

State of the Probate Court Address 2009 and the New Chief Judge



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State of the Probate Court

On October 29, 2009, Chief Probate Judge Elizabeth Pezzetti addressed the Oakland County Board of Commissioners with an update on the Oakland County Probate Court. Judge Pezzetti briefly reviewed the court's jurisdiction and that fact that the probate court deals with some of society's most vulnerable citizens. In updating the commissioners, Judge Pezzetti highlighted some of the service aspects of the court and future concerns:

So far in 2009, this [service] includes assisting approximately 40,000 individuals at our service counter while monitoring close to 15,000 open cases, with a four-person reduction in our staff of 61. Despite our reduction in staff, with the adoption of the 4/40 work week, we have extended our hours of service to the public at the Probate counter from 4:30 to 5:30 p.m. We hope to continue the 4/40 work week as long as staffing levels allow. We have had many thanks from the public about our expanded hours at a time when many public entities are shrinking hours of service. We have been able to accomplish this only because our excellent staff have been willing to work extra hard.

Judge Pezzetti also noted that the court's ability to provide services may be further challenged in the near future:

We do have a concern about the future provision of timely services. As Yogi Berra said, "Predictions are very hard to do, especially if it's about the future." However, we do know that Oakland County has a large wave of baby boomers turning 65 in 2011. Between 2010 and 2011, 70,000 are expected to hit that threshold and another 100,000 over the next 15 years. Many of our communities will have more seniors than school-age children by 2015. Of course, this means increased need for probate services. We need to think creatively to manage those needs. For example, we continue

to search for innovative ways to accomplish the reviews we are mandated to perform on guardianships. We are exploring avenues such as grant funding and internships with college students and social work students. We are always actively seeking more volunteers to act as reviewers ... Be assured that we thoroughly train our volunteers for their tasks.

In addition, Judge Pezzetti noted that the probate court does not provide any non-mandated programs and described how budget tasks have been addressed. She further emphasized that the court will maintain its efforts to find opportunities for improving efficiency, and will continue in its goals to provide timely, compassionate and professional service to the citizens of Oakland County.

New Chief Judge

I am very pleased to announce that on November 5, 2009, the Michigan Supreme Court appointed Judge Eugene Arthur Moore as the chief judge of the Oakland County Probate Court. Judge Moore's term began January 1, 2010.

Judge Moore has served on the Oakland County Probate Court bench since his election in 1966. He has previously served as chief probate judge from 1989-1992, 1998-1999, and 2004-2005.

Judge Moore has appointed Judge Linda Hallmark to act as chief judge pro tem of the Probate Court, and Judge Daniel A. O'Brien as presiding judge-Estates Division. Both of these appointments were also effective January 1, 2010.

Congratulations, Judge Moore, on your appointment!

I would also like to thank Judge Pezzetti on behalf of the Probate Court for her service as chief judge during the past two very challenging and productive years. Thank you, Judge Pezzetti!

New Year

On behalf of the Oakland County Probate Court, I would like to extend wishes for a safe, healthy and happy New Year. We look forward to working with you.