

# Online Sources for District Court Information

Michigan's district courts have a unique place in the Michigan court system. Not only are the district courts some of the busiest courts in the state, they represent the primary contact between the Michigan court system and the average citizen. As noted on the Michigan Courts website: "Citizens have more contact with the district court than any other court in the state."<sup>1</sup> Despite the district courts' high visibility, access to court information such as court addresses, forms, and court rules, has historically been accessible through a variety of cumbersome print sources. Fortunately for the practitioner, more district court information and resources are being made available via the Internet, free of charge. This article will discuss various sources of online district court information, including forms, court rules, and contact information for the courts.

## Forms

The most common forms used in the district courts are prepared and approved by the Michigan State Court Administrative Office (SCAO Forms). A two-volume print version of the forms is published annually, and an online version of the forms is available at the Michigan Courts website, <http://www.courts.michigan.gov/scao/courtforms>. The State Court Administrative Office is responsible for the online version of the forms and has gone to great lengths to make the forms readily accessible, current, and easy to use. The website includes the SCAO forms, recent revisions to the forms, and numerical indexes. The actual forms are organized by subject and are available on the website in PDF format. Forms must be viewed using Adobe Acrobat Reader, which can be downloaded from the web for free. The Michigan Courts website provides a link for easy downloading. You should note that the forms may be filled

out and printed while online, however if you would like to save a completed version of a form, you will have to purchase Adobe's Acrobat Approval software. Further instructions on using and manipulating the forms are available on the court's website.

A specialized source for forms is the Tenants and Landlords guide, which is posted in PDF format on the Michigan Legislature website, <http://www.michiganlegislature.org/mileg.asp?Page=Publications>. Although the guide is designed for non-lawyers, it includes forms, sample lease agreements, and other materials that might be useful for practitioners.

## Court Rules

Full text versions of the Michigan Court Rules, Local Court Rules, and other rules are available online at the Michigan Courts website, <http://courtofappeals.mijud.net/rules/public/default.asp>. The rules are organized numerically and a linked table of contents is available for navigating the website. One advantage that the online version has over the print version is that it is regularly updated, and the most recent revision date is listed at the end of each rule.

Although the court rules are updated on a regular basis, it is often necessary to monitor proposed, new, and amended rules. The Internet does a wonderful job facilitating this process. Two excellent websites for tracking changes to the court rules are the Michigan Courts website and the Institute for Continuing Legal Education (ICLE) website. The Michigan Courts website for Rule Amendments and Administrative Orders is located at <http://courts.michigan.gov/supremecourt/Resources/Administrative/index.htm>. It includes rule amendments, administrative orders, proposed rule amendments, and other actions. The rule amendments are organized by date, which makes it somewhat difficult to find an amendment if you only know the rule number. However, by using a find search

(control F) you may search for the rule number wherever it is listed on the web page. Administrative orders and proposed amendments are organized by order number, and the amendments include detailed information on the status of proposed rule changes.

The Institute for Continuing Legal Education provides complete online access to the court rules for a fee through ICLE's partnership subscription service. Free access is available for new, amended, and proposed rules through ICLE's website, <http://www.icle.org/michlaw/>. This website also offers some alternative search features that are not available on the Michigan Courts website. For instance, you may browse amendments by date or by rule number.

## Contact Information

The *Michigan Bar Journal* directory issue is the primary print source for finding district court contact information such as names, addresses, and phone numbers. The *Bar Journal* directory is relatively easy to use, however the Internet does have some advantages over the print directory. First, there are several websites that include district court contact information and many of these sites allow you to search for information using various search criteria. Additionally, most of these websites contain additional information, such as descriptions of the district courts system, articles, and other news about the courts. Finally, many of the district courts have their own websites, which can be accessed directly, or through links from the websites discussed below.

The Michigan Courts website includes directory information, and links to many of the individual district court websites. The main website is located at <http://courts.michigan.gov/trialcourts/trial.htm#toplist>, and from here you can link to the "Trial Court Directory" and the "Local Trial Courts Links" web page. The Trial Court Directory has circuit,

district, and probate court information and is organized by county. The "Local Trial Courts Links" web page is organized by type of court, and the district courts are then organized by numeric designation. Not all district courts have their own websites, so some district courts are not included on this page.

Another excellent website for locating district court contact information is the Michigan District Court Judges Association, <http://www.mdja.org/>. This website includes an overview of Michigan's district courts, articles about the district courts, Frequently Asked Questions, and an online directory of judges and courts. To use the online directory, click on the link titled "Find Your Local District Judge and Court." There are two ways to find contact information on this web page: browsing and searching. The browse function allows you to scroll through a list of judge's names or a list of courts, while the search function allows you to search for information using various search criteria such as: judge's last name, city or zip code, and court.

Two other websites worth mentioning for contact information are the *Michigan Lawyers Weekly* website, <http://www.michlaw.com/mibar.htm#court>, and the State Bar of Michigan's Online Membership directory, <http://www.michbar.org/member/content.html>.

The Internet is certainly changing the way legal practitioners conduct business and this is especially true for those individuals who practice primarily in the Michigan district courts. While print sources will always be an option, the Internet is an excellent alternative for free and reliable access to Michigan district court information. ♦

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#### FOOTNOTE

1. Michigan Courts: Trial Courts at <http://courts.michigan.gov/trialcourts/trial.htm#district>.