

# UpFront

By Samantha Meinke

## Governor Snyder Signs Indigent Defense Legislation

Governor Rick Snyder signed House Bill 4529 and Senate Bill 301 into law July 1, taking a major step forward in assuring the constitutional rights of persons accused of crimes in Michigan. The bills, sponsored by Rep. Tom McMillin and Sen. Bruce Caswell, received strong bipartisan support, established the first statewide standards for indigent defense in Michigan, and created a foundation for fair and adequate funding statewide.

State Bar of Michigan President Bruce A. Courtade called the development “game-changing” and “a transformative first step” in making sure a person’s rights are no longer placed at risk simply because he or she cannot afford a lawyer.

“Indigent defense has been a glaring weakness in Michigan and a source of concern for everyone who cherishes our constitution and the rights it establishes,” Courtade said. “We have been identified as having one of the worst indigent defense systems in our nation, and that’s simply unacceptable. With the passage of this legislation we have turned a corner. We have a lot of work ahead of us, but this legislation gives us many of the tools we need to provide equal protection and access to justice for the poorest among us.”

Michigan started out as a national leader in defending the rights of the accused—the right to an attorney was granted to all citizens in the state’s first constitution in 1835. But over the next 150 years these rights steadily declined, and Michigan currently ranks near the bottom in protecting them. For more than a decade, the State Bar has



Front row, left to right: Senate Bill 301 primary sponsor Sen. Bruce Caswell, Gov. Rick Snyder, and House Bill 4529 primary sponsor Rep. Tom McMillin; back row, left to right: Michigan Catholic Conference Policy Advocate Paul Stankewitz, SBM President Bruce Courtade, and SBM Director of Governmental Relations Peter Cunningham.

taken steps to right this wrong, becoming the first state bar association to adopt the American Bar Association’s 10 Principles of a Public Defense Delivery System, sending leaders to the U.S. House of Representatives to testify on the constitutional crisis in the state, and making recommendations for change in the 2011 *SBM Judicial Crossroads Task Force Report and Recommendations*.

The State Bar had several valuable partners in the fight for reform, most importantly the Campaign for Justice, the American Civil Liberties Union of Michigan, and the Criminal Defense Attorneys of Michigan. ■

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## Michigan Legal Milestone Ceremony Honors Berrien County Courthouse

The historic Berrien County Courthouse became the State Bar of Michigan's 38th Michigan Legal Milestone on June 26. In a dedication ceremony at the Howard Performing Arts Center in Berrien Springs, speakers highlighted the history of the courthouse, built in 1839, and the important role such courthouses played in the state's justice system and communities. The milestone program is overseen by the SBM Law Related Education & Public Outreach Committee. ■



Photo by Samantha Meinke

*Jeffrey Paulsen, SBM Law Related Education & Public Outreach Committee member; Janet Welch, SBM executive director; and Bruce Courtade, SBM president, join milestone dedication ceremony speakers Hon. Al Butzbaugh, past SBM president; attorney Michael Marrs, Conybeare Law Office PC; John Fedynsky, Michigan assistant attorney general; Hon. Thomas Nelson, Berrien County Circuit Court chief judge; and Robert Myers, History Center at Courthouse Square curator, to unveil the 38th milestone plaque.*

## Bar Leaders, Attorneys Visit Mackinac Island

Up-and-coming bar leaders and attorneys continuing their education attended the Bar Leadership Forum and Upper Michigan Legal Institute on June 14–15 at the Grand Hotel on Mackinac Island. The Bar Leadership Forum instructs incoming leaders of State Bar sections and committees and local and affiliate bar associations on how to be effective leaders. The Upper Michigan Legal Institute offers northern Michigan attorneys the opportunity to earn continuing legal education credits close to home. ■



Photo by Samantha Meinke

*Bar Leadership Forum attendees get a legislative update at the Grand Hotel.*

## Cooley Hosts Summer Institute for Disadvantaged Pre-Law Students

Nineteen underprivileged students from 13 colleges and universities in five states and the country of Lebanon participated in a College Pre-Law Summer Institute on May 29 at Thomas M. Cooley Law School's Auburn Hills campus. This is the fourth year Cooley, Oakland University, and the American Bar Association Council of Legal Education Opportunity have hosted the program.

The Summer Institute provides students 100 hours of free instruction on the skills necessary to succeed on the LSAT and in law school. The SBM Young Lawyers Section hosted and presented the program's opening ceremony, and the SBM Appellate Practice, Health Law, Law Practice Management and Legal Administrators, and Young Lawyers sections helped fund the program. ■

Photo courtesy of Thomas M. Cooley Law School



*Thomas M. Cooley Law School faculty members and SBM Young Lawyers Section council members stand with attendees of the College Pre-Law Summer Institute.*