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# Family Law Institute

The Place to Connect in Michigan Family Law

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# The **Place to Connect** in Michigan Family Law

Join 500+ members of Michigan’s family law community under one roof! You won’t find networking like it anywhere else—the priceless connections alone are well worth two days out of the office.

This year, hear from more judges, in more counties—including what they want to see in the courtroom, from settlement conferences to motion practice.

## The all-star judicial faculty answers questions such as:

- What is the court’s view on remedies and sanctions when orders and rules are not followed?
- What do judges want you to include in your attorney fee motions?
- What are widely believed assumptions on child support and paternity that are actually wrong?
- How can courts provide support for families in crisis in cases involving reunification therapy?
- How might the court view both common and unique provisions for pre- and postnuptial agreements?



**Hon. Janice K. Cunningham,**  
56th Circuit Court

## You Asked, We Answered

**“Worth the price  
of admission.”**

Judge Cunningham’s caselaw update gets rave reviews every year—and due to popular demand, its time slot has been extended. Don’t miss this chance to hear from one of our most popular speakers and one of the most respected members of Michigan’s judiciary.

# Interact with **13 Judges** from Across the State



Hon. Melissa A. Cox  
3rd Circuit Court



Hon. Brittany Dicken  
10th Circuit Court



Hon. Maureen A. Gottlieb  
17th Circuit Court



Hon. Maureen H. Kinsella  
6th Circuit Court



Hon. Paul F. Kraus  
20th Circuit Court



Hon. Anthony J. McDowell  
7th Circuit Court



Hon. Debra L. McNabb  
17th Circuit Court



Hon. Michelle M. Rick  
Michigan Court of Appeals



Hon. Laurie N. Savin  
6th Circuit Court



Hon. Amanda J. Shelton  
6th Circuit Court



Hon. Carla G. Testani  
3rd Circuit Court



Hon. Brian K. Zahra  
Michigan Supreme Court

## PLATINUM SPONSORS



# The Hottest Issues, Covered by Top Michigan Practitioners

Veteran lawyers you know and trust share their insights on tricky topics—plus the issues you need to tackle every day.

## Featured Speakers

11:15am/Thursday

### Questioning Parental Alienation and Reunification Therapy

What is reunification therapy and how does it work? Why is the parental alienation classification so controversial? Apply advice from a therapist who's been in the trenches. Learn how to support families in conflict by understanding current thinking and research, as well as the various roles involved.



Connie R. Thacker  
Thacker Sleight, *Grand Rapids*

1:30pm/Thursday

### Drafting and Litigating Pre- and Postnuptial Agreements

Pre- and postnuptial agreements are increasingly common. Get the latest thinking and practical strategies for advising clients and drafting clear agreements right from the start. Understand enforceability and how to litigate agreements—no matter which side you represent.



Jennie Boldish Bryan  
McShane & Bowie PLC, *Grand Rapids*

2:40pm/Thursday

### Effective Depositions in Family Law

Master the art of depositions step by step, from proper preparation to execution to follow-up. Get techniques for handling even the most difficult witnesses. Identify when taking a deposition is the best option and will yield the best results for your clients.



J. Matthew Catchick Jr.  
Catchick Law PC, *Bloomfield Hills*

4:25pm/Thursday

### Overcoming Complex Retirement Plan Division Issues

Struggling with QDROs and retirement division in general? You're not alone. This session covers it all: how to handle annuities, military pensions, traditional IRAs, and more. Know what to consider regarding negotiations and get critical language to use in your judgments.



Sharee Burkel  
The QDRO Company LLC, *Chelsea*



# New to Family Law? **See and Be Seen** at This Event

Nothing beats in-person networking. Connect with 500+ of your peers and forge lasting relationships. Meet newer lawyers like yourself, and rub elbows with judges, experienced practitioners, FOC referees, and more.

## **Schedule Highlights for Newer Lawyers**

Get practical, how-to content in the Family Law Foundations Track. Nowhere else can you get these types of expert tips you can immediately use in your practice.



11:30am/Thursday

## **Getting What You Want in Motions and Hearings**

Get the judge to grant your motion—no matter the issue—and explore arguments that judges find persuasive.

1:30pm/Thursday

## **Techniques for Proving Your Case on Direct and Cross-Examination**

Master the key elements of building credibility, from crafting the right questions to navigating objections.

2:40pm/Thursday

## **Ultimate Primer on Financials in Divorce**

Confidently handle common divorce assets: vacation homes, stock options, collectibles, vehicles, and more.

# The Hottest Issues, Covered by Judges

In addition to Judge Cunningham’s perennially popular caselaw update, you won’t want to miss hearing straight from the bench in these key sessions.



## Sessions by Judges, for Lawyers

4:25pm/Thursday

### Myth-Busting with Judge Anthony McDowell

Judge McDowell, also a former FOC, gives you a behind-the-curtain look at common—but erroneous—assumptions on a wide range of topics. Get your questions answered on child support and state aid, establishment of paternity, and more. Even experienced practitioners won’t want to miss this.

9:00am/Friday

### Family Law Judges Panel

Appellate and circuit court judges from across the state share what they want to see in their courtrooms, from settlement conferences to motion practice. Get answers to questions about rules of evidence—and more. Hear from Judges Cox, Dicken, Kraus, and Rick.



## Sessions by Judges, for Judges

1:30pm/Thursday

### Elevating Professionalism and Civility in Family Law

Get strategies for when things get uncomfortable. Explore various scenarios, cast your vote, and get the recommended best course of action from an esteemed panel straight from the SBM’s Special Committee on Professionalism and Civility. It’s also a perfect opportunity to earn MCJE credits.

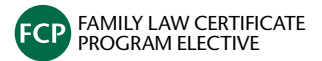
2:40pm/Thursday

### Mental Health Hearings: A Tool Kit for Judges and Lawyers

Navigate tricky issues like substance abuse and trauma. Get guidance on conducting a hearing or ordering treatment. What happens if the family can’t afford to hire a therapist? Includes insights from Richard C. Wooten, a psychologist who works extensively with family law courts involving mental health issues.

# Agenda

CLE: 8.75 MCJE: 8.75 LEVEL: Basic/Intermediate/Advanced



## THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 20, 2025

- 8:00am Registration, Continental Breakfast, and Vendor Showcase
- 9:00am Welcome, Introductions, and Section Update
- 9:25am Domestic Relations Caselaw and Statutory Update with Analysis
- 11:00am Networking Break
- 11:15am Questioning Parental Alienation and Reunification Therapy
- 12:15pm Networking Lunch

	<b>Family Law Foundations Track</b>	<b>Intermediate/Advanced Track</b>	<b>Bench and Bar Track</b>
1:30pm	Techniques for Proving Your Case on Direct and Cross-Examination	Drafting and Litigating Pre- and Postnuptial Agreements	Elevating Professionalism and Civility in Family Law
2:40pm	Ultimate Primer on Financials in Divorce	Effective Depositions in Family Law	Mental Health Hearings: A Tool Kit for Judges and Lawyers
3:20pm	Networking Break		
3:35pm	The Domestic Relations Verified Financial Form (VFIF)	How to Use Parenting Time Guidelines to Fit Families' Needs	The Court's View on Remedies and Sanctions When Orders and Rules Are Not Followed
4:25pm	Myth-Busting with Judge Anthony McDowell	Overcoming Complex Retirement Plan Division Issues	Best Practices for Obtaining Attorney Fees
5:10pm	Family Law Town Hall		
5:40pm	Networking Reception		

## FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 21, 2025

- 8:00am Registration, Continental Breakfast, and Vendor Showcase
- 9:00am Family Law Judges Panel

	<b>Family Law Foundations Track</b>	<b>Financial Track</b>	<b>Intersection of Family Law Track</b>
10:25am	Don't Lose Sleep Over a Mistake—Fix It!	Top 10 Mistakes in Business Valuation	Family Law and Estate Planning: What Every Practitioner Should Know
11:15am	Networking Break		
11:30am	Getting What You Want in Motions and Hearings	Income for Support: Hot Topics and Tips	Divorce and the Marital Home: Legal, Lending, and Listing Perspectives

## Tracks

### Plenary Sessions

8:00am/Thursday & Friday

#### Registration, Continental Breakfast, and Vendor Showcase

9:00am/Thursday

#### Welcome, Introductions, and Section Update

Hear from the chair-elect of the Family Law Section of the State Bar of Michigan.

Donald C. Wheaton, Jr., Wheaton Law, *Saint Clair Shores*

9:25am/Thursday

#### Domestic Relations Caselaw and Statutory Update with Analysis

The Hon. Janice K. Cunningham returns with her expert analysis of recent court decisions and legislative enactments.

Hon. Janice K. Cunningham, 56th Circuit Court, *Charlotte*

11:15am/Thursday

#### Questioning Parental Alienation and Reunification Therapy

Join us for a thoughtful discussion on the intersection of reunification therapy and the pitfalls of the parental alienation classification. Hear about research on the deficits of the current reunification model, including therapist bias and possible harm to the children. Explore the complex and interwoven roles of the therapist, lawyer, judge, parent, and child, and take away best practices and alternative approaches to supporting families in conflict.

Hon. Maureen A. Gottlieb, 17th Circuit Court, *Grand Rapids*; Merrill E. Graham, Merrill E. Graham PhD LMSW RPT, *Grand Rapids*; Allison E. Sleight, Thacker Sleight, *Grand Rapids*; Connie R. Thacker, Thacker Sleight, *Grand Rapids*

5:10pm/Thursday

#### Family Law Town Hall

Select faculty members lead an interactive discussion of new developments, statewide and local trends, and up-to-the-minute practice strategies in this freewheeling session. Get in on the discussion and get your questions answered.

Shon A. Cook, Tabono Law, *Muskegon*; Peter M. Kulas-Dominguez, 17th Circuit Court, *Grand Rapids*; Hon. Carla G. Testani, 3rd Circuit Court, *Detroit*

9:00am/Friday

#### Family Law Judges Panel

In this practical and interactive session, hear what judges from across the state want to see in their courtroom. From Zoom hearings to motions to settlement conferences and more, take away best practices to ensure the best possible outcome for your clients. Hear about common mistakes made in the courtroom and get answers to questions about

pleadings, persuasive arguments, and rules of evidence.

Hon. Melissa A. Cox, 3rd Circuit Court, *Detroit*; Hon. Brittany Dicken, 10th Circuit Court, *Saginaw*; Hon. Paul F. Kraus, 20th Circuit Court, *Grand Haven*; Hon. Michelle M. Rick, Michigan Court of Appeals, *Lansing*; Donald C. Wheaton, Jr., Wheaton Law, *Saint Clair Shores*

### Family Law Foundations Track

1:30pm/Thursday

#### Techniques for Proving Your Case on Direct and Cross-Examination

Master the fundamentals of building credibility on direct and scoring critical points on cross with this practical session. Learn the principles, strategies, and techniques that drive compelling examinations and get results. Walk away with tips you can use today—crafting questions, handling friendly and difficult witnesses, and navigating evidentiary foundations and objections. Make your case with confidence in the courtroom.

David C. Sarnacki, The Sarnacki Law Firm PLC, *Grand Rapids*

2:40pm/Thursday

#### Ultimate Primer on Financials in Divorce

A family's assets can include the family home, vacation homes, rental properties, different types of retirement accounts, stocks, stock options, collectibles, vehicles, and more. Get critical techniques impacting valuation, negotiation, tax consequences, and the unique aspects of these important considerations in divorce. Gain best practices and avoid pitfalls so you can handle these complicated assets with confidence.

Jason E. Bodmer, Bodmer Price, *Bloomfield Hills*; Karen S. Sendelbach, Nichols Sacks Slank Sendelbach Buiteweg & Solomon PC, *Ann Arbor*

3:35pm/Thursday

#### The Domestic Relations Verified Financial Form (VFIF)

Take a deep dive analysis into the VFIF and launch this valuable discovery weapon. Obtain critical client cooperation and learn to draft a Demand for Supplementation of the VFIF. Insist upon mandatory production of required documents, analyze MCR 3.206, and take concrete steps to effectively use the VFIF and your Demand for Supplementation at deposition or trial.

James J. Harrington, III, Harrington Law PLC, *Novi*

### SAVE MORE WITH ICLE

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Learn more: [www.icle.org/cna](http://www.icle.org/cna)

4:25pm/Thursday

### Myth-Busting with Judge Anthony McDowell

Perfect for new lawyers and experienced practitioners alike. Go behind the curtain of court administration to uncover common, but erroneous, assumptions lawyers make involving things like child support and state aid, establishment of paternity, UCCJEA jurisdictional issues, and more. Judge McDowell answers your questions and provides guidance and tips to improve your advocacy and ensure you are providing accurate advice to your clients.

Hon. Anthony J. McDowell, 7th Circuit Court, *Flint*

10:25pm/Friday

### Don't Lose Sleep Over a Mistake—Fix It!

Did you make a mistake in the trial court? Don't fear. Let's help you come up with ways to fix it. This session will address court rules, statutes, and other tools to fix mistakes in pleadings, forms, and documents so you can put your best foot forward.

Shon A. Cook, Tabono Law, *Muskegon*; Liisa R. Speaker, Speaker Law Firm PLLC, *Lansing*

11:30pm/Friday

### Getting What You Want in Motions and Hearings

Get a custom road map for getting results in your next motion. Learn how to identify and cite the authority that allows the judge to grant your motion, no matter what the issue. Understand what key facts to include in your motions and how to distinguish bad law from your case. Plus, get tips for arguing your position during motion hearings and explore the kinds of arguments judges find persuasive.

Roquia Draper, Warner Norcross + Judd LLP, *Bloomfield Hills*; Hon. Amanda J. Shelton, 6th Circuit Court, *Pontiac*

## Intermediate/Advanced Track

1:30pm/Thursday

### Drafting and Litigating Pre- and Postnuptial Agreements

In a culture where prenuptial and postnuptial agreements are increasingly common, get practical strategies for advising clients, drafting clear agreements, and anticipating problems. With input from the bench, learn the common issues presented and how the court might view routine as well as unique provisions. Examine enforceability of these agreements and get tips for litigating agreements no matter what side you represent.

Jennie Boldish Bryan, McShane & Bowie PLC, *Grand Rapids*; Hon. Deborah L. McNabb, 17th Circuit Court, *Grand Rapids*

2:40pm/Thursday

### Effective Depositions in Family Law

While often underutilized, a well-thought-out and orchestrated deposition can yield huge results. Master

## Moderators



**Intermediate/Advanced Track**

Jennie Boldish Bryan

McShane & Bowie PLC, *Grand Rapids*



**Family Law Foundations Track**

Roquia Draper

Warner Norcross + Judd LLP, *Bloomfield Hills*



**Bench and Bar Track**

Sahera G. Housey

Oakland County Friend of the Court, *Pontiac*



**Intersection of Family Law**

Blair M. Johnson

Blair Law PLLC, *Saint Joseph*



**Financial Track**

Eric Larson

Doeren Mayhew, *Grand Rapids*



**Family Law Foundations Track**

Karen S. Sendelbach

Nichols Sacks Slank Sendelbach  
Buiteweg & Solomon PC, *Ann Arbor*



**Plenary Session**

Donald C. Wheaton, Jr.

Wheaton Law, *Saint Clair Shores*

## Tracks

the art of successful deposition taking, including proper preparation, execution and follow-up. Learn techniques to solicit information from even the most difficult witnesses and identify the kinds of cases where taking a deposition just might be your best discovery tool.

J. Matthew Catchick, Jr., Catchick Law PC, *Bloomfield Hills*; Jorin G. Rubin, Rubin Frampton, *Birmingham*

3:35pm/Thursday

### How to Use Parenting Time Guidelines to Fit Families' Needs

Get an overview of the major Michigan Parenting Time Guideline changes from 2021, including many important, but lesser known additions. Determine how guidelines best assist families—whether being implemented by a lawyer, referee, or judge—and understand how they help avoid common pitfalls. Review local guidelines to understand similarities and differences with the state guideline. Walk away with tangible tips to incorporate into your practice.

Amy Lindholm, Michigan State Friend of the Court Bureau, *Lansing*; Traci L. Schenkel, Kent County Friend of the Court, *Grand Rapids*

4:25pm/Thursday

### Overcoming Complex Retirement Plan Division Issues

Master the complexities of retirement plan division with practical tools and insights. Delve into issues like gains and losses, pay status, public versus private plans, annuities, military pensions, and more. Understand the considerations for negotiating retirement division and critical language to include in your judgments. From traditional IRAs to defined contribution plans, this session covers it all.

Sharee Burkel, The QDRO Company LLC, *Chelsea*; Ryan M. Kelly, Kelly & Kelly PC, *Northville*

## Bench and Bar Track

1:30pm/Thursday

### Elevating Professionalism and Civility in Family Law

Hear straight from members of the SBM's Special Committee

“ I don't think there is another conference that I have ever attended that gives me so much in such a short period of time. ”

-Shon A. Cook, Tabono Law, *Muskegon*

on Professionalism and Civility, including Hon. Brian K. Zahra, in this interactive session. Take away concrete guidance on integrity and appropriate demeanor in family law matters. Get strategies you can use right away: managing courtroom interactions, diffusing tense proceedings, and ensuring respectful communication with colleagues, clients, and the public. Walk away with best practices to enhance the legal profession while strengthening public confidence in the judicial process.

Hon. Paul F. Kraus (moderator), 20th Circuit Court, *Grand Haven*; Sahera G. Housey, Oakland County Friend of the Court, *Pontiac*; Kyle J. Quinn, McShane & Bowie PLC, *Grand Rapids*; Joan P. Vestrand, Cooley Law School, *Lansing*; Hon. Brian K. Zahra, Michigan Supreme Court, *Lansing*

2:40pm/Thursday

### Mental Health Hearings: A Tool Kit for Judges and Lawyers

Family law judges, referees, and lawyers frequently find themselves navigating the issues of medication misuse, substance abuse, trauma, and/or other mental health issues—but often without guidance on conducting a hearing or ordering treatment. Hear from experts in the field and take away resources to assist in discovery, examination of witnesses, etc., to effectively obtain critical information in these difficult cases. Plus, get specific guidance on what testing and therapies are appropriate to order and when.

Sean A. Blume, Blume Law Group PLLC, *Sterling Heights*; Michelle M. Letourneau-McAvoy, Oakland County Friend of the Court, *Pontiac*; Hon. Carla G. Testani, 3rd Circuit Court, *Detroit*; Richard W. Wooten, Matrix Psychological Consulting LLC, *Southfield*

3:35pm/Thursday

### The Court's View on Remedies and Sanctions When Orders and Rules Are Not Followed

What can or should you do when the other side is not abiding by procedural court orders or court rules? Explore judicial approaches to handling procedural noncompliance in family law cases. Understand the lawyer's role in providing caselaw or court rule authority for addressing the opposing party's failure to abide by court directives, including possible motions to compel or sanctions. Plus, get best practices for effective communication with opposing counsel and guidance on when it may be appropriate to communicate with the court.

Elizabeth K. Bransdorfer, Mika Meyers PLC, *Grand Rapids*; Peter M. Kulas-Dominguez, 17th Circuit Court, *Grand Rapids*; Hon. Lorie N. Savin, 6th Circuit Court, *Pontiac*

4:25pm/Thursday

### Best Practices for Obtaining Attorney Fees

ive into the strategies, tactics, and best practices that allow for successfully securing attorney fees from the opposing party, including fees as sanctions. Determine the legal authority for and under what circumstances attorney fees can be granted and glean

exactly what judges want you to include and not include in your attorney fees motions. Plus, take away tips for oral argument.

James W. Chryssikos, James Chryssikos Law Firm PLLC, *Troy*; Hon. Maureen H. Kinsella, 6th Circuit Court, *Pontiac*

## Financial Track

10:25am/Friday

### Top 10 Mistakes in Business Valuation

Get a primer on the most common mistakes found in business valuation while also exploring the foundational aspects of a business valuation from experts in the trenches. Learn to identify concerns or problems in both your expert's business valuation as well as the valuations of an opposing expert.

Brian M. Bakker, Stout, *Grand Rapids*; Eric Larson, Doeren Mayhew, *Grand Rapids*

11:30am/Friday

### Income for Support: Hot Topics and Tips

Get a roundup of the latest and greatest tips from financial experts and judges about income for support, including the 2025 changes to the child support manual.

Benjamin I.S. Bershadt, Bershadt Valuation Consulting LLC, *West Bloomfield*; Michelle F. Gallagher, Adamy Valuation, *Lansing*

## Intersection of Family Law Track

10:25am/Friday

### Family Law and Estate Planning: What Every Practitioner Should Know

Step outside your comfort zone to an area that often impacts counsel, clients, and their families—before, during, and after a divorce proceeding. Explore the use and analysis of estate planning documents with emphasis on trust instruments and the need for new documents and revocations as a result of divorce.

Dawn M. Schluter, Schluter & Hughes Law Firm PLLC, *Bloomfield Hills*

11:30am/Friday

### Divorce and the Marital Home: Legal, Lending, and Listing Perspectives

Resolving the dispute around the marital home during divorce is a familiar challenge. What may often be overlooked is how to sell or refinance, and that often requires clients to engage third parties—lenders, mortgage brokers, appraisers, or real estate agents. Hear from a loan officer and listing agent about items to consider in negotiations involving the marital home. Get best practices from a family law lawyer on counseling clients and drafting documents to maximize return on this primary asset.

Carri Goldring, Union Home Mortgage, *Berkley*; Blair M. Johnson, Blair Law PLLC, *Saint Joseph*; Amy Osterbeck, Keller Williams, *Birmingham*

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24TH ANNUAL

# Family Law Institute

NOVEMBER 20–21, 2025

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- \$195 New Lawyer (Not yet reached 4th anniversary date of MI Bar admission)
- \$395 per Registrant (4+ Registrants from the Same Firm)<sup>1</sup>
- FREE Judges (Limit 40, must attend in person)<sup>2</sup>
- \$115 Referees and Friends of the Court (Limit 40, 5 per office)<sup>3</sup>

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### C. Materials Format for Institute Registrants | Pick One

- FREE Electronic Materials
- \$45 Print Handbook<sup>4</sup> and Electronic Materials

### D. Can't Attend the Institute?

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- \$225 Non-ICLE Partners
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Accommodations: A discounted block of rooms has been reserved at The Hyatt Place in Novi under group code G-ICL5. Visit [www.icle.org/family/hotel](http://www.icle.org/family/hotel) or call 800-233-1234 to reserve a room. Reservations must be made by 10/19/25. Registrants are responsible for their own hotel expenses.