

Equity in the Courts View from the Bench

Justice Elizabeth M. Welch

Michigan Supreme Court Justice & DEI Commission Co-Chair

22nd Annual MAMA & GLS Summer Education Conference



Brief History of DEI Collaboration between Michigan Supreme Court & State Bar of Michigan

History of DEI Work

- 1987 Supreme Court Task Force on Gender Issues in the Courts
- 1987 Task Force on Racial/Ethnic Issues in the Courts
- 1996 State Bar of Michigan Task Force on Race/Ethnic and Gender Issues in the Courts and the Legal Profession
- National Consortium on Racial and Ethnic Fairness in the Courts
- Conference of Chief Justices
- Conference of State Court Administrators



Chief Justice Dorothy Comstock Riley



Julia Darlow, Former SBM President

History of DEI Work

- MSC, under leadership of Chief Justice Dorothy Comstock Riley, created two task forces in 1987:
 - The Task Force on Racial/Ethnic Issues in the Courts
 - The Task Force on Gender Issues in the Courts.
- These 1987 Task Forces spent two years researching race, ethnic, and gender issues in the courts.
- Among recommendations were:
 1. Establish **permanent commission under the MSC.**
 2. Modify judicial and attorney ethical standards/discipline.
 3. Improve judicial and attorney education on these issues.
 4. Create a plan to implement recommendations and monitor results.
- In December 1989, the Task Forces concluded that:

“a substantial number of citizens and lawyers believed that bias affects justice, and that their perception of bias was often based on reality.”

History of DEI Work SBM Leadership

- SBM created the Open Justice Commission.
- SBM President Victoria Roberts (1997-97) created the State Bar of Michigan Task Force on Race/Ethnic and Gender Issues in the Courts and the Legal Profession.
- SBM Task Force concluded that a crucial factor to implementation was the creation of a permanent MSC DEI infrastructure.
- SBM created Justice Initiatives Committee.
- Diversity Pledge effort launched.
- Diversity and Inclusion Advisory Commission established.

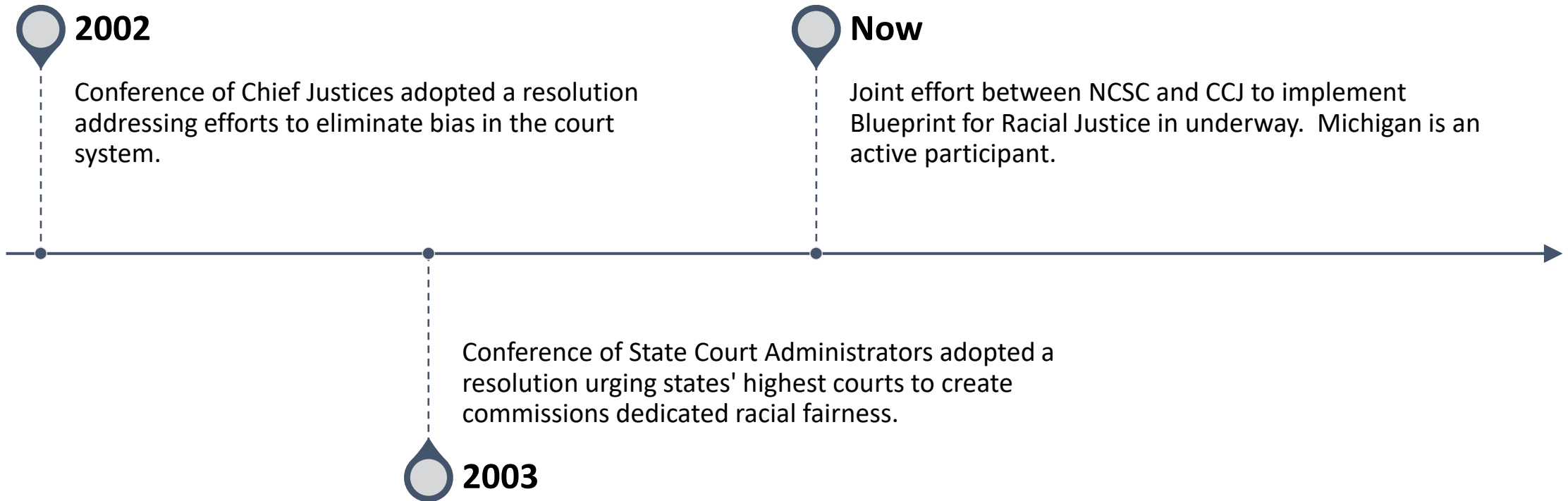


Judge Victoria Roberts

History of DEI Work – Nationally

- In 1988, National Consortium on Racial and Ethnic Diversity in the Courts created by leaders from New York, New Jersey, Washington, and Michigan.
- Justice Marilyn Kelly, Judge Harold Hood, and Judge Ben Logan—all from Michigan--were founding NCREFC members.
- In Michigan, Chief Justice Bridget McCormack, Justice Elizabeth Welch, Judge Cynthia Stephens, and Judge Gregory Conyers have continued Michigan's NCREFC leadership involvement.

The National Center for State Courts Blueprint for Racial Justice



Michigan Supreme Court & State Court Administrative Office DEI Committee

Facilitators:

Judge Andre Borrello, Judge Shauna Dunnings, Judge Cynthia Stephens,
Justice Elizabeth Welch

DEI Committee Work Groups

- Leadership
- Education
- Talent & Retention
- Data

Recommending a Permanent Commission

Special thanks to Greg and Michelle Abbi, and Rawan!

Thanks to the SBM and DEI interns for their research regarding:

- How are other commissions structured, funded and staffed ?
- What are Best Practices ?



Commission Membership Nominated by Entities

1. A sitting Justice of the Michigan Supreme Court
2. The State Court Administrator, or designee
3. The Executive Director of the State Bar of Michigan, or designee
4. The Executive Director of the Michigan State Bar Foundation, or a designee
5. One member each, recommended by the following:
 1. Michigan State Planning Body
 2. Michigan Indigent Defense Commission
 3. Justice For All Commission
 4. Michigan Association of Counties
 5. Prosecuting Attorneys Association of Michigan
 6. Association of Black Judges of Michigan
 7. Board of Commissioners from the State Bar of Michigan membership.
 8. Michigan Tribal State /Federal Judicial Forum.

Commission Membership by MSC Appointment

6. One member each, appointed by the Supreme Court, from the following bodies/stakeholder groups as members:

1. Michigan Court of Appeals;
2. Michigan Judges Association (Circuit Court Judge);
3. Michigan District Judges Association;
4. Michigan Probate Judges Association;
5. Michigan Court Administrators Association;
6. An administrator or faculty member of a Michigan ABA accredited law school;
7. Four members of various affinity and/or special purpose bar associations (as defined by the Commission's Executive Team)
8. Three community members with contacts with the justice system

Newly Appointed Commission Members

Executive Committee:

- Justice Elizabeth Welch, Michigan Supreme Court - Co-Chair
- Judge Cynthia Stephens, Michigan Court of Appeals (ret.) - Co-Chair
- Elizabeth Rios, State Court Administrative Office – State Court Administrator designee
- Peter Cunningham, State Bar of Michigan Executive Director
- Jennifer Bentley, Michigan State Bar Foundation Executive Director

For terms ending December 31, 2023:

- Josh Hilgart (Michigan State Planning Body)
- Dee Brooks, Prosecuting Attorneys Association of Michigan
- Erika Bryant, State Bar of Michigan Board of Commissioners
- Zenell Brown, Michigan Court Administrators Association
- Jacqueline Freeman, Michigan ABA-Accredited Law School
- Angie Martell, Affinity Bar Association
- Belem Morales, Affinity Bar Association

For terms ending December 31, 2024:

- Nicole Huddleston, Justice for All Commission
- Chief Judge Kenneth Akini, Michigan Tribal State Federal Judicial Forum
- Judge Kathleen Brickley, Michigan Judges Association
- Judge Juanita Bocanegra, Michigan District Judges Association
- Michelle Crockett, Affinity Bar Association
- Syeda Davidson, Affinity Bar Association
- Alanna Lahey, Community Member

For terms ending December 31, 2025:

- Judge Kristina Robinson Garrett, Michigan Indigent Defense Commission
- Robyn Afrik, Michigan Association of Counties
- Judge Austin Garrett, Association of Black Judges of Michigan
- Judge Sima Patel, Court of Appeals
- Judge Shauna Dunning, Michigan Probate Judges Association
- Louisa Wills, Community Member
- Siham Awada Jaafar, Community Member

Reporting and Publication

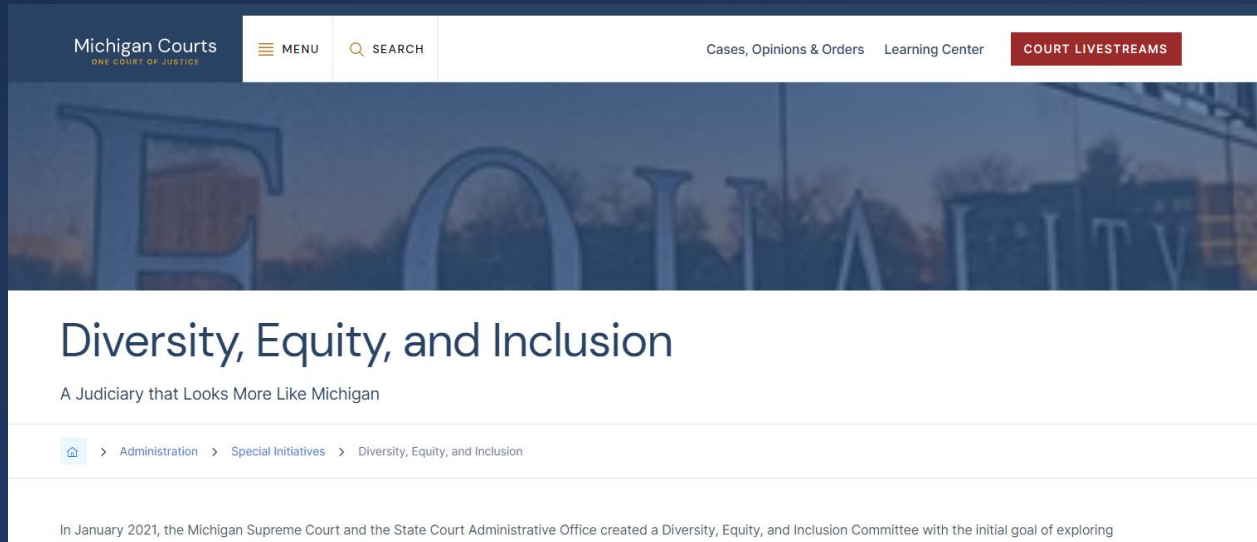
Biennial Report, will contain:

1. The Commission's activities and progress during the previous 24-month period
2. Its goals for the next 24 months.
3. Additional information, data, presentations, and publications made available to the public
4. Public comments concerning the Commission's work.

Next steps:

- Strategic Planning
- Work Groups

We welcome your involvement!



Visit our website by searching "DEI" at www.courts.michigan.gov.

