

# Unsung Hero Award Nomination - Judge Melissa Pope

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Carrie Sharlow, Representative Assembly Awards  
State Bar of Michigan  
306 Townsend Street  
Lansing, MI 48933

repassembly@michbar.org

Re: SBM Unsung Hero Award

Dear Ms. Sharlow


Please accept this letter as my nomination of Hon. Melissa Pope, P55328, Chief Judge, Nottawaseppi Huron Band of the Potawatomi, for the SBM Unsung Hero Award. As a former member of the Representative Assembly, I recognize and appreciate the high level of service and integrity necessary to qualify for this great honor. But Judge Pope has demonstrated the highest standards of practice and commitment for the benefit of others, and more than meets the established criteria for this award.

I make this nomination not because of any specific contribution, event, or accomplishment during this past year. Rather, it is her cumulative efforts over the more than 21 years she has been a member of the State Bar of Michigan that makes her worthy of this honor. Foremost among her many contributions have been her efforts to combat domestic violence directed at indigenous woman. Through her commitments to tribal sovereignty and the rule of law, she has developed programs at the tribe she serves to effectively deal with this special problem. She is well known throughout Indian Country as a champion of tribal sovereignty and a warrior in the prevention and treatment of domestic violence.

Judge Pope has served the public not only directly through her numerous presentations on violence against indigenous women, but also indirectly through her active participation in numerous boards and commissions. She currently is a member of the Michigan Domestic and Sexual Violence Prevention and Treatment Board, The Michigan Judicial Council, and the Michigan Tribal State Federal Judicial Forum.

I hope that the Representative Assembly will concur in my belief that this outstanding member of the bar has earned the esteemed recognition of the Unsung Hero Award.

Sincerely



Richard L. Cunningham

## NOMINATION FOR SBM UNSUNG HERO AWARD

Nominee: Hon. Melissa Lopez Pope, P55328  
Chief Judge, Nottawaseppi Huron Band of the Potawatomi  
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Hon. Melissa Pope has demonstrated great service to the bar, the public, and the Native American community in many ways throughout her career. Foremost among her many contributions is her work in the fight against domestic and sexual violence directed at indigenous women. She has used her dedication to the rule of law, commitment to tribal sovereignty and appreciation of the dignity of the individual to address this serious problem. She is well known throughout Indian Country for her efforts to raise awareness of this cancer and bring change and peace to the community.

Judge Pope is the Chief Trial Judge for the Nottawaseppi Huron Band of the Potawatomi, a position she has held since 2011. She has also served in the part-time position of Chief Justice of the Appellate Court for the Little River Band of Ottawa Indians since 2007. These two tribal communities are among the 12 federally recognized Indian Tribes in Michigan. Recognizing the importance of a collaboration between state and tribal courts, the Michigan Supreme Court created the Michigan Tribal State Federal Judicial Forum. The group consists of tribal judges from each of Michigan's federally recognized tribes, 10 state court judges, and federal judges and officials. Judge Pope currently serves as Co-Chair of the Forum.

The Michigan Domestic and Sexual Violence Prevention and Treatment Board is a seven-member body composed of a cross-section of professionals concerned with crimes of domestic and sexual violence. Members are appointed by the Governor, with the advice and consent of the Michigan Senate. The Board is assisted in carrying out its responsibilities by staff provided by the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services. Judge Pope currently serves as a member of this Board.

When the Michigan Supreme Court decided in April 2021 to amend Michigan Court Rule 8.128 to establish a 29 member Judicial Council to plan strategically for the Michigan judicial branch of government, the justices determined that the council would be representative of the state's diverse population and regions and advance diversity, equity, and inclusion. Judge Pope was selected to serve on the Judicial Council for an initial term ending December 31, 2022.

Her commitment to tribal sovereignty within the rule of law is best exemplified by an opinion that was ultimately reviewed by the United States Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit. In Spurr v Pope, 936 F.3d 478 (2019), the federal appellate court upheld her ruling that tribal courts have the inherent sovereignty to issue civil personal protection orders against even non-Indians who harass, stalk, or threaten tribal members within Indian Country.

Judge Pope is often called upon to address the issue of violence against indigenous woman at professional seminars and public gatherings. Her passion for the subject is obvious from a video of her short speech at the Quilt Walk For Justice in December 2015 at Washington, D.C. This video can be viewed on YouTube at [https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=2ahUKEwi7irfVo4\\_2AhWTGTQIH05B0s4ChC3AnoECBYQAg&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.youtube.com%2Fwatch%3Fv%3DCvbTiAvw4C0&usg=AOvVaw3Vjcs7PHGNQ6HME0jghgil](https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=2ahUKEwi7irfVo4_2AhWTGTQIH05B0s4ChC3AnoECBYQAg&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.youtube.com%2Fwatch%3Fv%3DCvbTiAvw4C0&usg=AOvVaw3Vjcs7PHGNQ6HME0jghgil)

Melissa Pope has been a member of the State Bar of Michigan since 1999 and has been an active member of the American Indian Law Section throughout her legal career. She served several different terms as Section Chairperson and has actively participated in many SBM conferences and events.

While attending law school she served on the staff of a State Representative, and all of her positions after leaving that position have provided the foundation for her work on behalf of abused indigenous woman:

- 2005-2006 Staff Attorney, Women's Survival Center of Oakland County
- 2006-2009 Director of Victim Services, Triangle Foundation
- 2009-2011 Coordinator, Gender and Sexuality Center, Oakland University
  
- 2011-Present Chief Judge, Nottawaseppi Huron Band of the Potawatomi
- 2007-Present Justice, (Part-Time), Little River Band of Ottawa Indians

Since 2007, Judge Pope has served as an Adjunct Instructor on the faculty of the University of Detroit Mercy School of Law. She teaches American Indian Law one semester each year, and frequently also conducts a seminar course in the second semester.