

# MICHIGAN Circuit Judges

By John T. Hammond

**W**hat are our judges like? Who are these folks? Are they all white-haired old men? Lawyers, above all, want to know!

Just the facts, ma'am, just the facts. Since older judges leave and younger judges are added, seemingly every month, any survey is dated before it can be published, and this is no exception. However, from year to year, even over election years, there is very little overall average age change. As indicated in the chart below, white-haired judges are a small minority. As is usually true, counting beats any estimate.

I compiled statistics on age, years of service, prior judicial service, and total judicial service. Thereafter, I was asked how female judges ranked on the same inquiries. The results for the first study are shown in the top half of the chart. I obtained updated information seven years later, and the results for this second study are shown in the bottom half.

The percentage of judges having prior judicial service decreased from 38 percent in the first study to 32 percent in the second.

Obviously, the female judges are younger and their numbers and percentages are growing. In the first study, 21 percent were women; in the second, 29 percent. As one young female lawyer

pointed out to a group of male circuit judges, size and gross physical strength are irrelevant, and the "glass ceiling" still allegedly present in some law firms does not block women who are candidates for judgeships.

As the head of the admissions committee of a highly rated law school explained, the equivalent LSAT scores of male applicants has not changed much over the decades (though the scores are expressed differently), but law school classes are comprised of increasingly more women because very bright women are forcing out the men at the bottom of the male pool who would have been automatic admittees a decade or two earlier. Some law school classes are now more than 50 percent female. ■

*John T. Hammond is a retired circuit court judge who served for more than 40 years as a Michigan judge. He chaired the SBM Criminal Law Section and served on the Representative Assembly, the Criminal Jurisprudence Committee, the Executive Board of the Michigan Judges Association, and the Special Committees to Revise the Criminal Code and the Code of Criminal Procedure. He presently sits on the Criminal Jury Instruction Committee and is a commissioner on the State Appellate Defender Commission.*

|                                       | Mean<br>(average) | Standard<br>Deviation | Median<br>No. above = below | Mode<br>(most common) | Range |     |
|---------------------------------------|-------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------|-------|-----|
|                                       |                   |                       |                             |                       | High  | Low |
| <b>First study (2004)</b>             |                   |                       |                             |                       |       |     |
| Age of all circuit judges             | 57                | 8.137                 | 57                          | 57                    | 74    | 35  |
| Years of prior judicial service (38%) | 8                 | 5.662                 | 7                           | 2, 3, 4, 6            | 23    | 0   |
| Years of circuit court service        | 12                | 7.727                 | 10                          | 7                     | 32    | 0   |
| Total years of judicial service       | 15                | 8.877                 | 14                          | 10, 14                | 41    | 0   |
| Age of female judges (21%)            | 51                | 7.1089                | 50                          | 48                    | 66    | 38  |
| <b>Second study (2011)</b>            |                   |                       |                             |                       |       |     |
| Age of all circuit judges             | 58                | 8.06                  | 59                          | 63                    | 74    | 36  |
| Years of prior judicial service (32%) | 8                 | 5.61                  | 6                           | 4                     | 20    | 1   |
| Years of circuit court service        | 12                | 8.13                  | 11                          | 3                     | 35    | 0   |
| Total years of judicial service       | 14                | 9.8                   | 13                          | 9                     | 39    | 0   |
| Age of female judges (29%)            | 54                | 8.2                   | 55                          | 58                    | 73    | 36  |

Years rounded to nearest whole.