



# FBAnewsletter

Federal Bar Association - Eastern District of Michigan Chapter - 65 years of service to our Federal Bench and Bar

## 2025 Wade H. McCree, Jr. Luncheon Mends Art, Advocacy, and Access to Justice

By David Mellem

On February 19, 2025, more than 170 members of the legal community gathered at the elegant Detroit Athletic Club to celebrate the annual Wade H. McCree, Jr. Luncheon for the Advancement of Social Justice. The event, hosted by the Eastern District of Michigan Bar Association, brought together judges, attorneys, and community advocates to honor this year's award recipient, Barbara Patek, and to reflect on the intersections of art and justice with a keynote address by Yuval Sharon, Artistic Director of the Detroit Opera.

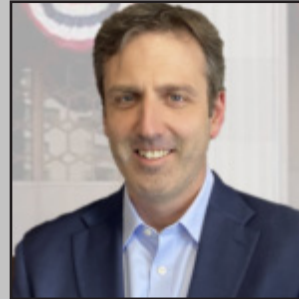
The luncheon opened with a warm welcome from EDMIBAR President-Elect Charissa Potts, who underscored the importance of the McCree Luncheon as a space for both recognition and inspiration. Potts then invited U.S. District Judge F. Kay Behm to the podium, where Judge Behm spoke powerfully about the critical role of pro bono work in expanding access to justice and fostering trust in the legal system.

This theme of creative access to justice carried through to the keynote address by Yuval Sharon. Known nationally for his boundary-pushing work in opera and multimedia storytelling, Sharon delivered a thought-provoking talk entitled "What the Arts Can Teach Us About Social

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### President's Column

Andrew Lievense

Reflecting on the past year is a common practice in a president's last column. I'm also naturally a person who reflects on the past.

But beyond thinking about the past year, I think about how, when I became Program Chair in the summer of 2020, the Chapter Officers did not know what the future held for our Chapter, our signature Luncheon Series, other events, or the practice of law in the Eastern District of Michigan. In the shadow of the COVID-19 pandemic, while we had adapted to virtual court appearances and events, we did not know what the year, or years, ahead would bring.

But we found our way together. And I learned from and had the pleasure of working with the committed leadership of Chapter past Presidents Fred Herrmann, Dan Sharkey, Jennifer Newby, and George Donnini. And with the tremendous dedication of Mindy Herrmann, we forged forward and found new ways to put on programs that brought value to our members. And so the foundation was strong when I became President last summer, which allowed me to focus on new ways to advance the Chapter's mission of serving the federal bench and bar.

I set three main goals for this year: (1) reinvigorate our committees, (2) bring a creative speaker to a Luncheon, and (3) enhance our educational offerings. I'm proud to say that I've met these goals, collaborating with Mindy Herrmann and a group of Officers who I respect immensely and feel fortunate to call friends: Charissa Potts, Lauren Mandel, Matt Allen, Robin Wagner, and immediate past president George Donnini.

*(continued on page 2)*

**WINNER**  
**20 YEARS**  
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A W A R D

## President's Column *(from page 1)*

First, several new Committee Chairs stepped up to join existing committee leadership to plan numerous events. I hope these new leaders continue to reap rewards for our organization into the future.

Second, at our Luncheons we heard from Chief Judge Sean Cox (State of the Court Luncheon), retired District Judge Victoria Roberts (Rom/Rakow/Court Historical Society Luncheon), and Sixth Circuit Judge Stephanie Dawkins Davis (Gilman Luncheon), all of whom gave important presentations on legal issues of the day. And we also heard from Yuval Sharon, the Artistic Director at the Detroit Opera (among many other roles), who spoke to us about the intersection of the arts, the law, and social justice at the McCree Luncheon. He is creative and innovative in many ways. And he inspired me to buy tickets to our opera event!

Third, we expanded our training opportunities by putting on two full-day trial practice programs, one focused on pretrial matters and one on trial practice. Several of our judges spoke at these programs, along with many notorious (in a good way) practitioners who imparted their knowledge and experience.

Of course, I did not do any of this alone, nor can I take credit for the other events over the past year. I've already recognized many of the people who made the year great, and rather than risk leaving someone out who deserves recognition, I'd simply like to acknowledge the entire Executive Board, the Committee Chairs, the support we've received with our website, printing programs and other materials, and the people who performed all the overlooked tasks that make our organization run seamlessly and professionally.

I also want to thank the entire Bench and court staff for their support, but particularly thank Chief Judge Cox, who has been a consistent cheerleader for our organization during his time on the bench. Our organization is better because of him.

All of these people and many others dedicated their time and talents to our organization over the past year. I will always be immensely grateful for what we have accomplished together and for the privilege of serving as president of this organization.

## McCree Jr. Luncheon *(from page 1)*

Justice." Drawing from his experience in bringing opera to the eyes and ears of many in Detroit, Sharon challenged the audience to consider how the arts can model empathy, foster inclusion, and illuminate marginalized voices in ways the legal system often cannot. His address was inspiring and deeply reflective, reminding attendees that both artists and advocates are tasked with reshaping the narratives that define our society.

Following the keynote, Scott Fishwick, Chair of the Wade H. McCree Jr. Award Committee, introduced this year's award with a tribute to the legacy of Judge McCree—a legacy rooted in principled service, legal excellence, and unwavering dedication to justice. U.S. Magistrate Judge Elizabeth Stafford then took the stage to present the 2025 McCree Award to Barbara Patek, Legal Director of the University of Detroit Mercy School of Law Pro Se Legal Clinic.

In accepting the award, Patek spoke with humility and conviction about her work leading the Pro Se Clinic, which provides legal support to individuals navigating the federal court system without representation. Her remarks highlighted the challenges faced by litigants who cannot afford counsel and the powerful impact that committed legal professionals and law students can have in leveling the playing field. Patek's leadership has transformed the clinic into a model of community-engaged legal education and a critical lifeline for unrepresented litigants across the Eastern District.

As always, the Luncheon served not only as a celebration of one individual's impact but as a collective reaffirmation of the legal community's responsibility to advance social justice. Attendees left the event inspired by voices—legal and artistic alike—that continue to push those ideals forward.



### Clerk of the Court Kinikia Essix

The Court celebrated Judge Robert J. White with his investiture ceremony on January 24, 2025. He was joined by his colleagues on the bench, family, friends, and court staff. Judge White fills a vacancy that resulted when Judge Paul D.

Borman took senior status.

Chief Judge Sean Cox has announced his retirement effective July 28, 2025. He has served as a district judge in the Eastern District of Michigan since 2006 and has been chief judge since 2022. We wish him all the best in this new chapter of life!

We are excited to announce that the Court's Capital Security Program is entering its final stages! The entrance on the Lafayette side of the building is nearly complete, with both wheelchair ramps fully constructed. There are a few outstanding tasks that will be finalized once the weather breaks, then the barriers on that side of the building will be removed, and both ramps will be completely operational. The public screening stations on both the Lafayette and Fort Street sides of the building have been moved to their new locations. However, additional work is needed to finish those projects. We are working through the logistics in the screening areas to ensure a smooth and efficient screening process. We appreciate your patience and understanding throughout this construction project and look forward to welcoming everyone to the newly updated entrances.

Remember, if you have any questions, suggestions, or comments, please contact me at: [kinikia\\_essix@mied.uscourts.gov](mailto:kinikia_essix@mied.uscourts.gov).

## Appellate Practice Lunch-and-Learn

By Andrew Goetz

On January 14, 2025, the Appellate Practice Committee hosted a lively and informative lunch-and-learn event featuring Judge Kevin Ritz, who was recently confirmed to the United States Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit. Judge Ritz spoke with Andrew Goetz, currently of Miller Johnson and formerly the Appellate Chief at the United States Attorney's Office, about his background and insights into appellate practice.

Judge Ritz shared his personal and professional journey, including his various roles as a lawyer and now judge. He discussed the differences in those roles, including his time as the United States Attorney for the Western District of Tennessee, and his transition to the federal bench. He also revealed some of his interests and hobbies outside of the law, such as soccer, books, and podcasts.

Judge Ritz offered valuable advice and tips on legal writing and advocacy, based on his perspective as a judge and a former advocate. He emphasized the importance of effective written advocacy, the qualities of a persuasive brief, and the common problems and errors that undermine a brief's credibility. He explained how he prepares for oral argument, what he expects from advocates, and what sometimes makes him cringe during oral argument.

The audience enjoyed the opportunity to get to know Judge Ritz better and to learn from his experience.

## Prisoner Mediation Training

By Jennifer Newby and Nolan J. Moody

The EDMIBAR Pro Bono Committee recently hosted a training program to support the Eastern District of Michigan's Pro Se Prisoner Early Mediation Program. The Court instituted the program in 2018 to offer early

mediation to eligible prisoner civil rights cases. Since then, roughly a third of the cases, through mediation, have resulted in early dismissal. Not only has the mediation program been of great assistance in conserving Court resources, but it has also provided prisoners a forum to be heard and been a great pro bono opportunity for practitioners.

The committee, in conjunction with the Court and sponsorship by the Judicial Arbitration and Mediation Services (JAMS), hosted a training program at the Theodore Levin Courthouse on April 22, 2025, to train volunteers to serve as mediators for the program. The training program was led by retired U.S. District Court Judge Victoria A. Roberts, now a mediator at JAMS. Judge Roberts was joined by fellow mediator and arbitrator Paul Monicatti, Morgan Esters of Honigman LLP, Allan Soros, Assistant Attorney General for the State of Michigan, and Eric Lewis, who describes himself as an entrepreneur and ex-felon.

The panel touched on all aspects of mediation in this setting. The program included information from Lewis on how prisoners view their rights. Soros presented the State's perspective. Esters offered a role-play opportunity. Expert mediators Judge Roberts and Monicatti offered practical



*Prisoner Mediation Training hosted by the Pro Bono Committee.*

*Photo by Mindy Herrmann*

*Executive Director, Eastern District of Michigan Bar Association*

*(continued on page 4)*



## Prisoner Mediation *(from page 3)*

advice about managing expectations and assessing the risks. The robust presentation included plenty of questions from the attentive audience as well.

If you are interested in learning more about the program, visit the Court's website at <https://www.mied.uscourts.gov/index.cfm?pagefunction=prosemediation>. The recent training program, which qualifies the viewer to serve as a mediator, was recorded and will be available to view in the coming weeks through the Court.

## John Neal Receives the Leonard R. Gilman Award

On April 23, 2025, the Chapter presented the Leonard R. Gilman Award to Assistant United States Attorney John Neal. The Gilman Award is named after Lenny Gilman, who was a United States Attorney at the time of his passing in 1985, and is presented annually to a practitioner of criminal law in the Eastern District who embodies Gilman's commitment to excellence, professionalism, and commitment to public service.

Prior to the presentation of the award, Mindy Herrman (Executive Director of the Chapter) and George Donnini (immediate Past President) thanked those in attendance, offered opportunities for continued involvement in the Chapter, and highlighted upcoming Chapter events.

U.S. Court of Appeals Judge Stephanie Dawkins Davis spoke next. Judge Davis spoke of a system of justice centered on honor and nobility. Judge Davis stressed that the Gilman Award is intended to exemplify what is best about the practice of law, shedding light on what makes the law a noble profession. Noting

that her entire career has been spent in the Eastern District of Michigan, she highlighted that the practice of law in this district is at a level that truly honors the nobility that we all come to expect of the law. She closed her remarks by reminding those in attendance to "remain vigilant in

standing and stepping into nobility that is the cause of justice."

Next, Mark Chutkow, of Dykema Gossett, introduced John Neal, who has served as an assistant U.S. attorney in the Eastern District of Michigan since 2011 and currently serves as the chief of the Office's Public Corruption & Civil Rights Unit. Chutkow, a former assistant U.S. Attorney, noted that Neal exhibited many qualities that made him a clear choice for this year's Gilman Award. He was dependable, trustworthy, and known to handle the most challenging of cases with grace and civility. Neal's work has involved subjects ranging from mortgage fraud to controlled-substance distribution to a matter involving a corrupt dealer in human cadavers. He also oversaw several significant corporate prosecutions, including an investigation into Volkswagen that resulted in the automaker pleading guilty and

paying a \$2.8 billion criminal fine.

Neal thanked the Gilman Committee for selecting him for the award. He noted that although he was not native to Michigan, since coming here in [2009], he has

fully immersed himself in the practice of law in the Eastern District of Michigan, which he described as a supportive environment that fostered a culture of respect among adversaries. Neal made note of this district's Defense bar, which he commended on their civility and the overall respect for the system and the roles that we all play to keep this system of justice going.

Neal closed his remarks by thanking his

colleagues and the bench, making special mention of his mentor and outstanding leader and lawyer, Wayne F. Pratt (also a prior Gilman Award recipient).



*Gilman Luncheon Honoree John Neal.*

*Photo by Mindy Herrmann*

*Executive Director, Eastern District of Michigan Bar Association*



*Gilman Luncheon Attendees.*

*Photo by Mindy Herrmann*

*Executive Director, Eastern District of Michigan Bar Association*

## Motion Day with The Honorable Judith E. Levy

By Lena Gonzalez, Hank Moon,  
and Nathan Dupes

On April 16, 2025, the Eastern District of Michigan Bar Association partnered with the University of Detroit Mercy School of Law to host a special “Motion Day” event, offering students a front-row seat to the judicial process. Over 70 students observed as the Honorable Judith E. Levy, U.S. District Judge for the Eastern District of Michigan, presided over oral arguments in a live civil case at the law school.

During the proceedings, Judge Levy heard oral arguments for competing motions for summary judgment in a compelling Section 1983 case, where the plaintiff alleged that the use of facial recognition technology contributed to her wrongful arrest. The City of Detroit moved for summary judgment on qualified immunity grounds, while the ACLU participated as amici on the side of the plaintiff. Although the ACLU did not take a position on qualified immunity, it argued that a photo lineup influenced by facial recognition cannot, by itself, be probable cause for an arrest.

Following the hearing, Judge Levy and the advocates remained to engage in a thoughtful Q&A session with students. The conversation offered valuable insights into a wide range of topics, offering students a deeper understanding of both the litigation process and broader issues in the field of law. The event was widely praised by students and faculty alike. We extend sincere thanks to Judge Levy and her staff for their time, candor, and generosity, as well as to the Detroit Mercy Law School for its warm hospitality and collaboration. Events like Motion Day continue to embody EDMIBAR’s mission to foster engagement between the bench and the next generation of legal professionals.

## 49th Annual New Lawyers’ Seminar

By Lauren Moine

On Tuesday, March 11, 2025, and Wednesday, March 12, 2025, freshly barred attorneys from all over the Eastern District gathered at the Theodore Levin United States Courthouse for the 49th annual New Lawyers’ Seminar, hosted by the Eastern District of Michigan Bar Association (EDMIBAR).

As is tradition for the New Lawyers’ Seminar, the first day involved a full schedule of fantastic and knowledgeable speakers who provided attendees with everything they needed to know about practicing in Federal Court. After a warm welcome from the Honorable Sean F. Cox, Chief Judge of the Eastern District, attendees heard presentations

on the basic anatomy of a civil case from Richard T. Hewlett from Varnum LLP, the essentials of Bankruptcy Law from Hon. Paul Hage from the U.S. Bankruptcy Court for the Eastern District, and the basics of 42 U.S.C. § 1983 Litigation from Kevin Carlson, from Pitt, McGehee, Palmer, Bonanni & Rivers. The seminar also provided practical information, such as electronic filing tips from Victoria Lung, and Discovery Practice tips in an interactive simulated discovery

hearing from Hon. Anthony P. Patti, Angela L. Jackson, and Madeline Portzline, both from Hooper Hathaway, P.C.

Additionally, participants got to hear from and network with several judges. Hon. Shalina Kumar, Hon. Matthew Leitman, and Hon. Martha Snow spoke with attendees about tips for Motion Practice, and Hon. Laurie Michelson, Hon. Robert White, Jennifer Newby, Assistant U.S. Attorney, and Adam Wenner from General Motors Corporation touched on the Dos and Don’ts of Practicing in Federal Court. Hon. Kimberly G. Altman, Nolan Moody of Dickinson Wright PLLC, and Jennifer Newby gave an impactful presentation on ways that attorneys can get involved in Pro Bono opportunities, including anecdotes about the ways that pro bono work can change the lives of attorneys and their communities. Lastly, attendees were then given the honor of being sworn in to the District Court



*Gilman Luncheon Attendees.*

*Photo by Mindy Herrmann*

*Executive Director, Eastern District of Michigan Bar Association*

*(continued on page 6)*



## New Lawyers' *(from page 5)*

for the Eastern District of Michigan by Chief Judge Cox in the historic Million Dollar Courtroom.

The second day honed in on practice in state courts. There were presentations on practical topics such as an overview of the attorney grievance process from the Grievance Administrator, Michael Goetz, and the business behind setting up a law practice from Julie Fershtman of Foster Swift. There were also substantive presentations on the various aspects of state law that new attorneys might encounter, including criminal law from Todd Flood of the Law Offices of Todd Flood, real property transactions from Alfredo Casab from Dawda Mann, domestic relations cases from Sara Aretakis from Woll & Woll P.C., and workers' compensation from Richard Hogg of Berman & Kaufman P.C.

"State Day" was rounded out by speakers on more niche areas of practice, such as Sara Szickl from Couzens Lanksy on her experience practicing in Michigan probate courts, Kevin Hendrick from Clark Hill about effectively using Alternative Dispute Resolution, and Cathrine Wenger about her experience practicing employment law as in-house counsel. The day was capped off by an exciting presentation from the Official Court Reporters of the Eastern District, Sheri Ward, Shacara Mapp, and Jodi Matthews, who shared tips on ensuring that a clean and clear record is established (their biggest tip is to enunciate!).

This event would not have been possible without the hard work and dedication of the EDMIBAR staff, as well as the countless attorneys from around the region who took the time to present to the Bar's newest members. Attendees

heard from lawyers practicing in firms of all sizes, government, the courts, and even private corporations. There's no doubt that the participants of this seminar will remember their experience for years to come, as is evident by the many speakers who shared their experience as a NLS attendee in years past.

## 2025 EDMIBAR Annual Dinner

By David Mellem

The Chapter held its 45th Annual Dinner honoring the Judicial Officers of the Eastern District of Michigan on June 5, 2025, at the Westin Book Cadillac Hotel, Detroit. This event is held every year to recognize and thank the members of our amazing bench, to celebrate a successful year of EDMIBAR events, and to ensure a fun evening with our colleagues and friends of the Eastern District.

In addition, the dinner is held to present the winner of the Cook-Friedman Civility Award. The award, named for former Chief Judges Julien Abele Cook and Bernard A. Friedman in recognition of their dedication to civility, was established in 2008. It is presented each year at the FBA's Annual Dinner to an attorney who is deemed to exemplify outstanding professionalism and civility in their practice. The recipient must consistently demonstrate not only the "highest levels of legal competency" but also conduct himself/herself "in accordance with the highest standards of professional integrity and personal courtesy."

This year the award was presented to Gerald Gleeson with Miller Canfield. Gleeson is one of four attorneys at



*Annual Dinner Attendees*

*Photo by John Meiu, courtesy of Detroit Legal News.*

Miller Canfield to receive this honor, joining Carl von Ende, Saul Green, and Tom Cranmer. The Chapter congratulates Gerald Gleeson on this remarkable achievement and looks forward to the next year of events and camaraderie!



*Women Helping Women Attendees.  
Photo by Mindy Herrmann  
Executive Director, Eastern District of Michigan Bar Association*

## Women Helping Women Event Kicks off the Women's Series

By Hannah Smith

EDMIBAR is excited to announce the new Women's Committee! On January 22, the Women's Committee kicked off with its first event in the Women's Series. The first-of-its kind event was geared toward female lawyers in federal practice, focusing on issues relevant to women lawyers.

The event included a panel discussion on business development and being a rainmaker in the industry. The Hon. Laurie Michelson, District Judge in the Eastern District of Michigan, Jennifer Grieco, Altior Law, Liz Hardy Kienbaum Hardy Viviano Pelton and Forrest, and Megan Norris, Miller Canfield, provided career advice, shared their own trials and tribulations, and discussed helpful strategies to grow and maintain a book of business. In a time when building your brand as a professional is of the utmost importance, these women generously shared their success strategies.

The Women's Committee is working to support female practitioners in their personal, professional, and networking goals. When women support each other and rise through the ranks, they make space for others to follow. In a legal profession that can still be isolating for women, the Women's Committee sets out to create an inclusive and welcoming space for practicing attorneys of all experience levels. Join the Women's Committee at

## Calendar of Events

July 15

**Appeals Committee Event**  
**12:00 pm – 1:00 pm**  
**MEMBERS: \$0**  
**NON-MEMBERS/GUESTS: \$15**

**"At the Podium: Arguing Before the Supreme Court," hosted by the Appeals Committee.**

This special event features an engaging discussion with Victoria Ferres of Fletcher, Fealko, Shoudy & Francis; Aaron Lindstrom of Barnes & Thornburg; and Christian Grostic, an Assistant Federal Public Defender in the Northern District of Ohio. All three have argued before the U.S. Supreme Court and will share their experiences, preparation strategies, and insights into effective advocacy at the highest level—both in civil and criminal cases. Don't miss this unique opportunity to hear firsthand from seasoned advocates at the nation's highest court.

August 6

**Bench-Bar Golf Outing**  
**9:30 am – 4:30 pm**

Join our bench and bar for this cherished annual event! Sign up early and save! Larger firms encouraged to bring (2) foursomes with the second foursome being heavily discounted (lawyers from the same firm). Online payment is available, though check(s) preferred (plus, sending a check saves you the 3% processing fee). Email Mindy Herrmann ([mindy@edmibar.org](mailto:mindy@edmibar.org)) regarding any questions, or any of our Golf Committee Co-Chairs (Brian King/Bush Seyferth, Katelyn Young/Honigman).

September 18

**Book Club Event**  
**The Grand Bargain**  
**12:00 pm - 1:30 pm**

October 15

**State of the Court Luncheon**  
**12:00 pm – 1:00 pm**

**Local updates and further developments**  
**at [www.edmibar.org](http://www.edmibar.org) and**  
**national chapter updates at [www.fbamich.org](http://www.fbamich.org)**  
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**order to save time and obtain Member pricing**

its next event focusing on "How to Survive and Thrive in an Uncivil Landscape." This topic arose from discussions during the first event where, unfortunately, the lack of civility in the practice of law was mentioned as one of the most dissatisfying aspects of many women's careers in the law. The event will take place on May 21, from 4:30 pm - 7:30 pm at Kerr Russell.

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