400,000 times by courts, law enforcement and state agencies.

### **Online Ticket Payment and Resolution Options Continue to Grow**

More than 85 percent of Michigan residents now have access to online ticket payment programs at 118 courts statewide. In addition, an online ticket resolution program was piloted successfully in Washtenaw County in which defendants were able to resolve their cases without having to take time off work to go to court. The Online Court Project, funded by the University of Michigan and developed by Court Innovations, Inc., allows citizens who’ve received minor civil infractions or traffic tickets to seek reduced charges or other solutions to their problems online. Already expanded to Bay County, the program will reach more courts statewide in 2015.

### **Michigan Online Legal Help Top Three in the Nation**

Since its launch in August, 2012, more than 630,000 visitors have accessed MichiganLegalHelp.org and since October 2014, there have been more than 14,000 visitors per week. The site helps Michigan residents address their legal problems without having to use an attorney. LawHelp Interactive reports that Michigan is in the top three states for the number of documents assembled through their online service.

### **One Court of Justice Website Rated in Top Ten Worldwide**

The Michigan Supreme Court website was rated by the Forum on the Advancement of Court Technology as one of the Top 10 court websites in the world. In 2014, the number of visitors is expected to reach nearly one million with more than 10 million page views.

### **Tax Garnishment Pilot Program Successfully Launched**

Launched the fall of 2014, the pilot GarnIT program successfully processed nearly 7,000 writs for garnishment of state income tax refunds. Bulk filers were thrilled with results and the 36<sup>th</sup> District Court saved 175 hours of staff time since the automated process takes only seconds.

With more than 635,000 writs filed statewide, the potential savings for court staff could reach more than 15,000 hours. In the 36<sup>th</sup> District Court alone, the total savings in staff time could amount to eight clerks working full time for two months.

## **ADOPTING COURT PERFORMANCE METRICS AND BEST PRACTICES**

### **Court Performance Measures**

Every court in Michigan has adopted performance measures and has an online dashboard with information about clearance and case age rates and public satisfaction. For example, statewide, trial courts cleared 96 percent of cases with Michigan Supreme Court time guidelines. In a recent survey of 21,000 court users, 94 percent said they were treated with courtesy and respect, 85 percent said they were able to get their business done in a reasonable amount of time, and 81 percent thought their case was handled fairly.

### **Adopting Best Practices: Problem-Solving Courts**

More than 174 problem-solving courts are accessible to 97 percent of Michigan's population. In addition to drug, sobriety and mental health courts, Michigan's 20 veterans treatment courts make our state a number one nationwide in helping veterans access needed services to address their problems and avoid costly incarceration. Participants in mental health and sobriety courts are three times less likely to reoffend while participants in drug courts are two times less likely to reoffend after two years.

### **Training of Judges and Court Staff**

The purpose of MSC-sponsored training and education to trial courts is to encourage the adoption of best practices and support continuous improvement of service to the public. For example, in 2014, the Michigan Judicial Institute (MSC's training branch) held 33 educational programs, attended by more than 500 judges and more than 850 court staff. There were also more than 1,500 participants in web-based training programs. Topics range from judicial ethics to jury management. In addition, the Child Welfare Services division held 15 training programs attended by more than 1600 participants, all focused on improving service delivery and strengthening the protection of children.

## **RE-ENGINEERING COURTS TO INCREASE EFFICIENCY**

### **Rightsizing the Judiciary**

Rightsizing the judiciary to balance workloads will result in the reduction of 40 judicial seats and has already saved taxpayers \$4.4 million over the past three years. No other state has reduced the number of judges by more than a handful. Starting in 2015, the annual savings will be \$3.5

million and when the reductions are completely implemented, annual savings will be \$6.4 million.

### **Concurrent Jurisdiction Plans**

Three out of four Michigan counties plan to streamline their court systems through the adoption of concurrent jurisdiction plans. These plans allow courts to share resources, balance judicial workloads, and cooperate to increase efficiency and improve service to the public.

### **Multi-court Chief Judges**

Up from only nine in 2010, the Michigan Supreme Court has appointed 46 multi-court chief judges. The Court has also provided additional support to chief judges with new training programs and an online Chief Judges Resource Center. Multi-court chiefs are charged with cutting bureaucracy, eliminating duplication, and improving service to the public.

### **36<sup>th</sup> District Court Restructuring**

With the leadership of Special Judicial Administrator, Judge Michael Talbot, the 36<sup>th</sup> District Court in Detroit was restructured to improve customer service and restore fiscal accountability. By opening more courtrooms, permanently assigning judges to specific dockets, grouping courtrooms together by type, adding arraignments, expanding magistrate duties and installing video monitors listing litigants and their assigned courtrooms, customer lines were dramatically reduced. The budget was balanced by cutting costs, the collections process was reformed, and a successful ticket amnesty program raised more than \$2 million in additional revenue while enabling 58,000 people to resolve delinquent tickets. Expert analysts from the National Center for State Courts found the turnaround “remarkable.”

### **Court of Claims**

The end of 2014 marks the completion of the first year of operation of the Court of Claims in its new home at the Michigan Court of Appeals. The Court of Claims is a court of statewide, limited jurisdiction that hears and determines all civil actions filed against the State of Michigan and its agencies. These cases include highway defect, medical malpractice, contracts, constitutional claims, prisoner litigation, tax-related suits, and other claims.