

# Ombudsman for the Eastern District of Michigan

George J. Bedrosian was recently appointed by Chief Judge Bernard A. Friedman of the Eastern District of Michigan as the district's first ombudsman. Chief Judge Friedman administered the oath of office to Mr. Bedrosian on February 22, 2005, at a Federal Bar Association luncheon. Mr. Bedrosian's outstanding reputation and his diverse career experiences made him well-suited to fill the position. The Eastern District of Michigan is the eighth largest federal court in the nation. It has court facilities in Detroit, Flint, Ann Arbor, Port Huron, and Bay City.

Born in Detroit, Mr. Bedrosian practices law just a few miles from where he grew up. He is a graduate of Wayne State University Law School and has served as a member of the Board of Visitors of his alma mater. Mr. Bedrosian was a partner in the firm of Goodman, Eden, Millender & Bedrosian for over 35 years. Currently, Mr. Bedrosian is actively involved in alternative dispute resolution, including facilitation, mediation, and arbitration. Mr. Bedrosian has served as president of the Michigan Trial Lawyers Association, chairman of the State Bar of Michigan Negligence Law Section, and chairman of the State of Michigan Attorney Grievance Commission, to name just a few on the long list of his past leadership positions involving the administration of justice. In addition, Mr. Bedrosian is a Fellow of the International Academy of Trial Lawyers and a Fellow of the American College of Trial Lawyers, and he serves on the executive committee of the board of directors of the Detroit Symphony Orchestra. Woodward White has recognized Mr. Bedrosian in all of its published editions of *The Best Lawyers in America*.

In announcing the appointment, Chief Judge Friedman stated: "The degree of respect that the bench and bar have for Mr.

Bedrosian, along with his outstanding reputation, will enable him to function as ombudsman with the support and cooperation of all."

Attorneys who know or work with Mr. Bedrosian also attest that he clearly embodies the ideals of the quintessential ombudsman: one who can and will act in a confidential, neutral, independent, ethical, and professional manner.<sup>1</sup> Julia Caroff Pidgeon, president of the Federal Bar Association, Eastern District of Michigan Chapter, states: "In George Bedrosian [the bench] has chosen a gracious man, someone who is highly respected by his peers. Practitioners would know that he has the sensitivity to listen to their concerns and whose guidance will be respected."

The purpose of the ombudsman position is to provide a discrete forum for the informal resolution of issues in matters in which there is no other established procedure for redress. The ombudsman will serve as a neutral, vested with the authority to act as an intermediary between attorneys and judicial officers.

As the district court's ombudsman, Mr. Bedrosian will listen to any issues and grievances presented to him, determine whether they come within his charge, and decide what action is appropriate in an attempt to resolve the situation. U.S. District Judge Victoria A. Roberts, a former partner of Bedrosian's, states: "He has a tremendous amount of wisdom, good judgment, and fairness, and he is particularly attuned to all sides of a situation. He is well-suited to bring resolution to a problem."

Implicit in the decision to appoint an ombudsman was the recognition that concerns may arise during litigation that the parties or the court would like to resolve informally. Although such circumstances may be rare in the Eastern District of Michigan, Chief Judge Friedman believes that an intermediary who is vested with the authority to address practi-



*George J. Bedrosian, ombudsman for the Eastern District of Michigan*

tioner and judicial concerns will further promote the high standards of the practice of law within the district.

Dennis M. Barnes, immediate past president of the Federal Bar Association, Eastern District of Michigan Chapter, states that appointing an ombudsman "is a sign of the great relationship between the bench and the bar and a testament of that healthy relationship."

Mr. Bedrosian will serve as ombudsman for the Eastern District of Michigan indefinitely, and the position will be reviewed periodically. He has agreed to serve in this capacity without compensation. In a show of support for this new position, the officers of the Federal Bar Association, Eastern District of Michigan Chapter, have asked Mr. Bedrosian to be an ex-officio member of their board. In this capacity, he is welcome to attend all bench-bar and board meetings.

As the Eastern District of Michigan's first ombudsman, Mr. Bedrosian will have evolving duties. The ombudsman does not actively seek complaints or issues. Instead, when a practitioner or a judge within the Eastern District encounters a problem or has a concern, he or she may contact Mr. Bedrosian. Conversations with the ombudsman are privileged and confidential. According to Mr.

## George J. Bedrosian

Partner—Goodman, Eden, Millender & Bedrosian (1963–1998)

Fellow—International Academy of Trial Lawyers

Member—Board of Directors  
(1986–1992, 1994–1997,  
2000–2003)

Secretary-Treasurer (1998–2000)

Fellow—American College of Trial Lawyers

Advocate—American Board of Trial Advocates

Past President—Michigan Trial Lawyers Association

Past Chairman—State Bar of Michigan Negligence Law Section

Past Chairman—State of Michigan Attorney Grievance Commission

Past Member, Board of Directors—Detroit Metropolitan Bar Association

Past Member—Michigan Supreme Court Committee on Standard Jury Instructions—Civil (1975–2001)

Past Member—Advisory Council, American Arbitration Association Accident Claims Committee

Past Member, Board of Visitors—Wayne State University Law School

Master of the Bench Emeritus—American Inn of Court XI University of Detroit Mercy

Case Evaluator (neutral)—Wayne County Mediation Tribunal

Detroit Metropolitan Bar Association Nathan B. Goodnow President's Award (1997)

an issue can be appropriately addressed by him as ombudsman. Each situation presented to the ombudsman is unique and calls for distinct determinations and procedures. For example, if a party approaches the ombudsman with litigation concerns and the matter requires further inquiry, the ombudsman communicates with counsel for all parties to inform them that he intends to investigate the issue, which may include contacting the court. In that instance, the ombudsman's goal is to avoid ex parte communication and to achieve full disclosure only to the extent necessary to avoid the appearance of impropriety.

The United States District Court for the District of Delaware has maintained two ombudsmen since 1997, the only other federal court with an ombudsman program. Like the Eastern District of Michigan, the District of Delaware's bench believes that "those who litigate before them should have the option of remaining anonymous while trying to resolve certain sensitive issues."<sup>2</sup>

Within the United States, ombudsmen are used in state and local government agencies. However, ombudsmen are not limited to the public sector. Within the private sector, ombudsmen can be found in corporations, universities, and nonprofit organizations. Ombudsmen are common in European governments. In fact, the term ombudsman is of

Swedish origin, and it literally means "representative." In French-speaking nations, the term for ombudsman means "mediator of the republic," and in South Africa the term "public protector" is used for the ombudsman. The terms clarify the ombudsman's position here in the Eastern District of Michigan. Ultimately, Mr. Bedrosian's neutral non-partisan status renders him the representative for all attorneys and judges involved in litigation in the Eastern District of Michigan.

As State Bar of Michigan President Thomas W. Cranmer attests, there is no doubt that the establishment of the ombudsman position "will only enhance and strengthen the good working relationship" between the bench and the bar in the Eastern District of Michigan.

Ombudsman Bedrosian can be reached at 2810 Cadillac Tower, Detroit, MI 48226, (313) 965-6250, gjbaw@aol.com. ♦

*The Michigan Bar Journal acknowledges the contributions of Chief Judge Bernard A. Friedman and Greta A. Jacobs, former law clerk to Chief Judge Friedman, to this article.*

### FOOTNOTES

1. The Ombudsman Association, available at <http://www.ombuds-toa.org> (last modified July 2, 2005).
2. Federal Court Management Report (July/August 2004) available at <http://jnet.ao.dcn/library/fcmr/webfcmr0704/accessibile/index.html>.

Bedrosian himself, "The confidential nature of my position is of paramount importance." In fact, Mr. Bedrosian takes every precaution to maintain confidentiality. He does not keep written notes of his conversations or any information disclosed to him as ombudsman. However, he does maintain records for statistical purposes. Specifically, Mr. Bedrosian tracks the nature of each issue presented to him and the amount of time he spends in his capacity as ombudsman to determine the amount of time the voluntary role requires.

The ombudsman's first duty is to act as a "screen." The bench has entrusted Mr. Bedrosian with the discretion to determine whether