

# BAR BRIEFS

Official Publication of the Macomb Bar Association

March 2025



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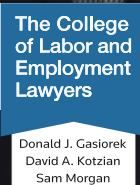


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# MCBA Awards

*By Dana Freers, President of the Macomb Bar Association*

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We know that people who help others don't do it for the accolades. Still, oftentimes we see someone do something that we feel is worthy of recognition and gratitude. The Macomb County Bar Association wants to honor our colleagues who go above and beyond and shine their light on our profession. Each year at our annual meeting we recognize outstanding lawyers in several categories. I urge you to consider nominating someone in each of the following categories. A nomination link is available on our website.

**Extraordinary Service Award** – The Extraordinary Service Award is awarded to the most involved member during the year. The Board only chooses a winner in this category when a member stands out as deserving of this honor.

**Distinguished Public Service Award** – The Distinguished Public Service Award winner in this category is when a member stands out to us as deserving of this honor.

**Pro Bono Awards** – The Macomb Bar Pro Bono Service Award recognizes and honors attorneys that assist with the unmet legal needs of low-income or senior residents of Macomb County on a pro bono basis.

**Kimberly M. Cahill Civility Award** – The Kimberly M. Cahill Civility Award is given to the member who has brought respect to himself or herself and the legal profession through both dialogue and conduct by cultivating considerate, professional conduct with opposing counsel, especially in the presence of clients; encouraging clients to adopt meritorious positions and avoiding inflammatory and retaliatory tactics and behavior; welcoming and encouraging attorneys of all races, ethnicity and genders; assisting and mentoring new and inexperienced attorneys; avoiding disparaging comment and

criticism of the bench and bar, and commending the profession's members when appropriate.

**Special Service Award** – The Special Service Award is given to those individuals who initiated and/or completed special projects for the MCBA during the year.



*Steven Freers was awarded the 2023 Kimberly M. Cahill Civility Award*

**Medal of Achievement and Courage** – The Medal of Achievement and Courage is awarded only when the Board of Directors decides a candidate's achievement in a challenging situation is an undeniably significant example of the noble practice of law. In selecting recipients, the Board considers Macomb County lawyers who have achieved great success for their clients and who have demonstrated courage in the face of adversity to represent the rights of the opposed, disadvantaged or destitute. Such acts represent the spirit of the Constitution of the United States of America and honor the highest principles of the practice of law. Because of this stringent standard,

the award is the highest expression of esteem the Board can confer on an individual.

**Gideon Award** – The Gideon Award recognizes an individual for their representation of the indigent either through one significant case or for an exemplary career dedicated to the protections guaranteed by the 6th Amendment of the U.S. Constitution. This award is meant to honor an individual whose zealous advocacy has protected the rights of the indigent and has demonstrated their dedication to the protection of all, regardless of status.

Who do you know that fits these categories? Nominate someone and tell us!



# The Honorable Eric D. Shepherd

By Deborah F. O'Brien, Ihrie O'Brien Albright Perakis

Ihrie O'Brien  
ATTORNEYS & COUNSELORS

From day one in our law firm, Eric Shepherd was an unusual bird in that legal eagle nest populated by young lawyers on our staff. Though intensely focused and always determined to get everything legally right, he never sported an anxious, ready to pounce, bird of prey approach to the matters before him. Rather, from the start he navigated the legal setting with disarming ease and geniality. He was a good listener and conversationalist with a ready laugh, finding humor, almost delight, in his own foibles and in life's quirky trivialities and wonderful imperfections. He was charmingly self-effacing and fun to be around, even under the stress of constant deadlines and too much work. This meant there was always traffic at his door, beyond the fact that it was across from the office kitchen. Every colleague liked to hang-out with him; every client, from mayors to misdemeanants, loved him, and every secretary wanted to mother him.

So, when he announced he was running for judge, Eric engendered an unprecedented team of wildly supportive boosters who secretly hoped he'd never leave. When he won and finally had to depart, he had to wade through a flood of tears, and he left enough warm fuzzies to over-stuff a super-sized couch.

This is the young jurist who has ascended to his beloved dad's position on the bench in 41-A District Court. He says his most poignant memory to date, which he will cherish forever, has been being given the oath of office by his father. Without

question, a better role model than the Honorable Douglas Shepherd does not exist, which Eric readily acknowledges, nor could there have been a better family experience to have molded Eric for the job.

The caboose of three children, Eric has a natural inclination to seek the whole story, to hear the smallest voice in the fray, a trait honed by the fallout of his birth order, which will serve him well in court. Then, on his own home front, he is blessed to have his wife, Brianna, a field general in her own right in everything she tackles, who makes sure any rocks in his head have re-settled in proper formation. Lastly, there is four year old Sawyer, who is the best advance team one could

order-up. Wherever she goes, she is the most memorable personality in the room and makes her parents look like parenting geniuses.

Now that Judge Eric Shepherd has been dispensing justice for about 2 months, I caught up with him to get answers to a few questions about his new employment and lifestyle. Read on.

## 1. Has anything or any experience in the courtroom surprised you since taking the bench?

"I was surprised when sentencing my first defendant that she volunteered that she'd been in front of my dad many times, not exactly an admission a criminal defendant should make. But, afterward, she told me that my dad had 'made a good judge' out of me. Otherwise, I have noticed that people think



*Eric Douglas Shepherd was sworn in to the 41-A District Court on November 5, 2024*

my jokes are funnier now and my wife thinks I'm more handsome! What has really surprised me, however, is how isolating this job can be. I miss the camaraderie and kibbitzing in a hallway full of lawyers. So, to you all lawyers out there, pop-ins are welcome!"

**2. Have you started to develop a list of lawyerly pet peeves or an "attorneys-please-do-this" list yet? If so, tell us.**

"So far, at the top of the list for me is that lawyers need to let me know when they're running late!"

**3. Besides your judgeship, what is the most meaningful thing you have derived from the campaign and election process?**

"I was forced to face head-on that discomfort of putting yourself out there in the public and being subject to scrutiny. I would say the most valuable lessons for me came from being willing to jump into uncomfortable settings, respond to pointed challenges, and fight for what I believed and wanted in the process. And now I feel honored to give back to my community."

**4. What do you miss, if anything, about the practice of law in the trenches with the rest of us?**

"I miss the socializing and getting the opportunity to advocate, to take a position for a client. And I really miss my family at Ihrle O'Brien."

**5. Are you still relaxing in the evening by watching your alleged favorite tv show, Hoarders, or have you branched-out to something more scholarly?**

"I've recently finished The Office, which is a step up for sure!"

**6. Now that you are able to wear that loose-fitting, hide-every-sin, little black dress every day, has your daily wardrobe become more casual, and are you finding it more difficult to say no to more donuts and cookies?**

"My wardrobe still consists of suits, but my colleagues on the bench have all asked me when I'm going to give that up! And I've never said no to sweets."



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# Commissioners Corner

By Sherrie L. Detzler, SBM Commissioner – District D

## Ensuring Effective Legal Representation: Upcoming Implementation of Michigan Indigent Defense Standards 6 and 7

As legal professionals dedicated to upholding justice and fairness, it is essential to stay informed about significant changes in our field. As you know, the Michigan Indigent Defense Commission (MIDC) has approved a series of standards designed to ensure indigent defendants receive competent and effective legal representation. The implementation of these standards marks a pivotal step in our collective commitment to equitable defense.

### Overview of Standards

The Michigan Indigent Defense Standards encompass various aspects of legal representation, from attorney qualifications to workload limitations. Below, we highlight two key standards that were approved in October 2024 and will soon take effect:

#### 1. Workload Limitations (Standard 6)

- This standard establishes limitations on the number of cases an attorney can handle within a specified period. The goal is to ensure that attorneys have sufficient time and resources to dedicate to each client’s case, thereby providing thorough and effective representation. By maintaining manageable caseloads, attorneys can uphold the quality of legal defense and prevent burnout.

#### 2. Attorney Qualification and Review (Standard 7)

- Under this standard, attorneys accepting indigent defense assignments must meet specific criteria related to education, training, and experience. The MIDC has established these qualifications to ensure that only competent and knowledgeable attorneys represent indigent clients. Additionally, the standard mandates regular reviews of attorneys to maintain high standards of representation and address any performance concerns.

### Upcoming Implementation

Soon all trial court funding units in Michigan are required to implement their plans for compliance with the approved standards. This marks the start of a statewide initiative to enhance the quality of indigent defense and ensure that all eligible clients receive the representation they deserve.

Attorneys should be aware of these changes and take necessary steps to align their practices with the new standards.

### Call to Action

As members of our esteemed bar association, we must stay proactive in adapting to these new requirements. Attorneys handling indigent defense cases should review the standards in detail, assess their current caseloads, and seek any additional training or resources needed to meet the qualifications.

We encourage all attorneys to support their peers in this transition and collaborate with the Macomb County Office of Public Defender and the MIDC to ensure smooth and effective implementation. Together, we can strengthen the foundation of our justice system and provide equitable defense for all.



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# Lessons I Learned from an Angry Judge

*By Judge James M. Maceroni, 16th Judicial Circuit Court*

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This past summer I attended a conference with several other circuit court judges from across the state. On the last day there was a question-and-answer session with a member of SCAO, as well as one of our Supreme Court Justices. One of the participants took the opportunity to lament the “fact” that appointed attorneys appearing in front of him were making “way more money” than himself. He was visibly seething. At first, his palpable contempt came as a surprise to me, but only briefly. No one taking criminal appointments is making more money than a Circuit Court Judge, nor a district court judge for that matter. Thankfully, appointed attorneys are now being compensated for their time, but no assigned counsel is doing appointments 40 hours per week. Even if they were, the angry judge (likely having come from the public sector, prosecutor’s office, perhaps? And thus, has no idea what it takes to run a law practice) was not accounting for the cost these same attorneys pay for their rent, utilities, support (if any), health care, supplies, etc. Now, there are, no doubt, attorneys who appear in front of this judge daily who make way more money than he does. However, they are not the ones doing criminal appointments, nor would he ever think to complain about their fees.

The Angry Judge’s contempt and his singling out of appointed attorneys is an extreme example of the bias that continues to exist against attorneys doing publicly funded criminal defense work. It was reflected in the pushback from courts throughout the state in losing the ability to control their appointments, in other words, to hand-pick the attorneys they wanted to represent defendants. As if they could pick the prosecutor, or medical malpractice defense attorney, or divorce counsel. Even now I sometimes hear colleagues express surprise, and in a muted sentiment consistent with that of the Angry Judge, a little irritation, that those doing appointed work are actually being paid for their efforts. What I hear most often is that this supposed gravy train won’t last. Incidentally, it was these same people who proclaimed that the state would never fund indigent defense work, and that Macomb County would never have a public defender office. One former chief judge stated that the creation of such an office would occur only over his dead body. Yet, across the street from where I sit, is the Macomb County Office of Public Defender, and that judge is still very much alive.

The funding and the proliferation of PD offices throughout the State did not arise out of thin air. There were several efforts over the years to increase the nearly negative payment for court-appointed counsel and to create public defender offices. Primarily, however, the state only took steps to address the issue when they were sued. Essentially the lawsuit alleged that the State of Michigan was failing to provide constitutionally effective assistance of counsel to indigent defendants. The lawsuit alleged the State was abdicating its duty by leaving its responsibility up to each county, and each funding unit within that county. That lawsuit was ultimately voluntarily dismissed after the state agreed to address the issue. The process we have witnessed unfold over the last several years, the gradual implementation of the 8 standards promulgated by the Indigent Defense Commission, is a direct result of that litigation. Standard 8, the one that requires that individuals do appointed criminal work, the one that so enraged the judge at the conference, is critical to the overall effort for obvious reasons.

In the recent past, payment for court-appointed work was so miniscule that it bordered on pro bono work. In the more distant past, it was pro bono work. When crime rates were much lower, a portion of the bar would volunteer when a judge asked them to take a court-appointed case. Think Judge John Taylor appointing Atticus Finch to represent Tom Robinson. However, even though Macomb County has much in common with Maycomb County, the relatively rare occurrence of crime is not one of them, and attorneys with the professional ethics of Atticus Finch are exceedingly rare. In other words, we have much more crime, and way less Atticus. As close to the morals of a Finch as an attorney might have, it is difficult to adequately represent indigent clients and pay your rent, let alone raise your kids and pay your mortgage. What inevitably happened: the attorneys taking appointments put their time and resources into their retained work, and the court-appointed work suffered. Meaning, that indigent defendants were not getting constitutionally guaranteed effective assistance of counsel.

No system is perfect. However the implementation of the creation of the Public Defense Commission and implementation of the standards has been an improvement. Requiring attorneys who accept criminal appointments to

maintain yearly CLE credits for example, requires them to maintain competency in changes in the law, it also weeds out attorneys who took a couple of appointments a month rushing from waived prelim to plea only to supplement their retained work. Fairly compensating the attorneys who are left, who do care about the work, allows them to spend the time on their appointed files their clients deserve, and a fair system of justice demands.

More consequential to the improvement of indigent defense in Macomb has been the implementation of The Office of Public Defender. The benefits of such an office in a county our size are numerous. There is now an office of dedicated attorneys who do nothing but criminal defense work. Their time does not have to be divided between their indigent client, and the retained divorce client calling and texting incessantly because their spouse is threatening to take them to court and ask for more parenting time. The CLEs they take are criminal CLEs. Like their opposing counsel, they work in an office atmosphere with other attorneys doing the same work and have the benefit of discussing their cases with them. They have support staff. They have a steady income so they are not worried about where the next client is coming from so they can afford their health insurance. They have access to resources.

Two recent hires at the PD Office illustrate this last point. The first was a full-time investigator to allow counsel to fully investigate their files. The prosecutor's office has always had the benefit of the investigating agency, and their own in-house investigators to help them prepare a file. If defense counsel needed an investigator they had to file a motion before the judge hearing the case and request funds to hire one. The problem with this is self-evident from an access and fairness point of view but add to that the differing responses counsel would receive from the judge to whom they made the request. I can't say for sure but I would wager the Angry Judge's response to such a request would be negative, perhaps even angry. Unfortunately, and predictably these requests were rarely made.


The second hire was that of a social worker. The benefit of such a hire is perhaps less obvious but no less important. At the risk of sounding kumbaya, we are all in this together. We are all engaged in the criminal justice system. The prosecution, the defense, the judges, police, probation, treatment providers, and the public. We all have an interest in reducing crime, a fundamental goal of the criminal justice system. At least at the stage that we become involved, we attempt to meet that goal by making sure the offender does not re-offend. Rarely, thankfully, is that goal accomplished by lifetime incarceration or even a lengthy prison sentence. Which is to say, the vast majority of the defendants we come in contact with will serve relatively short jail or prison sentences, if any. The more that can be done to address the plethora of issues many criminal defendants bring to the table helps to reduce recidivism to the benefit of us all. A report from a social worker is helpful to the attorney representing the client, as well as the court when fashioning an appropriate sentence. We must recognize, and educate, as to

the importance of this concept. As most of our cases are not the violent crimes that make the headlines. The more nuanced argument of dealing with these issues by way of rehabilitation as opposed to increased incarceration is often lost to the mindless and often shouted mantra of being "tough on crime."

The establishment of the Office of Public Defender helps promote this message by being an equal partner in these efforts, by having a seat at the table. This was rarely the case in the past, all other partners in the criminal justice system were represented, but more often than not the defense was not considered a partner.

Over the past few years there has been a noticeable improvement in indigent defense. The full-time attorneys from the PD office are doing excellent work. They have been bringing a professionalism that seems to be changing the culture of indigent defense work throughout the County. Hopefully, the public will recognize this.

All of us who choose to play a role in the criminal justice system have difficult albeit often rewarding jobs. We work in an adversarial system. Each side, defense, prosecutor, the court, police, all players have their respective responsibilities and must push to fulfill those responsibilities. Most do an admirable job not injecting superfluous conflict into a system based on conflict. However, when necessary, never hesitate to make the Angry Judge angry.



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# Prosecutor Lucido Names Robert Leonetti as Chief Assistant Prosecutor

*By Dawn Fraylick, Communications Director,  
Macomb County Prosecutor's Office*

Recently, Macomb County Prosecutor Peter J. Lucido named Robert A. Leonetti as his Chief Assistant Prosecutor, the second-highest position in the prosecutor's office, continuing his mission to reform and modernize the county prosecutor's office. As a seasoned attorney and former Macomb County Commissioner, Leonetti brings a strong record of legal expertise, public service, and a commitment to accountability and transparency. Under Michigan law, the chief assistant performs the duties of the office in case of the absence, disability, or sickness of the prosecuting attorney.

Leonetti, a lifelong Macomb County resident, and East Detroit High School graduate, brings a wealth of legal expertise and public service to the role. Leonetti spent more than 28 years in private practice, specializing in criminal defense, family law, real estate, and



*Chief Assistant Prosecutor Robert A. Leonetti*

bankruptcy. He holds a Juris Doctorate from Wayne State University, where he also earned a BA in Political Science, Summa Cum Laude with Honors. Lucido described Leonetti's appointment as pivotal to the ongoing transformation of the prosecutor's office, which Lucido has led since 2021. "Robert Leonetti has a deep understanding of Macomb County, as a public servant and as a legal professional," Lucido said. Leonetti echoed Lucido's sentiment, praising the prosecutor's office for its progress in recent years. "Under Prosecutor Lucido's leadership, the office has gone from turbulent times to a national award-winning model of good governance," Leonetti said.

Leonetti has witnessed the Prosecutor's Office improvements firsthand. "As a defense attorney, I can say Prosecutor Lucido's improvements, and the resulting benefits to the public, are self-evident," he said. "From hiring talented prosecutors to implementing cutting-edge technology and

modernizing the office to reforms that increase access to justice, the office improved service for everyone involved in the justice process."

In addition to his legal credentials, Leonetti served four years on the Macomb County Board of Commissioners, representing Harrison Township and St. Clair Shores. He has experience with the county budget process. As Vice Chair of the commission's finance committee, he focused on budget transparency, protecting Lake St. Clair, and expanding senior and veterans' services.

He also testified in the Michigan Attorney General's criminal corruption case in which the former Macomb County prosecutor was ultimately convicted, where Leonetti emphasized the importance of adhering to county commission resolutions compelling financial accountability and transparency.

"I've always believed that good governance starts with being a good steward of taxpayer dollars," Leonetti added. "As a commissioner, I worked to ensure the county was transparent and our budget was spent wisely. As Chief Assistant Prosecutor, I'll continue that focus by helping Prosecutor Lucido lead an office that serves justice efficiently, economically, and ethically."

During his time on the Macomb County Commission, Leonetti helped to establish the County's Freedom of Information Act policy. Leonetti also supported legal action by Commissioners against the Macomb County Executive, which contested contracts and change orders that were part of a \$9 million overrun approved by the county executive office for renovations after a 2013 County Building fire, according to a 2018 Detroit Free Press article. This included a contract change order signed by the County Executive's office for over \$300,000, for which no approval was requested or obtained from the County Board, according to the board's court filing. The commission's attorney at the time said the board was asking the court to declare that contracts over \$35,000 have to come before it before they're approved and effective. In 2012, the County Executive was forced by the Michigan Court of Appeals to follow the county contracting ordinance. The County Executive's resistance in that case cost taxpayers \$320,000 in legal fees, according to the Detroit Free Press. Now in 2025, the County Executive is overseeing contracts worth hundreds of millions of dollars for a new county jail and

is in court again, this time racking up legal fees to oppose the County Commission's efforts to get real-time access to county financial data. That case remains pending before the Michigan Supreme Court.

The Macomb County Prosecutor's Office, which Lucido has called the county's largest law firm, employs 91 full-time and part-time assistant prosecutors and a total staff of 140, operating on a budget exceeding \$15 million. Leonetti's appointment signals a continuation of the reforms Lucido began four years ago, aimed at restoring public trust and enhancing the office's efficiency.

"I was raised here and continue to make Macomb my home. I'm passionate about ensuring it remains a great place to live and work," Leonetti said. "I'm excited to help Prosecutor Lucido fight for crime victims and our most

vulnerable residents, fight for criminal accountability, and fight for budgetary transparency, to continue the progress."

Lucido, who inherited a department marred by scandals under a previous administration, has emphasized that his office

will remain focused on justice and integrity. "We've come a long way, but there's still work to be done," Lucido said.

Lucido said Leonetti's appointment reflects his broader vision for the prosecutor's office. "Together, we will continue to build an office that Macomb County residents can be proud of, where justice is served fairly, transparently, and with integrity," Leonetti said, "The accomplishments

of Prosecutor Lucido and his team are almost too long to list. I'm honored to have the opportunity to support and work with such talented people."



*Robert Leonetti takes the oath of office with the office's Chief of Special Prosecutions Joe Biondo (center) and County Prosecutor Peter Lucido*

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# What Makes a “Good” Judge or Lawyer?

## Part I: Character

By Bill Barnwell, Barnwell Law, PLLC



Recently I was in a Metro-Detroit area court and a lawyer I had never met started striking up conversation. They began remarking about a new judge in the courtroom. The lawyer began singing the praises of the new judge and what a great jurist they were. When I asked what they thought made them such an effective judge the lawyer remarked, “The judge just treats people with respect.”

This might seem like a fairly basic aspect of the job. But without saying it, what the lawyer was suggesting was that the jurist who preceded the new judge did not treat people with respect. Indeed, for many years, attorneys did not look forward to visiting this particular courtroom. The reason was not simply, or even mostly, “This judge doesn’t rule the way I like.” It was that every time attorneys visited this courtroom, they frequently felt mistreated or disrespected.

This isn’t to say the former judge was not very bright, didn’t know the law, and didn’t know all the mechanics of how to run a courtroom well. What was lacking was people skills, or at least an indifference to how people felt, including colleagues. As the old saying goes, people don’t care what you know if they don’t know that you care.

To be sure, a judge’s job is not to be liked or popular. And there are many appropriate times for judges to be “tough” or “firm”, including at times with unprepared attorneys. Yet on a practical level, it really doesn’t matter how intellectually competent somebody is in their job if they have an inability to get along or work with others.

What matters more than anything, therefore, is character. Competency can be learned and mastered over time. Inherent character flaws, while they can be overcome, are much harder to finesse, as personality and character is shaped over a lifetime. If you have a person who is inherently humble, you’re likely to have a humble jurist. If you have somebody who is inherently arrogant or impressed with wielding power, it’s very likely that will translate to the bench.

The same goes for attorneys. There’s many things that go into being a “good attorney.” We will cover some more of those traits next month as far as the “nuts and bolts” of being effective

and successful. But again, there is a foundational starting point: Our inherent character and how we treat other people.

Some of the most successful and effective attorneys are not master orators. They are not flashy. They are perhaps average legal writers. What they do very well though is make their clients feel seen, heard, and respected.

On the civil plaintiff side, smaller firms can be effective by offering the personal touch that could be perceived to be lacking in a larger firm. This is frequently a selling point for small to medium sized firms who still have the resources to litigate a complex civil case, but can also give more “TLC” to a given case or client.

An associate of a larger firm can overcome the objection of a potential client who wants a firm with resources to fight their case, but that is smaller and can give them more attention. The larger-firm attorney can assure the potential client that they are more than just a number or a file, and regardless of the size of the firm, they will be a valued and important client, and that the attorneys working on their file care about them and their case and will give them personalized attention.

Civil defense attorneys are often answering to nervous insurers who have a lot on the line, or even individuals facing a tort action. While the public can demonize insurance companies (evidenced recently when many members of the public disturbingly celebrated the murder of United Health Care’s CEO), their attorneys still see them as people and can empathize with their clients when they are facing large lawsuits.

Likewise, criminal defense attorneys often get little love from the general public for what they do, unless and until somebody or someone they love finds themselves facing a criminal case. The criminal defense attorney obviously has his or her constitutional obligations to a client. But the very effective ones also see the client for more than what they have been accused or done – even those who have committed horrific actions. They too, are human beings. And most criminal defendants are not “bad people”, but are often “good people” who made a mistake, or people who have repeatedly been in the system due to systemic issues not of their choosing.

Good prosecutors are more than just “tough” on defendants. They don’t swagger and berate defense counsel. The most effective prosecutors I’ve worked across are people who are good in the courtroom, yes, but who are respectful of opposing counsel, and know how to talk to their complainants and victims. There is a particular skill set in a prosecutor letting crime victims feel seen and heard. In having to talk to a young complainant in a criminal sexual conduct case before a preliminary exam or trial. Or talking to disappointed complainants and victims after a trial or sentencing.

Whether it’s dealing with a truck accident victim whose civil case is lingering for many months, a businessperson trying to control their bottom line, a criminal defendant, a crime victim, etc, etc, all of the various types of individuals we encounter as lawyers require people skills. It’s important to know how to run a legal business, employ good legal research, effectively write, effectively litigate, etc, but a judge or attorney’s effectiveness, respect in the community, and satisfaction of those we deal with, will most depend perhaps most on how we treat others.

There have been more than a few times where a client has written me a glowing review where I really didn’t feel I did anything that special. The case outcome was not anything particularly unique and I felt anyone could have accomplished it. But the clients were grateful because they felt cared about, I was accessible to them, and they had someone to walk them

through all their fears, anxieties, and ups and downs of each stage of the case.

All attorneys, whether they represent plaintiffs or defendants on the civil or criminal end, have their client or case horror stories. There are ungrateful and unreasonable clients, and some people who are just a nightmare to work with. For such individuals, it doesn’t matter what you do, it will never be enough.

By and large, however, the average client will appreciate an attorney they feel genuinely has their back and not only will zealously advocate for their interests, but will treat them with humanity and respect. Let that always be a goal we strive towards as we interact with opposing counsel, clients, and the public.

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## WLAM, Macomb Region – Judge Tracey A. Yokich Scholarship

*By Jen Smith, WLAM Macomb Vice President,  
Brimstone Law, PLLC*



The Macomb Region of the Women Lawyers Association, in conjunction with the Macomb County Bar Foundation, is proud to announce the creation of the Women Lawyers Association of Michigan, Macomb Region – Judge Tracey A. Yokich Scholarship, in honor of her outstanding commitment to the organization and her unwavering mentorship of women in the legal profession. This scholarship recognizes Judge Yokich's dedication to fostering the professional growth of women lawyers and her tireless efforts to promote diversity, inclusion, and leadership within the legal community. It will serve as a lasting tribute to her legacy of support and guidance, helping future generations of lawyers thrive in their careers.

Judge Tracey A. Yokich was appointed to the Macomb County Probate bench by Governor Jennifer M. Granholm on July 1, 2003, and was elected to the 16th Circuit Court for Macomb County in 2004. She has been a respected member of the Michigan judiciary for over two decades, bringing a wealth of legal experience and public service to her role on the bench.

A native of Michigan, Judge Yokich earned her undergraduate degree from James Madison College at Michigan State University in 1982. She then went on to receive her Juris Doctorate from the University of Detroit School of Law in 1985. After law school, she clerked for the Honorable George Clifton Edwards Jr. at the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit in Cincinnati, Ohio.

Judge Yokich's legal career is distinguished by a broad range of public service. She began her legal career as an Assistant

Prosecuting Attorney in Macomb County, where she served from 1986 to 1989. She then worked as an Assistant Corporation Counsel for Macomb County from 1989 to 1990 before returning to the Prosecutor's Office in 1997.

Her career also includes three terms in the Michigan House of Representatives from 1991 to 1996, where she represented Eastpointe, St. Clair Shores, Lake Township, and Harrison Township. During her time in the legislature, Judge Yokich was an active member of several committees, including Appropriations, Judiciary, Public Health, and Conservation, Environment, and Great Lakes.

In addition to her judicial career, Judge Yokich has a strong record of leadership within the legal community. A longtime member of the Women Lawyers Association, she has been a mentor to many. She is a Michigan State Bar Foundation Fellow and a past

president of the Michigan Judges Association. She has also been actively involved with several organizations, including the Selfridge Base Community Council and the Michigan Air Guard Historical Association. Judge Yokich served in the Michigan Air National Guard from 1995 to 2006, further demonstrating her commitment to public service.

Judge Yokich's judicial philosophy is grounded in fairness, integrity, and a commitment to the law. She continues to serve with distinction, drawing on her extensive legal experience, legislative background, and dedication to the citizens of Macomb County.



*Judge Yokich with WLAM Macomb President Noraline Issak*

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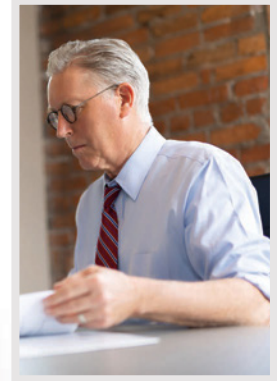
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