

STATE BAR OF MICHIGAN BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS MEETING MINUTES

President Hamameh called the meeting to order at 9:33 a.m. on Friday, April 24, 2026, in the Boardroom at the Michael Franck building in Lansing, Michigan.

Commissioners present:

David C. Anderson, Treasurer
Hon. Karl A. Barr
Darnell Barton
Erika L. Bryant, President-Elect
Aaron V. Burrell
Hon. B. Chris Christenson
Alena Clark
Hon. Ponce Clay
Patrick J. Crowley
Tanisha Davis
Sherrree L. Detzler
Robert A. Easterly
Jacob G. Eccleston
Nicole A. Evans
Lisa J. Hamameh, President

Thomas H. Howlett, Vice-President
Elizabeth A. Kitchen-Troop
Suzanne C. Larsen, Secretary
Joshua A. Lerner
James L. Liggins, Jr.
James W. Low
Ashley E. Lowe
Elizabeth L. Luckenbach
Gerard V. Mantese
Thomas P. Murray, III
Gerrow D. "Gerry" Mason
Nicholas M. Ohanesian
Hon. David A. Perkins
Hon. Kristen D. Simmons
Lisa W. Timmons

Commissioners absent:

Claudnyse D. Holloman
Silvia A. Mansoor

Moheeb H. Murray
Douglas B. Shapiro

Consent Agenda

The Board received the minutes from the March 6, 2026, Board meeting.
The Board received the recent activities of the president.
The Board received the recent activities of the executive director.
The Board received the FY 2026 financial reports through March 2026.
The Board received the Client Protection Fund Claims.
The Board received the Model Jury Instructions.

President Hamameh asked if any items needed to be removed from the consent agenda. There were none.

A motion was offered to approve the consent agenda. The motion was seconded and approved.

Upcoming Events

A new standing agenda item, **Upcoming Events**, was introduced to increase Commissioner awareness of and participation in State Bar events. President Hamameh and several Commissioners highlighted upcoming events and reminded the Board that a comprehensive calendar is available on the SBM website.

President Hamameh encouraged Commissioners to support Young Lawyers Section events and emphasized the importance of Board participation and visibility at SBM programs and activities.

President and Executive Director's Report: Lisa Hamameh, President and Peter Cunningham, Executive Director

President's Report

President Hamameh highlighted recent activities since the last Board meeting, noting that the events have been picking up since the last time she gave her report. Ms. Hamameh also mentioned that she attended the National Arab American Bar Association meeting and was presented the American Heritage Month Legacy Award, noting the experience was both eye-opening and flattering.

Executive Director's Report

Mr. Cunningham congratulated Molly Ranns, Savanna Polimeni and Robin Eagleson on the successful launch of the rebranded podcast, SBM MiLawyer, which debuted earlier in the month with Chief Justice Kavanaugh as the guest. Mr. Cunningham also noted the work being done to promote the podcast.

Felicia Thomas, Assistant Executive Director, introduced Kevin Francart as the new Unauthorized Practice of Law (UPL) Counsel. Mr. Francart previously worked in state government and has served on several SBM committees and panels related to ethics, professionalism, and attorney discipline.

Michigan Supreme Court Commissions Updates

Commission on Well-Being in the Law

Mr. Cunningham referenced the memo included in the board packet from the Commission on Well-Being in the Law providing an update on the Proposed Court Rule for the Secured Leave. The proposal would permit attorneys to schedule a reasonable amount of personal leave through advance notice to courts and opposing counsel. He noted that the proposal had previously been approved by the Representative Assembly but was not published for comment by the Michigan Supreme Court. The Commission is now working toward resubmission with updated language and broader stakeholder engagement.

Molly Ranns, Director of Lawyers & Judges Assistance Program and the Vice Chair of the Commission on Wellbeing and the Law, noted that in addition to the Commission meeting four times a year in person, there are three subcommittees: Incentivizing Wellbeing; Prevention and Promotion; Wellbeing Programming.

Ms. Ranns also reported on the national lawyer well-being survey conducted following the 2016 attorney mental health study. She noted that nearly 40,000 attorneys participated nationwide and that Michigan-specific data will be available following publication of the national results.

Commission on Fairness and Public Trust

President-Elect Erika Bryant reported on the April 17 convening held by the Commission on Fairness and Public Trust. The convening brought together court leaders from across the state to focus on improving court user experiences. She noted that additional regional discussions are planned to gather further input and develop recommendations.

Justice For All Commission

Mr. Cunningham gave a brief update on the Justice for all Commission which is continuing to do a lot of work to expand their self-help centers around the state. He also reported progress on the statewide court forms redesign project, which is a multi-year project working to standardize and redesign court forms for clarity and usability. Lastly, Mr. Cunningham provided an update on the Legal Practitioner Pilot Program. The first examinations for the new licensees are anticipated in April 2027, with the application and character and fitness processes expected to launch in early 2027,

possibly earlier. SBM staff continue to work with SCAO and the Justice for All Commission on development of the character and fitness portal funded through a grant from the JFA.

ABA House of Delegates Appointments

The Executive Committee reviewed six Letters of Interest and presented three recommendations to the Board of Commissioners for approval.

A motion was offered and approved to reappoint Mark A. Armitage and appoint Julie I. Fershtman and Joseph P. McGill to two-year terms on the ABA House of Delegates expiring at the conclusion of the 2028 ABA Annual Meeting.

Michigan Indigent Defense Commission (MIDC) Recommendations

The Board reviewed three Letters of Interest for the MIDC vacancy.

A motion was offered and approved to forward the applications of Sofia V. Nelson, Joshua S. Goodrich, and Nathan A. Triplett to the Governor's office for consideration.

2026 SBM Officer Election Materials

The 2026 SBM election materials were shared along with the election timeline for the Secretary position for the Board of Commissioners. Letters of Intent and the completed matrix is due back to the State Bar President and Executive Director on June 9, 2026.

Reminders

Mr. Cunningham reminded Commissioners to submit travel reimbursement requests within 45 days of travel and noted that reimbursements may be donated to the Access to Justice campaign by notifying Amy Owens. He also reminded Commissioners that requests to have the State Bar President attend an event should be submitted through the Appearance Request Form which can be located at <https://www.michbar.org/president>.

Access to Justice Campaign Update

Jennifer Bentley, Executive Director of the Michigan State Bar Foundation, provided an overview of the Access to Justice Campaign. She noted that the Foundation partners with the State Bar of Michigan to support regional and statewide civil legal aid programs and that all campaign funds are distributed directly to those programs.

SBM Presentation – Access to Justice Program (ATJ)

Robert Mathis, Director of Justice Initiatives, provided an outline of the ATJ programs sharing highlights of the following initiatives:

- A Lawyer Helps
- QDRO Program
- Tax Program
- Patent Program
- Malpractice Insurance
- Appeals Self-Help Pilot Clinic
- Pro Bono Workshop
- Limited Scope Webinar Series
- Pro Bono Honor Roll

Representative Assembly (RA) Report: Nicole A. Evans, Chairperson
Chair Evans reported that the Representative Assembly was preparing for its first meeting of year with four proposals scheduled for consideration.

Ms. Evans also provided an update regarding amendments to State Bar Rule 6 governing Representative Assembly elections. The Michigan Supreme Court adopted revisions eliminating the five-signature petition requirement and expanding eligibility criteria related to residency and practice location. The Court did not modify the existing term limits, nor did the Court adopt the rule change that would have given RA members the ability to complete a term if they move mid-term from the judicial circuit that elected them.

Ms. Evans also reviewed RA award nominees for the Representative Assembly's Unsung Hero Award and congratulated Commissioner James L. Liggins for being selected to receive the Michael Franck Award in recognition of his sustained commitment to ethical practice, public service and community leadership.

Young Lawyers Section (YLS) Report: Jacob Eccleston, Chairperson

Mr. Eccleston reported that the Young Lawyers Summit was held on March 27 with attendance of over 140 people; 30 law school students and 30 speakers. He thanked the Commissioners who attended and noted that the event was well received.

He also highlighted recent outreach efforts at the University of Detroit Mercy School of Law and provided updates on upcoming YLS activities, including the 25th Annual National Trial Advocacy Competition, for which 16 teams were selected from nearly 30 applicants.

COMMISSIONER COMMITTEES

Public Policy: Erika L. Bryant, President-Elect
President-Elect Bryant provided the report for the Public Policy committee.

Court Rules

1. **ADM File No. 2024-32 – Proposed Amendment of MCR 2.410**

The proposed amendment of MCR 2.410 would explicitly allow ADR proceedings to be conducted by videoconferencing technology if such participation is appropriate under MCR 2.407

A motion was offered and seconded to support ADM File No. 2024-32. The motion was approved.

2. **ADM File No. 2023-23: Proposed Amendment of MCR 3.972**

The proposed amendment of MCR 3.972 would require the court, in child protective proceeding bench trials, to make findings of fact and conclusions of law and allow for the equivalent of an involuntary dismissal.

A motion was offered and seconded to support ADM File 2023-23 with an additional amendment that the third sentence of MCR 3.972(E) should read:

A party other than the respondent that filed the motion may request to present evidence to the court before it decides the motion, and the court must grant that request before deciding the motion.

The motion was approved.

3. **ADM File No. 2024-04: Proposed Amendment of MCR 3.981**

The proposed amendment of MCR 3.981 would require the court to advise minor PPO respondents of their right to appeal following the issuance of an order that is appealable by right and would clarify that appointment of appellate counsel in these cases is controlled by MCR 3.993(D)(5).

A motion was offered and seconded to support ADM File 2024-04 with a further amendment to the language proposed to be added to MCR 3.981 as follows:

The court must advise the respondent of their appellate rights under MCR 3.937 following the issuance of any order appealable by right, ~~and in those cases,~~ If a respondent requests the appointment of appellate counsel, the appointment of appellate counsel is controlled by MCR 3.993(D)(5).

The motion was approved.

4. **ADM File No. 2025-09: Proposed Amendment of MCR 6.610**

The proposed amendment of MCR 6.610 would clarify that defense counsel must be allowed a reasonable opportunity to attend, as part of a court-ordered presentence investigation, any presentence interview of their client.

A motion was offered and seconded to support ADM File 2025-09. The motion was approved.

5. **ADM File No. 2025-23: Proposed Amendment of MCR 7.210**

The proposed amendment of MCR 7.210 would explicitly exempt full transcripts for appeals from certain domestic relations actions.

A motion was offered and seconded to support ADM File 2025-23. The motion was approved.

Legislation

1. **HB 5445** (Wozniak) Courts: specialty courts; family division of the circuit court judgeships; modify. Amends secs. 1003, 1011, 1021 & 1023 of 1961 PA 236 (MCL 600.1003 et seq.) & adds secs. 1002 & 1012.

A motion was offered and seconded that this legislation is *Keller*-permissible. The motion was approved.

A motion was offered and supported to have the Bar oppose the legislation and provide permission to the Family Law Section and the American Indian Law Section to advocate their contrary position. The motion was approved with one abstention.

2. **SB 0885** Criminal procedure; indigent defense; parent and child legal representation commission; create. Creates new act.

A motion was offered and seconded that this legislation is *Keller*-permissible. The motion was approved.

A motion was offered and seconded to support SB 0885. The motion was approved

Strategic Planning and Engagement Committee (SPEC): Thomas H. Howlett, Vice President

Website Rebuild

Commissioner Luckenbach provided background on the State Bar's website rebuild project. Marjory Raymer, Director of Communications, presented an overview of the selected project scope, implementation plan, timeline, and budget. The project kickoff is scheduled for June 1, 2026. The board is being asked to approve the Master Services Agreement and Statement of work for approval.

A motion was offered and approved to enter into the Master Services Agreement and Statement of work for the website rebuild.

GLLC Workgroup

Secretary Larsen provided an update on plans for the Board's inaugural retreat, anticipated to be held in fall 2026. She also outlined plans for a proposed Bar Leadership Forum, a one-day leadership program for leaders of SBM sections and local and affinity bar associations during the 2026–2027 bar year.

Based on completion of its assigned work, the Great Lakes Legal Conference (GLLC) Workgroup recommended that the workgroup be dissolved.

A motion was offered and approved to authorize planning the 2026-2027 one-day Bar leadership event and to disband the GLLC Workgroup.

Partner Programs

Ms. Robin Eagleson, Director of Lawyer Services, presented a new partner program with Enterprise Car Rental explaining discounts that will be offered through Enterprise, Alamo and National Car Rental. The program would supplement the existing Avis partnership and generate additional non-dues revenue through a royalty-sharing arrangement.

A motion was offered and approved to accept Enterprise as a partner program of the State Bar of Michigan pending General Counsel review of the contract and finalization. The motion was seconded and approved.

SBM Awards

Ms. Eagleson presented the recommendations from the Strategic Planning and Engagement Committee for the following awards:

- Roberts P. Hudson Award – No award recommended.
- Frank J. Kelley Distinguished Public Service Award – Hon. Christopher P. Yates; Hon. David Murkowski
- Champion of Justice Award – Dorothy Dean; David M. Honigman
- Kimberley M. Cahill Bar Leadership Award – Black Women Lawyers Association of Michigan; Dennis J. Clark; Jerjuan A. Howard (Umoja Debate League)
- John W. Reed Michigan Lawyer Legacy Award – Leonard Niehoff
- 2026 John W. Cumiskey Award – Russell Abrutyn

A motion was offered and approved for the recommendations presented of the below listed awards. The motion was seconded and approved. Commissioner Mantese abstained from voting on the Champion of Justice Award recommendation for David M. Honigman due to a disclosed professional relationship.

Finance and Audit: David C. Anderson, Treasurer

Treasurer Anderson reviewed the financial results through the reporting period, noting that revenues and expenses were favorable to budget, resulting in an overall positive variance of approximately \$900,000.

Mr. Cunningham reviewed membership trends, noting continued growth in emeritus and 50-year membership categories and a decline in paying members. He reported that paying membership has decreased by approximately 245 members compared to the prior year and by more than 1,500 members since 2022. Despite these trends, new attorney admissions continue to recover following the COVID-19 pandemic, and membership revenues are outperforming budget projections.

Budget amendments

Treasurer Anderson presented a budget amendment of \$175,000 to begin the rebuild of the website, with remaining costs to be incorporated into future budgets

A motion was offered and approved for a budget amendment of \$175,000 for the website rebuild.

Mr. Cunningham also presented a budget amendment of \$174,202 for building maintenance and infrastructure improvements, including HVAC, electrical, and related systems. He noted that staff are developing a long-term facilities maintenance plan intended to reduce the need for future budget amendments of this nature.

A motion was offered and approved for a budget amendment of \$174,202 for the building improvements.

Professional Standards: Suzanne C. Larsen, Secretary

Secretary Larsen indicated she had no new items to report as they were approved on the consent agenda.

FOR THE GOOD OF THE PUBLIC AND THE PROFESSION

Comments or questions from Commissioners

Vice President Howlett emphasized the importance of the Michigan Legal Milestones program in highlighting the role of the legal profession and promoting public understanding of the rule of law. He encouraged Commissioners to attend Legal Milestones events and expressed pride in the State Bar's continued support of the program.

Commissioner Mantese invited Commissioners to attend the Business Law Section symposium on May 7.

Comments or questions from the public

None.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 1:01 p.m.