

BAR BRIEFS

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Changing Language in Legal Practice

By Sherrie L. Detzler, 98th President of the Macomb County Bar Association

Language shapes how clients experience the justice system, how attorneys build trust, and how the public understands legal processes. It's not just about choosing different words—it's about rethinking how communication affects dignity, confidence, and engagement for the people we serve.

Why Language Matters

Legal terminology carries weight, and certain labels can unintentionally reinforce stigma or dehumanizing assumptions. Terms like *inmate*, *offender*, or *illegal immigrant* have broad social consequences that extend far beyond a case file. Research shows that identity-reducing language increases negative outcomes, while person-first language (such as *justice-impacted person*, *person with a conviction*, or *undocumented individual*) promotes dignity, reduces stigma, and supports more constructive engagement.

Across all practice areas—criminal, civil, family, juvenile, immigration, administrative, and beyond—attorneys can help clients feel valued and respected by adopting language practices that center humanity rather than status.

Strategies for Change

- **Use Strength-Based Framing** – Highlight resilience, growth, and capacity across all legal contexts.
- **Reframe Stigmatizing Terms** – Practice person-first language in client communications, filings, and internal discussions.
- **Evaluate and Train Teams** – Review and refine language used within office culture, courtroom interactions, and public materials.
- **Include Impacted Voices** – Invite individuals with lived experience to help shape language practices that reflect real needs.
- **Address Language Barriers** – Use qualified interpreters, bilingual staff, and plain-language explanations to ensure full understanding.

Cultural and Communication Considerations

Clients interpret legal terms and processes through cultural, linguistic, and personal lenses. Attorneys should be mindful of communication styles, cultural norms, religious practices, and non-verbal cues. Attunement to these dynamics strengthens relationships across all practice areas and helps prevent misunderstandings.

Practical Steps for All Attorneys

- **In client meetings:** Use clear, respectful, non-judgmental language.
- **In filings:** Avoid unnecessarily harsh or dehumanizing descriptors.
- **In community engagement:** Practice inclusive communication in public-facing materials.
- **Internally:** Normalize respectful language within your team and organizational culture.

Courtroom Communication: A Meaningful Opportunity for Change

Courtroom introductions are a simple but powerful place to start. Please avoid saying, “I am the court-appointed attorney for...” or similar phrasing that highlights status or appointment in ways that may inadvertently signal hierarchy or diminish client autonomy. Instead, identify yourself by name and whom you represent.

Examples of appropriate introductions include:

- “Good morning, Your Honor. Jane Smith, appearing on behalf of Mr. Jones.”
- “Jane Smith for the plaintiff, Your Honor.”
- “Your Honor, Jane Smith, counsel for the minor.”
- “Jane Smith, representing the guardian ad litem in this matter.”
- “Jane Smith, on behalf of the State, Your Honor.”

This small shift supports clarity, professionalism, and consistency across all practice areas.

The Bottom Line

Changing language in legal practice is both a professional and ethical responsibility. Thoughtful communication reduces stigma, strengthens trust, and supports a more humane system. Just as importantly, these shifts can profoundly benefit *attorneys themselves*. When lawyers use language that aligns with dignity, respect, and human-centered practice, it often reduces moral stress, fosters more positive interactions, and supports a healthier sense of purpose in their work. In other words, communicating with empathy doesn't just help clients—it helps attorneys stay grounded, aligned with their values, and more resilient in a demanding profession.

These changes—whether in filings, conversations, or courtroom statements—contribute to better outcomes, healthier professional relationships, and a more equitable justice system.



Specialty Treatment Courts in Macomb Success Begins by Starting the Conversation Early

*By Kumar Palepu, Chief of District and Specialty Treatment
Court Units, Macomb County Prosecutor's Office*



I have been involved with specialty treatment courts for most of my legal career, beginning in 2011 as a public defender assigned to Judge Timothy Kenny's Mental Health Court in Wayne County. After joining the Macomb County Prosecutor's Office in 2014, I was assigned to Judge Mark Switalski's Veterans Treatment Court. As a veteran myself, it was a natural fit. Those experiences taught me early that accountability and treatment are not competing ideas. Done correctly, each makes the other more effective.

When Peter J. Lucido was elected Macomb County Prosecutor, our very first conversation returned to treatment courts. He wanted them to become a greater priority for the office. *"Some people need a second chance,"* he told me.

Since becoming Chief of the District Court Division, I have worked to bring treatment to the forefront of our plea-negotiation process. Substance abuse and mental illness are often at the root of repeated contact with the criminal justice system. Jail can interrupt that cycle, but it does not necessarily change it. For eligible defendants, treatment combined with supervision and accountability can address the underlying problem while allowing someone to continue working and supporting a family. That can improve public safety while reducing the likelihood that the person returns to the criminal justice system.

There is also a practical cost. Incarceration in the Macomb County Jail costs approximately \$110 per day, while treatment courts make extensive use of grant funding for supervision and services. Macomb County has developed a significant network of specialty treatment courts, with 14 programs across our District and Circuit Courts and approximately 415 spots available for participants.

Our goal at the Prosecutor's Office is to identify appropriate candidates, facilitate their entry into these programs, and give them an incentive to succeed. We regularly structure sentencing agreements that reward successful completion of treatment court, including agreements that may reduce or dismiss criminal charges upon graduation.

For defense attorneys, my advice is simple: **start the conversation early**. If you believe your client has a substance abuse or mental health issue, talk to the assistant prosecutor handling your case. In District Court, getting started can be as easy as walking down the hall to probation and arranging an assessment before a plea. In Circuit Court, an application can be submitted after the plea.

And do not assume your client is out of options simply because the court where the case is pending does not have the appropriate

program. Defendants routinely participate in treatment courts in other jurisdictions. While residency and eligibility requirements apply, we can often find an appropriate placement, sometimes even in a neighboring county.

Treatment court teams bring together judges, probation officers, defense attorneys, prosecutors, and treatment professionals. Although we approach cases from different perspectives, the goal is shared: get appropriate defendants the help they need, reduce recidivism, and get people back to their families and back to work instead of back into the criminal justice system.

If you want to explore the possibility of treatment courts for your client, let your assistant prosecutor know as soon as possible or please contact me directly. Kumar.Palepu@Macombgov.org
586-469-7274.

PATHWAYS TO THE JUDICIARY



Join the Commission on Fairness and Public Trust in the Judiciary and the Oakland County Bar Association for a panel discussion featuring:

- Judge Sima G. Patel, Michigan Court of Appeals
- Chief Judge Jeffery S. Matis, 6th Circuit Court, Oakland County
- Judge Lorie N. Savin, 6th Circuit Court, Oakland County
- Judge Shelia R. Johnson, 46th District Court, Southfield

Hear directly from the judges about the pathways they took to the bench, the obstacles they overcame along the way, and their advice for others considering a career in the judiciary.

Mingle with the judges and fellow guests afterward at a social hour hosted by the Michigan State Bar Foundation (cash bar).

WHEN: Thursday, October 29, 5:00-7:30 p.m.
WHERE: [Imagine Theater, Royal Oak](#)
CONTACT: tarsine@courts.mi.gov
REGISTER: [CLICK HERE](#)

(Space is limited and registration will close Monday, October 26.)



What Does a Lawyer Mean to a Child in Court?

*By Jason Smith, Executive Director,
Michigan Center for Youth Justice*

The right lawyer equipped with proper training and experience can change the lives of the youth they represent.

On July 24, Michigan officially signed into law a bill that would allow the Michigan Indigent Defense Commission (MIDC) to oversee juvenile defense services. That is something they already do for adults, but juvenile defense has not had the same oversight or support for defense attorneys representing youth.

The bill, initially part of the bipartisan Justice for Kids and Communities legislative package that passed in 2023, did not make it into law with the other nineteen bills at the time. Now, almost three years later, legislation that would protect a youth's right to counsel crossed the finish line, thanks to the efforts of many advocates, attorneys, policymakers, and members of the community.

For justice-impacted children, this law could mean a world of difference.

The direction a child's case goes will have far-reaching ripple effects throughout their life. The right lawyer equipped with proper training and experience can be the deciding factor for whether a child who has made a mistake is sent to detention or diverted to an intervention program. In Michigan, data shows that youth who participated in diversion programs were significantly less likely to reoffend than their peers who were not diverted.

Currently, Michigan youth face inconsistency in the appointment of their counsel. There are both varying degrees of investment in youth defense services and delivery systems for youth to access counsel. Oftentimes, costs tied with office-related expenses, training, or travel to see a client placed in a facility are not covered. An assessment of our system found that

courts did not consistently appoint counsel before an initial hearing to ensure adequate time and preparation. There was also a pattern identified that youth were notified they had the right to counsel, but were given limited information on accessing those services in a time-effective manner.

**An assessment of our
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time and preparation.**

That timing is critical. The consistent appointment of counsel early in juvenile proceedings is paramount for long-term case outcomes. Within the juvenile justice system, children face a threat to their liberty across various stages of the proceedings. Court adjudications decide whether a youth is placed in a detention or residential facility, which can significantly impact their graduation rates, mental health, and future employment opportunities.

The Juvenile Justice Reform Task Force found over 60 percent of youth placed in detention committed a status or misdemeanor offense as their most serious offense. Status offenses are acts that are illegal only for minors, such as underage drinking or curfew violations.

A well-trained public defender can also identify and flag competency concerns that may go unnoticed, advocate for appropriate interventions for youth with disabilities, and help ensure the youth being charged understands the legal process they are undergoing.

This legislation will go into effect in October 2027. It is not an immediate fix, but MIDC will have the authority to establish defense standards for youth and help ensure that Michigan's juvenile justice system is fairer, cost-effective, and constitutional. With steps like these, we can work towards a more just reality for future generations.

For more information, please visit: <https://www.miyouthjustice.org/>

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An Introduction to the Macomb County Bar Foundation

By Chris Metry, President of the Macomb County Bar Foundation

Hello, I'd like to introduce myself to those of you who do not know me. I am Chris Metry, the current president of the Macomb County Bar Foundation. As many of you know, I come from a family of attorneys and I practice mostly criminal law. As much as I love criminal law, that is not what I am writing about today; I am here to talk about the Macomb County Bar Foundation and what we do as an organization.

The Macomb County Bar Foundation is the charitable affiliate of the Macomb County Bar Association and is a reflection of the Macomb County legal community's 100 plus years of public service and civic involvement. The Foundation is a non-profit tax exempt 501(c)3 organization established by the Macomb County Bar Association to identify, initiate and support law related education projects and programs for the betterment of the community. We help people of all ages to better understand the impact that the United States Constitution, the Bill of Rights and the State and Federal system of laws have on their daily lives.

How do we do this? By doing a number of community events throughout the year. For example, every September we do Constitution Day, where members of our group and volunteers go into the schools and read the Constitution to students as a way to make it relevant to them. This is a way to help explain the importance of the body of laws by which our nation was founded. We have all taken 9th grade American Government; Constitution Day is a way to bring history into the student's lives today in 2026 and hopefully make an impression on them about the law and its foundations.

Coming up on November 19, 2026 we will be working with Family Youth Interventions to provide meals to our community members in need. We are giving back to our

community by helping others who need a helping hand. We are here to support our community because without the support of the local community we all suffer. This event is called **Feed the Need**, it is truly an amazing event! This recent partnership with *Family Youth Interventions* has made it where we can reach more people who need more assistance.

The Holiday Raffle, where our organization raises money for various organizations, including scholarships for law school that we distribute later in the year. The Raffle is one of our organization's biggest events to raise money that allows us to give back to our community. Without this Raffle we would not be able to do what we do. As many of you know the raffle has daily winners and has been a big success with our group for years.

In addition to that, we put on a regional mock trial competition, at The Macomb County Circuit Court. This event is a fun opportunity to help and hopefully influence high school students who have an interest in the law, to go into the law! We have volunteers who act in all sorts of capacities including judges, co-counselors (for when things get a bit tricky), court officers and timekeepers for this event. This is an educational and shockingly fun opportunity to help the next generation of lawyers understand the hard work that goes into trial work. They get a behind the scenes experience that, we hope, will give them a step up during their law studies.

We have several events approaching quickly that are designed to educate and help people as well as encourage our youth to truly consider going into the law, which we know is the best field out there. And as president I plan to continue running this organization in a positive and enlightening way that supports our community as well as educates and encourages those around us.

**Constitution Day is a way to
bring history into the
student's lives today in 2026
and hopefully make an
impression on them.**

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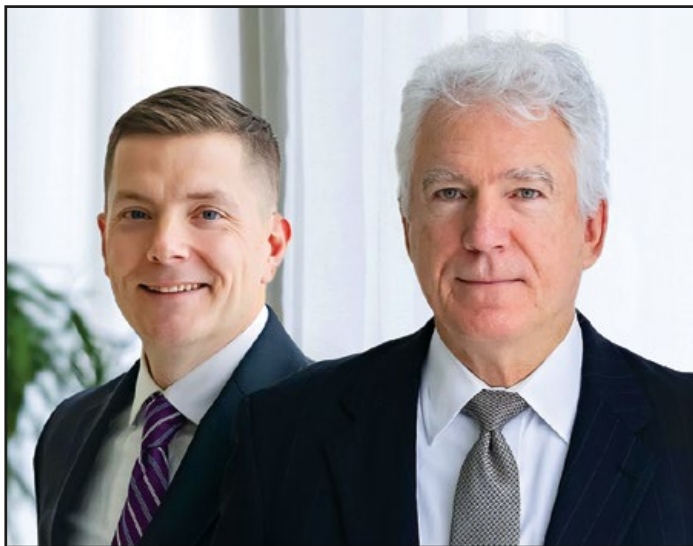


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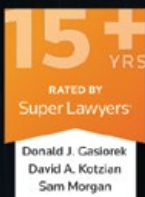
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Macomb County Bar Foundation Celebrates Constitution Day



The Macomb County Bar Foundation celebrated Constitution Day by visiting second-grade students at Ebeling Elementary School in Macomb Township. As part of the September 17 observance, Foundation volunteers read to students and discussed the Constitution, the role of laws in our communities, and the importance of civic education. The visit made learning about the Constitution both fun and engaging, giving students an opportunity to ask questions and learn more about our system of government. The Macomb County Bar Foundation is proud to support educational programs that connect the legal community with students throughout Macomb County.



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ChatGPT, Claude, or Gemini: Which AI Assistant Is Right for Your Task?

By Cheyenne Harden, CEO of Cyber Protect, LLC



If you run a business, you have probably heard this question: "Which AI tool should we be using?" The truth is, no single tool is the best. ChatGPT, Claude, and Gemini each have their own strengths and weaknesses. Understanding these differences can help you avoid wasted time, money, and frustration.

ChatGPT: The Planner and the Artist

ChatGPT, made by OpenAI, is the tool most people recognize. It is great for planning. You can ask it to create a marketing calendar, organize a project timeline, or break down a big goal into smaller steps, and it will quickly give you a clear plan. Its image generation is also strong, making it useful for social media graphics, presentation visuals, and quick mockups.

Where it falls short: ChatGPT can sound polished but generic, and it sometimes states incorrect information with total confidence. Its writing often needs a human editor to add personality and to verify facts before anything goes to a client.

Claude: The Natural Writer and the Coder

Claude, from Anthropic, tends to sound the most like a real person. Its writing feels conversational and thoughtful rather than robotic, which matters when you are drafting client emails, proposals, or website copy. It is also an outstanding coding assistant, useful for automating repetitive tasks, building simple tools, or troubleshooting scripts.

Where it falls short: Claude has historically offered fewer built-in "extras", such as native image generation. Depending on your plan, usage limits can also interrupt long working sessions.

Gemini: The Knowledge Engine

Gemini, from Google, shines at general knowledge. It is a strong choice for quick research, explaining unfamiliar topics, and answering broad questions. Its tight integration with Google Workspace (Gmail, Docs, Drive, and Calendar) is a real advantage for businesses already living in Google's ecosystem.

Where it falls short: Gemini's writing can feel flatter and more formulaic than its rivals, and its usefulness drops if your team does not use Google products.

Our Take

The best approach is not to pick one. It is to match the tool to the task:

- **Use ChatGPT** when you need a plan, a project outline, or a quick image.
- **Use Claude** when the writing needs to sound human, or when you need help with code and automation.
- **Use Gemini** when you need fast answers, or you work primarily inside Google Workspace.

These tools also change very quickly. A weakness today may be fixed in a few months, so revisit your choices regularly rather than committing for years.

A Word on Security

Whatever tool you choose, carefully consider the information you share. Do not enter client records, financial details, passwords, or other confidential business data until you have confirmed how the provider stores and uses it. Business-tier plans typically provide stronger privacy protections than free accounts. Establish a clear AI-use policy for your team before issues arise.

AI can be a powerful advantage for your business, but only when it is used deliberately and safely. If you would like help building an AI-use policy or making sure your team's tools are secure, Cyber Protect LLC is here to help.

Criminal Law Think Tank

Take It Up: Interlocutory Appeals

PRESENTED BY KATHY SWEDLOW
MANAGER, CRIMINAL DEFENSE RESOURCE CENTER
AUTHOR OF THE SADO INTERLOCUTORY APPEALS BOOK

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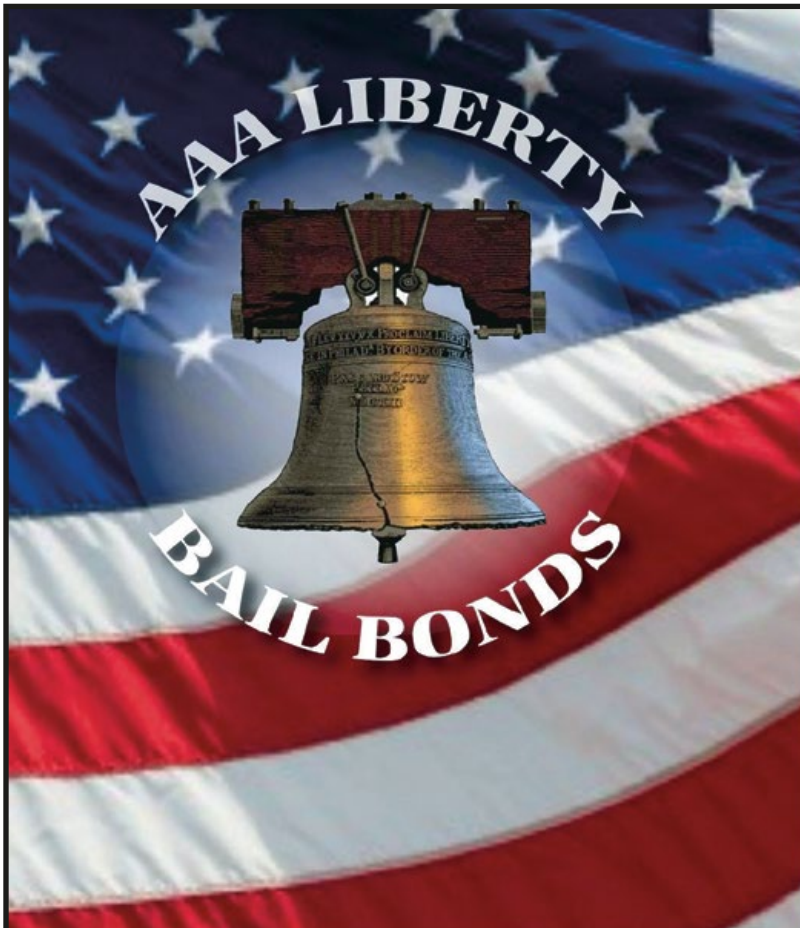
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Refer Your Injury Cases To Macomb County's Robert Lantzy

Attorney Robert Lantzy brings deep Macomb County connections to Buckfire Law. His perspective has been shaped by years in the local community, including by the influence of his father, Michigan high school Hall-of-Fame Football Coach, Bob Lantzy.

That familiarity with the community translates to real insight in serious, high-stakes cases.

Robert is trusted by attorneys and retired judges who refer him complex injury and wrongful death matters.



Coach Bob Lantzy, and Robert J. Lantzy, Attorney

ROBERT'S RESULTS IN SERIOUS CASES

\$9,000,000 Autistic child abuse settlement
\$6,000,000 Boating accident death
\$4,250,000 Carbon monoxide poisoning
\$4,000,000 Construction accident settlement
\$4,000,000 Police chase accident settlement
\$3,850,000 Truck accident settlement
\$3,000,000 Sexual assault settlement
\$2,000,000 Pedestrian death settlement
\$1,990,000 Auto accident settlement
\$1,400,000 Premises liability settlement
\$1,750,000 Macomb County premises liability jury verdict (2025)
\$1,000,000 Motorcycle accident settlement
\$ 465,000 Oakland County auto crash jury verdict (2025)

BUCKFIRE LAW HONORS REFERRAL FEES

We use sophisticated intake software to attribute sources of our referrals, and referral fees are promptly paid in accordance with MRPC 1.5(e). We guarantee it in writing.

HOW TO REFER US YOUR CASE

Referring us your case is fast and easy. You can:

1. Call us at **(586) 800-4004**
2. Go to **<https://buckfirelaw.com/attorney-referral>**
3. Scan the QR code with your cell phone camera

Attorney Lawrence J. Buckfire is responsible for this ad: (586) 800-4004

Refer Us These Injury Cases

- Auto Accidents
- Truck Accidents
- Motorcycle Accidents
- No-Fault Insurance
- Dog Attacks
- Medical Malpractice
- Cerebral Palsy/Birth Injury
- Nursing Home Neglect
- Wrongful Death
- Police Misconduct
- Sexual Assault
- Defective Premises
- Poisonings
- Other Personal Injuries



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