

# How We're Responding to COVID-19

By Elizabeth W. Couch

**F**rom the outset of the pandemic, the State Bar of Michigan has been working around the clock—not only to continue our normal operations, but to anticipate and react to the needs of Michigan lawyers during this unprecedented time. Here's a look at what we've been doing to help you help others.

## Continuing normal services

Our building is closed, but the SBM is very much up and running. Our staff is working from home, and we are fortunate to be able to remotely offer all essential services to lawyers and the public. We even held full meetings of the Board of Commissioners and Representative Assembly virtually.

## Developing online resources

On [michbar.org](http://michbar.org), you'll find an evolving collection of resources from all SBM departments. There has been a lot of information coming at attorneys from Michigan courts during the pandemic. We're helping keep it all straight. And because you need to know exactly what the law says, we're tracking all executive orders, administrative orders, and more in one place. We've offered guidance on ethics amid a pandemic. We've covered the basics of using Zoom and other now-crucial platforms that many people were unfamiliar with before March, as well as more specific guidance for using these tools to conduct legal work. From issues of force majeure to virtual parental visits, we're following the emerging legal trends of the pandemic. We've made available expert guidance to help you keep your law firm afloat. For everything not covered above, we've been responding to your questions on our COVID-19 FAQ page. Keep an eye on [michbar.org](http://michbar.org), as we frequently update these resources and add more.



## Extra communication

You've probably noticed you're hearing from us more than usual. That's because we want to make sure you're as equipped as possible to navigate the complexities of practicing law while staying safe from COVID-19. From email newsletters to social media posts, we're working to share important news and updates with you as soon as we can. And the lines of communication are open both ways—we've been grateful for the feedback we've received from lawyers and would love to hear from you at [covid19@michbar.org](mailto:covid19@michbar.org).

## Working for you

Legal work is essential to the rule of law and can't be suspended or deferred during a pandemic. Luckily, much legal work can be accomplished remotely—but not all. Knowing this, we deployed the feedback we received from lawyers in our continuous outreach to the governor about the importance of attorneys' having discretion to carry out critical legal work outside the home to responsibly serve their clients. We were happy to see an important change in the guidance from the governor's office that makes clear

that lawyers can provide legal services in person or outside your home when ethical obligations as an attorney so require.

## Creating ways for you to help

In this trying time, Michigan's lawyers have gone above and beyond, serving their existing clients and stepping up to help others. We're proud that the SBM can play a role by connecting those in need with lawyers willing to help. The response to our Frontline Responders Legal Helpline—through which lawyers provide free estate-planning services to people risking their lives on the front line of the fight against COVID-19—was so overwhelming, in fact, that at first we had more attorneys volunteering to help than people who contacted us for help. Through the COVID-19 Rapid Response Helpline, lawyers are being matched with clients who need help with issues specific to the pandemic, and fast. In these difficult times, Michigan lawyers have done what they do best—help others. ■

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