

**Michael Franck Award**

www.michbar.org/programs/eventsawards.cfm

**Criteria**

This award will be presented to a lawyer who has made an outstanding contribution to the improvement of the profession.

- The recipient must be a member in good standing with the State Bar of Michigan.
- The recipient's contribution may have been made during the past year or by virtue of cumulative effort or service.
- The recipient is selected by the State Bar of Michigan Representative Assembly Nominating and Awards Committee.



Online Application



Application Form-Word format

Complete the contact and nomination information using this document. Provide supplemental information in additional documents.

Submit this form online, by facsimile, or mail to:

Attention: Ms. Anne Smith  
Representative Assembly Awards  
State Bar of Michigan  
306 Townsend St.  
Lansing, MI 48933-2012  
(517) 346-6374

Fax: (517) 372-2410  
asmith@mail.michbar.org

Applications must be received no later than Friday, March 9, 2012.

**1. Contact information**

Name of nominee: **James H. Fisher**  
Title: **Attorney**  
Firm or organization: **Law Weathers**  
Address: **333 Bridge NW, Suite 800**  
**Grand Rapids, MI 49504**  
Phone: **616 459 1171**  
Fax: **616 732 1740**  
E-mail: **JFisher@lawweathers.com**

Name of nominator: **Stephanie S. Fekkes**  
Title: **Attorney**  
Firm or organization: **Law Weathers**  
Address: **333 Bridge NW, Suite 800**  
**Grand Rapids, MI 49504**  
Phone: **616 459 1171**  
Fax: **616 732 1740**  
E-mail: **SFekkes@lawweathers.com**

2. Explain the merits of your nomination along with all supporting materials for your nominee where possible. Give specific examples.
3. Please provide a complete resume that includes:
  - Dates of service to and on behalf of the State Bar of Michigan
  - Other service to the legal profession
  - Service to the public
  - Any awards the nominee may have received
4. An optional list of news, magazine, radio and TV features about the nominee's accomplishments may be submitted (do not submit actual articles or DVDs).
5. Please provide a letter written by the nominator explaining why the nominee should be considered for the award. The letter should be signed by the nominator and any additional supporters. One dated and signed letter is required.

**Deadline Friday, March 9, 2012. All applications must be received no later than this date.**

LAW WEATHERS  
ATTORNEYS & COUNSELORS

Stephanie S. Fekkes  
Direct Dial (616) 732-1721  
Direct Fax (616) 913-1221  
sfekkes@lawweathers.com

March 19, 2012

Representative Assembly Award  
State Bar of Michigan  
306 Townsend Street  
Lansing, MI 48933-2012

ATTN: Anne M. Smith

**Re: James H. Fisher**

Dear Ms. Smith:

It is my honor to present to you for nomination Judge James H. Fisher for your consideration to receive the State Bar of Michigan Michael Franck Award. I have known Judge Fisher for twenty-two years. When I first met Judge Fisher, he was a private practitioner and I was a clerk for Judge Thomas Eveland. I then became an associate with the law firm where Judge Fisher was a partner and later a partner in the same firm. From there, I practiced before Judge Fisher after he was appointed as the Barry County Circuit Court Judge. Recently, he has become of counsel with the law firm where I am a partner, Law Weathers.

Through the years, I have had the fortune of being Judge Fisher's colleague, partner, and friend. He has played a prominent role in mentoring me and many others in our legal careers. I can honestly say I do not know if I would have enjoyed the success in my career had it not been for the guidance and caring Judge Fisher has provided over the years. The guidance and caring included creating an environment of fairness, courtesy, efficiency and respect for the law. As the below will reflect, I am not the only person to have shared in this same good fortune.

Judge Fisher earned a degree in Engineering from the General Motors Institute 1973 and a law degree from Wayne State University in 1976. Thereafter, he returned to his hometown of Hastings, Michigan to begin his legal career where he served in the Barry County Prosecuting Attorney's office in the capacity of Assistant Prosecuting Attorney, Chief Assistant Prosecuting Attorneys, and Prosecuting Attorney from January of 1977 through November of 1979. He next became a partner at the firm of Siegel, Hudson, Gee and Fisher from November of 1979 through April of 1995 where he represented individuals and private and municipal corporations in a broad array of litigation, including civil, family and criminal cases, as well as estate planning and real estate. While at Siegel, Hudson, Gee and Fisher, he served as the Village Attorney for the Village of Middleville, Michigan from 1980 through 1995 and also as the City Attorney for Hastings, Michigan from 1986 through 1995.

In addition to his legal responsibilities, Judge Fisher was involved in a number of community service and charitable organizations. He was recognized as a Distinguished President of the Kiwanis Club of Hastings, Treasurer for the Citizens for Quality Education, as a member of the YMCA Board of Directors, and as one of the incorporators of the Barry County



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Child Abuse Prevention Council. He also served as an Elder of the First Presbyterian Church of Hastings and as a trustee.

In April of 1995, Judge Fisher was appointed by Governor John Engler and began serving as the Barry County Circuit Court Judge. During his tenure from April of 1995 through June of 2011, Judge Fisher was responsible for an annual caseload of 1200 felonies, family cases and civil cases over \$25,000. He was instrumental in planning and implementing a Unified Trial Court in Barry County which was the first such court sanctioned by the Michigan Supreme Court in 1996. He also planned and implemented a plan of concurrent jurisdiction which was among the first group of such plans approved by the Michigan Supreme court in 2002. Judge Fisher served as the Chief Judge of the Barry County Courts and was responsible for an operation with fifty employees and an annual budget of over \$4,000,000. The Barry County Trial Court consistently had an overall case flow compliance rate of over 95% and operated substantially under budget. As a result, the Barry County Trial Court was recognized for management excellence by the Michigan Supreme Court, and in 2010 the State Bar of Michigan Judicial Crossroads Report cited it as a model court for the rest of the State.


In addition to the above judicial responsibilities, Judge Fisher was a member of the Board of the Michigan Judges Association and was and remains a frequent lecturer on court management for the Michigan Judicial Institute in the areas of court management and sentencing reform.

In June of 2011, Judge Fisher retired as the Barry County Circuit Court Judge. He was appointed by Governor Snyder to serve as chair of the Indigent Defense Advisory Commission. He also joined the firm of Law Weathers in Grand Rapids, Michigan in August of 2011 and serves as an Arbitrator and Mediator having been certified in civil and domestic mediation.

Throughout the years, and to date, Judge Fisher continues to epitomize an individual with a strong respect for fairness, courtesy, efficiency, and respect for the law and our profession.

Thank you for your consideration of this nomination. I am attaching for your additional consideration Judge Fisher's court resume. If you should have any questions, please feel free to contact me at (616) 732-1721.

Very truly yours,



Stephanie S. Fekkes

SSF:tml  
Enclosure  
595735.1

## COURT RESUME FOR JAMES H FISHER

APPOINTED BARRY COUNTY CIRCUIT JUDGE IN 1995

CHIEF JUDGE OF COURT CONSOLIDATION DEMO COURT FROM 1996-2011

MJA BOARD MEMBER SINCE 2002

MEMBER OF COURT STRUCTURE AND RESOURCES SUBCOMMITTEE OF SBOM  
JUDICIAL CROSSROADS COMMITTEE, 2009-2010

ONE OF TWO CIRCUIT JUDGES SELECTED FOR JNAC COMMITTEE, 2010-2011

ESTABLISHED FELONY DRUG COURT IN 2002, AVERAGE CASELOAD 75-80

ONE OF TWO JUDGES SELECTED BY MJI TO BE TRAINED AS A TRAINER IN  
EVIDENCE BASED SENTENCING PRACTICES, 2009

MJA POINT PERSON RE INDIGENT DEFENSE REFORM, 2009

CURRENT CHAIR OF GOVERNOR'S INDIGENT DEFENSE ADVISORY COMMISSION

FREQUENT LECTURER FOR MJI REGARDING DOCKET MANAGEMENT, BUDGET  
CONTROL, COURT REORGANIZATION, COURT MANAGEMENT

18 YEARS EXPERIENCE BEFORE BECOMING A JUDGE AS A PROSECUTOR,  
DEFENSE ATTORNEY, AND GENERAL PRACTITIONER HANDLING ALL TYPES OF  
CASES

UNDERGRADUATE DEGREE IN INDUSTRIAL ENGINEERING FROM GENERAL  
MOTORS INSTITUTE, JD FROM WAYNE STATE

CURRENTLY OF COUNSEL WITH LAW WEATHERS, GRAND RAPIDS, SPECIALIZING  
IN ADR

Hon. Thomas P. Boyd  
Chief Judge



Michael J. Dillon  
Court Administrator

Hon. Donald L. Allen, Jr.  
Judge

James B. Pahl  
Magistrate

State of Michigan  
55<sup>th</sup> Judicial District Court  
700 Buhl Avenue • Mason, Michigan 48854  
517-676-8400  
[www.ingham.org/dc/](http://www.ingham.org/dc/)

March 15, 2012

Representative Assembly Awards  
Attn. Anne Smith  
State Bar of Michigan  
306 Townsend Street  
Lansing, MI 48933-2012

Re: Michael Franck Award for the Honorable James Fisher

To the Representative Assembly's Nominating and Awards Committee

Michigan's indigent defense system has been criticized since the United State Supreme Court issued *Gideon v. Wainwright* in 1963. The *Gideon* court confirmed that the right of one charged with a crime to counsel is fundamental and essential to a fair trial. While Michigan's indigent defense system has some unique aspects of which we should all be proud, criticism of Michigan's system has been persistent for almost 50 years.

These criticisms were revived by a 2008 report from the National Legal Aid & Defender Association (NLADA). This report concluded that Michigan's current system falls short of national standards for elimination of political and other pressures that may interfere with a truly independent counsel for indigent criminal defendants. Unfortunately, this report also concluded that the solution to Michigan's problems was the creation of a state level agency to represent these defendants.

House Bill 5676 was introduced on December 9, 2009. Consistent with the NLADA report, this bill called for a state takeover of what has been a locally controlled system. This bill further polarized those advocating change against those working hard every day to provide the best possible counsel for poor persons charged with crimes. The defeat of HB 5676 could have been the end of another chapter in Michigan's long history of failed efforts for reform.

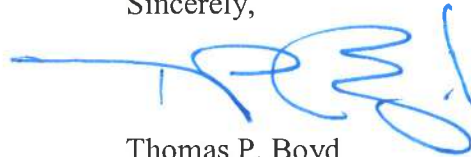
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The State Bar of Michigan reached out to Barry County Circuit Court Chief Judge James Fisher and others in late 2010 to revive a dialogue between the parties interested in improving our indigent defense system. This dialogue led to Governor Rick Snyder's executive order creating the Michigan Indigent Defense Advisory Commission (IDAC). Governor Snyder appointed Judge Fisher as Chair of the IDAC to continue the leadership he demonstrated in the preceding two years.

Judge Fisher has been an exemplary leader as Chair of the IDAC. The IDAC has 14 members. These individuals are as diverse as the great state they represent. Judge Fisher has fostered an environment of respect and creativity. Judge Fisher's outstanding contribution to the improvement of the legal profession as it relates to representation of indigent criminal defendants is worthy of acknowledgement by the State Bar of Michigan.

Thank you for your consideration of Judge James Fisher for the Michael Franck Award. Please contact me at (517) 676-8414 if you have any questions.

Sincerely,



Thomas P. Boyd  
Chief Judge  
Member, Michigan Indigent Defense  
Advisory Commission