



# FBAnewsletter

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

## Judge Sean F. Cox: A Legacy of Leadership and Humility

By Zainab Sabbagh

As Judge Sean F. Cox steps down from his position as Chief Judge of the United States District Court for the Eastern District of Michigan, the legal community reflects on a remarkable career. A career defined not only by leadership and legal excellence, but by humility, integrity, and sincerity.

Many in our community know the highlights of Judge Cox's professional journey. We know about his years of dedicated service, his thoughtful leadership on the bench, and his unwavering commitment to justice. But what we don't often hear about is the story behind that success: his upbringing, his family, and the values that shaped him. Those who know him well know how deeply proud he is to be the son of Irish immigrants, a source of identity and inspiration that has guided him throughout his life.

Judge Cox often speaks with great pride and emotion about his parents, who came to this country with little more than determination and faith. They arrived with nothing in their pockets but carried an unshakable belief that through hard work and perseverance, their children could achieve better lives. That belief took root and flourished. Their three sons became attorneys; two later became judges and one went on to serve as Michigan's Attorney General.

But for Judge Cox, these achievements were never about prestige or position. They were about honoring the

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## President's Column

Charissa Potts

I recently had a striking realization. Many of the colleagues with whom I now have the closest professional relationships, including my most trusted staff attorney, share a common origin story: we first met as opposing counsel. What began as purely adversarial encounters ultimately became something far more meaningful. When we approach difficult moments and work through them with civility and respect, an unexpected professional alchemy can result. The tension of zealous advocacy, when tempered by civility, has the power to transform conflict into trust and challenge into connection. Paradoxically, it is often those moments of pressure and disagreement that forge the strongest and most enduring professional bonds.

As I begin my term as President of the Eastern District of Michigan Bar Association, I am grateful for the foundation laid by those who came before me. EDMIBAR may be relatively new in name, but our local bar is deeply rooted in decades of service to the federal bench and bar. Since branching out from our historic role as the FBA Eastern District of Michigan Chapter, we have worked together to define who we are, how we serve, and how we carry forward traditions of excellence while embracing a new identity.

In doing this work, I am constantly mindful of the past and of the shoulders on which I stand, as well as the colleagues who stand with me today. I am honored to come from a long lineage of past presidents, most recently Andrew Lievense. My fellow officers, Lauren Mandel, Matt Allen, Robin Wagner, and Lena Gonzalez, bring insight, dedication, and a wealth of experience to our leadership cohort. I

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

am deeply grateful for their commitment to this organization. I am equally grateful to our Executive Director, Mindy Herrmann, whose partnership and steadfast support are invaluable.

In October, it was my privilege to introduce Chief Judge Stephen J. Murphy III at our annual State of the Court Luncheon. His commitment to EDMIBAR and to elevating the professionalism of our bar is unwavering. I look forward to working collaboratively with him to assess and strengthen our district's principles of civility. He is uniquely positioned to help support and reinforce these efforts. This is an opportunity not only to update language on paper but also to refresh our collective understanding of professionalism and civility. It allows us to recalibrate how we treat one another, both inside and outside the courtroom. I welcome all who wish to join me in this important work.

As we continue to build on our transition to EDMIBAR, and as we maintain close collaboration with the National FBA and our local chapter, we will remain focused on further solidifying who we are as an organization. We are committed to federal practice, to the judges who serve the Eastern District, and to the diverse and growing community of practitioners who appear before them. This means refining how we communicate our mission, strengthening our membership outreach, and investing in programming that is relevant, practical, and meaningful to those we serve.

We are fortunate to work within a district rich with legal talent, innovation, and history. Our goal is to ensure that our association reflects and amplifies that strength. Much of what makes our bar association valuable lies in the programs, connections, and professional development opportunities we offer. We will continue the Luncheon Series, educational programs, committee-driven events, and collaborations with the court that have become hallmarks of our membership. We will also continue to highlight voices from the bench, elevate diverse perspectives, and provide pathways for mentorship and leadership development.

By honoring our history, strengthening our identity, and cultivating a culture of civility that reflects the very best of our profession, we can build an association that serves today's practitioners while laying a strong foundation for the next generation of federal lawyers.

I welcome your ideas, your participation, and your voice.

## Judge Cox *(from page 1)*

sacrifices his parents made to ensure that he and his brothers had opportunities their parents never did. His achievements were also about fulfilling the dreams his parents carried with them when they came to this country.

Those lessons in humility, work ethic, and gratitude shaped every aspect of his life and career. From his early years on the Wayne County Circuit Court to his most recent tenure as Chief Judge of the Eastern District, Judge Cox was known for his fairness, respect for the law, and sense of duty to the people he served. As Chief Judge, he led not with authority but with intention – addressing every issue with thoughtfulness and collaboration.

What truly sets Judge Cox apart is how grounded he remained throughout his career. Despite his accolades, he never saw himself as anything more than a public servant. He was approachable, genuine, and utterly without pretense. You'd never hear him mention his title or accomplishments because, to him, being a judge was not about status. It was about service.

Those of us who had the privilege of clerking for Judge Cox were able to witness that humility firsthand. His chambers was more than a workplace, it became family. We shared lunches together in the jury room, laughing over stories, talking about life, and supporting one another through the ups and downs of work and life. Judge Cox was always right there with us – never distant, never above anyone, and fully part of those conversations and moments. That sense of belonging didn't end when our clerkships did. He continues to check in, celebrate our milestones, and offer guidance when we need it most. He takes pride in our successes as if they were his own, as though he sees a part of himself in each of us as we navigate our careers and our lives.

Some of my most meaningful memories with Judge Cox were during naturalization ceremonies. Standing before a room filled with immigrants — men and women eager to take the oath of citizenship — he would share his parents' story. He spoke of their courage and sacrifices, how they arrived with nothing but hope, and how the opportunities of this country allowed their family to thrive. You could see in his eyes that he saw his parents in every new citizen before him. His words carried authenticity and hope, reminding everyone that the American dream endures and that hard work, faith, and opportunity still open doors.

That deep sense of gratitude defined him. Judge Cox taught us that leadership is not about authority but service; that success is not measured by accolades but by the way we treat others; and that humility is not a posture but a way of life. His compassion and steady presence have left an indelible mark on all who have known him.

As Judge Cox embarks on his next chapter as a mediator with JAMS, there is no doubt he will bring to that work the same fairness, empathy, and wisdom that guided his years on the bench. His gift for listening and his



respect for all perspectives will continue to make a difference—this time, helping others find common ground outside the courtroom.

As we wish him success in this new endeavor, we also celebrate a legacy that reminds us what public service, mentorship, and humility truly mean.

## At the Podium: Arguing Before the Supreme Court

By Nicole Haelterman

On July 15, 2025, attorneys and other legal professionals gathered at the Theodore Levin Courthouse in Detroit for the Eastern District of Michigan Bar Association’s program, “At the Podium: Arguing Before the Supreme Court.” The event was moderated by Nicole Haelterman, associate at Bush Seyferth, who guided a thoughtful conversation with three accomplished advocates.

Victoria R. Ferres, partner at Fletcher, Fealko, Shoudy & Francis, discussed her experience arguing *Lindke v. Freed*, a First Amendment case about government use of social media. Christian Grostic, Assistant Federal Public Defender for the Northern District of Ohio, shared reflections on his recent argument in *Esteras v. United States*, which addressed a question of statutory interpretation during revocation of supervised release. Aaron Lindstrom, partner at Barnes & Thornburg, offered insights from his Supreme Court appearances in *Coleman v. Tollefson* and *Michigan v. EPA* while serving as Michigan’s solicitor general.

The panel explored how to distill complex legal issues into clear, persuasive themes that resonate with the Justices. They described the importance of using the first two minutes of uninterrupted speaking



*At the Podium Attendees, from left to right, Aaron Lindstrom, Victoria Ferres, Christian Grostic, and Nicole Haelterman*

*Photo by Mackenzie Harris.*

time to frame arguments effectively, and how extensive moot courts—both in-house and through programs like Georgetown’s Supreme Court Institute—help prepare advocates for the intensity of questioning. This extensive preparation led to an interesting observation: no panel member received a question at argument that they had not previously considered. Panelists shared strategies for reading the Justices’ cues, staying agile under questioning, and knowing when to pivot or reframe an answer. Beyond that, the panel chatted about how non-legal preparation, like familiarizing oneself with the courtroom layout and rehearsing materials, can be an essential part of readiness. And the curtain was pulled back on some of the unique rituals of the Court, from receiving a souvenir quill to the podium’s very close proximity to the justices.

The event wrapped with broader lessons about clarity, preparation, and adaptability—skills that serve advocates well whether standing before the Supreme Court or a local court.

## 2025 Past Presidents’ Luncheon

By Andrew Lievense



*Among those celebrating at the Past Presidents’ Luncheon were (first row, left to right) Dennis Clark, Christine Dowhan-Bailey, U.S. Magistrate Judge Kimberly Altman, and retired Justice Maura Corrigan; (second row, left to right) Jeffrey Appel, Julia Caroff, Lauren Mandel, Charissa Potts, and Matt Allen; (third row, left to right) Fred Herrmann, Barbara McQuade, Bob Hurlbert, Dan Malone, and Jennifer Newby; (fourth row, left to right) John Runyan, Lena Gonzalez, and Ed Kronk; and (fifth row, left to right) Andrew Lievense, Sheldon Toll, Dennis Barnes, Bob Forrest, and Fred Mester.*

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

On May 28, 2025, the officers and more than fifteen past presidents of the Chapter gathered to enjoy excellent food and the pleasure of one another’s company, and to connect the current leaders with those who came before them.

Executive Director Mindy Herrmann welcomed the group and provided a short recap of the year.

President Andrew Lievense, who was about to join the ranks of past presidents, provided highlights of

*(continued on page 4)*

## Past Presidents *(from page 3)*

the year from his perspective, which included significant progress on reinvigorating the committees to put on more events and an exciting group of speakers at the year's Luncheon Series. Lievens also recognized the contributions of his fellow officers over the past year.

Lievens then ceded the floor to his successor, Charissa Potts. President-Elect Potts shared her vision for the forthcoming year and told the group to expect a continuation of the standard of excellence our bar enjoys. Potts also welcomed Lena Gonzalez to the officer ranks, as she takes over as program chair.

Lievens and Potts both expressed their admiration for the hard work and dedication of the Past Presidents, many of whom continue to actively support the organization in many ways.

The group departed fulfilled by the renewal of friendship and dedication to the bar association that links us across the decades.

## Law Day 2025

By John Sier, Emily Burdick, and Amy Johnston

To commemorate Law Day 2025, the Eastern District of Michigan hosted 170 students from six Detroit-area high schools: Detroit Pershing, Melvindale, Livonia Stevenson, Fordson, Crockett Midtown High School of Science and Medicine, and Southfield High School for the Arts and Technology. Students had the opportunity to attend two naturalization ceremonies, a career fair, and presentation on the roles of the prosecutors, defense attorneys and probation officers in criminal proceedings. Judge Terrence Berg presided over the naturalization ceremonies, welcoming over 70 new U.S. citizens. Judge Berg fielded questions from

the students afterwards. Magistrate Judge David Grand shared his insights with the students about the judicial system and the roles of the various participants, including court staff. Additionally, the students were provided with scavenger-hunt-type questions about the courthouse, the judicial system, citizenship, and the programs they observed that day. The students who completed the questions received certificates acknowledging their participation and successful completion of the scavenger hunt. The Eastern District of Michigan's celebration of law day with the theme "Out of Many, One" embodied the true spirit of law day—a recognition and celebration of the rule of law.

Some of the comments from the teachers included:

"Thank you again for a wonderful event! The students really enjoyed the citizenship ceremony. Thanks again!"

"Our students were engaged and gained valuable insight into the citizenship process and the wide range of career opportunities within the federal courts and related agencies. It was an educational and inspiring experience that left a lasting impression on our students that will impact their future career choices. It was nice to see our students engaged with the panel of speakers and asking questions related to the topic. The event was very well organized and ran smoothly. The organizers clearly dedicated a lot of time to planning, coordinating logistics, and paying attention to detail, which stood out."

"On behalf of Stevenson High School's Global Education and Law programs, I want to extend our sincerest thanks for organizing such a meaningful and impactful Law Day experience for our students. I can honestly say this was the best program we've seen and your attention to detail and use of a guide to help us really made it smooth."

"From the career fair featuring federal agencies to the tour of the million-dollar courtroom and insightful conversations with representatives from the U.S.



*Career Fair with service dog.*

*Photo by Amy Johnston, Law Day Committee Member*



*Magistrate Judge David Grand, Judge Terrance Berg, Natasha Dholakia (granddaughter of Yashesh Dholakia who became a U.S. Citizen on Law Day) and Sarika Dholakia (mom to Natasha).*

*Photo by Amy Johnston, Law Day Committee Member*

Attorney's Office, The Federal Community Defender (FCD), and Probation Department, every part of the day was thoughtfully planned and truly educational. Your attorneys were poised and engaging and myself and my fellow teacher were moved by the way they spoke of their passions. All three presenters in the Million Dollar Courtroom were so dynamic, it was such a great learning experience as they spoke about how their three areas impact one another. A quote from one of my students, 'Mrs. Fehleley I have a new bucket list item. I want to be a lawyer and make a legal argument in that courtroom one day.' My students loved the swag and felt inspired by the career fair. Last but not least the opportunity to witness a naturalization ceremony and see individuals take their Oath of Citizenship was incredibly moving and something our students and we as teachers will never forget."

"Thank you for helping to create such a powerful real-world learning opportunity. Your time, effort, and commitment to student engagement are deeply appreciated. You've left a lasting impression on our students and helped bring the law to life in a way that no classroom lesson ever could."

## Passing the Gavel: Welcoming New Chief Judge Stephen J. Murphy, III

By James Callahan, Victoria Banowsky, and Erik Bubolz

Judge Stephen J. Murphy, III was born in St. Louis, Missouri, and is a proud alumnus of Marquette University and Saint Louis University School of Law. He began his legal career in 1987 with the U.S. Department of Justice. From there, he worked as an Assistant U.S. Attorney before becoming counsel for General Motors. In 2005, he was appointed U.S. Attorney in Detroit, and he served in that role until he was confirmed as a federal judge in 2008. He was appointed by Chief Justice John Roberts to serve as a member of the Advisory Committee on United States Appellate Rules for the Judicial Conference of the United States and he presently serves as Chairman of the Judicial Conference's Committee on Intercircuit Assignments.

On Monday, July 28, 2025, after 38 years in the legal field and nearly 17 years as a federal judge, Judge Murphy

became Chief Judge of the United States District Court for the Eastern District of Michigan. He succeeded now former Chief Judge Sean F. Cox, whose retirement from the bench went into effect on the same day.

Despite his formidable accomplishments, Judge Murphy's most impressive trait is his character, particularly his devotion to the dignity of the individual. His dedication to this principle is observed not only in his conduct as a jurist, but in how he treats his staff, his colleagues, and his friends. He is committed both to his family and to continual self-improvement. Judge Murphy's concern for and recognition of the value of the individual will, no doubt, permeate his tenure as Chief Judge.



*Women's Committee Panellists Judge Maria Oxholm, Nakisha Chaney and Tina Gray.*

*Photo by Mindy Herrmann  
Executive Director, Eastern District of Michigan Bar Association*

## Women's Group Tackles Incivility in the Profession

By Annemarie Smith-Morris

On Wednesday, May 21, 2025, nearly 100 members of the bench and bar gathered at host Kerr Russell's Detroit office for the second EDMIBAR Women's Committee event, "How to Survive and Thrive in an Uncivil Landscape."

After attendees settled in with snacks and drinks, Judge Stephen Murphy gave an opening address. Judge Murphy shared his perspective on why civility is so important in the courtroom and how everyone—judges included—can contribute to a more civil landscape. He noted that judges must set the tenor for proceedings and light the way to a more cooperative bar.

Next, Judge Maria Oxholm and attorneys Nakisha Chaney (Salvatore Prescott Porter & Porters) and Tina Gray (Tina S. Gray, P.C.) led a panel discussion on the topic. Ms. Chaney asked the assembled group, "What is incivility?" Participants responded by suggesting word associations, personal anecdotes, and even some comic relief. It became clear how subjective "incivility" can be. Judge Oxholm shared lessons to be learned from the bankruptcy bar's approach to civility, and Ms. Gray gave an example of how taking the high road can sometimes be a disarming and powerful response to incivility.

With a lot to contemplate, the attendees broke out into small group discussions, each led by a respected and experienced judge or attorney. In one small group helmed by Jennifer Grieco (Altior Law), early-career attorneys

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## Incivility *(from page 5)*

asked more experienced practitioners how to civilly respond to gendered comments and conduct and how to find the line between diligently representing a client and acting in a way that might be considered uncivil. The advice ranged from the practical (how to make and use a record of gendered comments and conduct), to the more philosophical (how “zealous advocacy” can be a shield for incivility).

The evening concluded with dinner and networking. Conversations that had started in the small groups spilled out into the common area as attendees continued to discuss and debate the evening’s thought-provoking content.

EDMIBAR hopes to turn the lessons learned at this event into change.

EDMIBAR is considering establishing a committee to work with the SBM Special Committee on Professionalism and Civility to propose to the Court changes that might improve civility within the district. Any attorneys interested in participating in such a committee should reach out to Mindy Herrmann ([mindy@edmibar.org](mailto:mindy@edmibar.org)).

The Women’s Committee was founded in 2024 to bring together attorneys from the bench and bar to network, support one another, and address hurdles to female success in the industry. The Committee plans to host its next event January 8, 2026 titled *Devil in the Details*.



*Women’s Committee incivility event breaks into small groups.*

*Photo by Mindy Herrmann  
Executive Director, Eastern District of Michigan Bar Association*

## Diversity Committee Event: Bash at the Beach 2025

By Ki Lee Kilgore

On July 17, 2025, the Chapter’s Diversity Committee hosted its annual summer event, “Bash at the Beach,” at Campus Martius Park’s BrisaBar. The weather was warm and the open-air setting encouraged meaningful conversations and connections between the over 45 attorneys, law students, law clerks, and judges in attendance. True to tradition, the evening provided an opportunity to celebrate the profession’s diversity while promoting informal interactions in a relaxed environment.

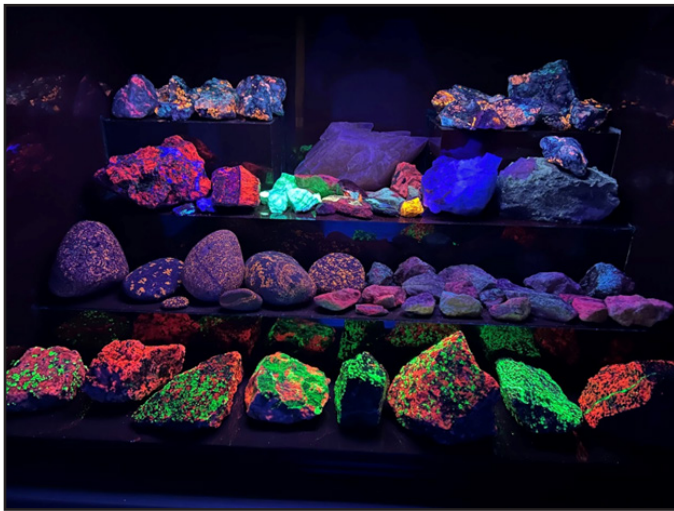
The Diversity Committee strives to create spaces for connections across all levels of the legal profession, and this event did just that. From seasoned practitioners and judges to first-year law students and new attorneys, attendees shared stories, career advice, and laughs throughout the evening.

Special thanks go to the event organizers for their thoughtful planning and to all who attended and contributed to the event’s success. The Committee would also like to recognize the distinguished federal judges—Judge Jonathan J.C. Grey, Judge Susan K. DeClercq, Judge Robert J. White, and Judge Elizabeth A. Stafford—who generously lent their time and presence to support this event. We look forward to seeing everyone again next year!



*Beach Bash Attendees.*

*Photo by Ki Lee Kilgore.*



*Fluorescence Rock Show.*

*Photo by Magistrate Judge Patricia Morris.*

## Rock Nerd Show and Tell

By Kristina Gregerson

Magistrate Judge Patricia T. Morris hosted a “rock nerd show and tell” on July 14, 2025, in her Bay City Chambers. The goal of the event was to encourage all attendees to find and embrace their inner love for rocks!

The show and tell attracted over a dozen individuals eager to learn more about rocks, stones, and gems. Attendees included Judge Morris’ chambers staff, Judge Thomas L. Ludington’s chambers staff, Assistant U.S. Attorneys, Probation and Pretrial Services officers and staff, and U.S. Marshals and Court Security Officers.

Everyone enjoyed the opportunity to examine the diverse assortment of minerals—many from Judge Morris’ extensive personal collection—on display. A number of the minerals were personally gathered by Judge Morris and other Court employees. The minerals on display included rainbow flint from Ohio, fluorescent sodalite on syenite from the U.P. (trademarked as “Yooperlites” by Erik Rintamaki), fantasy fluorescent rocks from Greenland, calcite and willemite from New Jersey, fluorescent calcite and fluorite from the Keweenaw peninsula, petrified wood, celestine, Petoskey stones, geodes, fossils, and a few mystery rocks.

The conference room was darkened to set the stage for fluorescence. Ultraviolet flashlights of long-, mid- and short-wave light were provided to attendees so they could see how the use of different wavelengths affected the color of fluorescent minerals. Lots of “oohs” and “aahs” ensued as the rocks began to glow. Attendees had fun playing like kids and sharing their best rock hunting stories and tips while enjoying Judge Morris’ delicious home-baked treats.

## Calendar of Events

### December 10

#### Annual Holiday Party

4:30 - 7:30 p.m.

#### Beaubien Room, Atheneum

Featuring: the camaraderie of our bar, great food and drinks, and fan favorite Jasen Magic performing table to table magic from 5-6 p.m.

### January 8

#### Third Women’s Event - Devil in the Details

4:30 - 7:30 p.m.

Featuring Benchmark Coach Elizabeth Joliffe and many of our District, Magistrate and Bankruptcy Court female judges.

### January 21

#### Open Committee and Executive Board Meeting

12:00 - 1:00 p.m.

#### Detroit Room, Theodore Levin Courthouse

Includes a FREE light lunch (with RSVP).

Great way to get involved with our bar, meet colleagues, friends and judges and provide value to our local legal community.

### January 27-28

#### 50th New Lawyers’ Seminar

2 Day Event

#### Detroit Room, Levin Courthouse

### February 1

#### Zekelman Holocaust Museum Visit

11:45 a.m. to 2:30 or 3:30 p.m.

In honor of International Holocaust Remembrance Day. Join Judge Friedman and other distinguished members of our bench and bar on this important visit.

### March 18

#### Open Committee and Executive Board Meeting

12:00 - 1:00 p.m.

#### Detroit Room, Theodore Levin Courthouse

Includes a FREE light lunch (with RSVP).

Great way to get involved with our bar, meet colleagues, friends and judges and provide value to our local legal community.

### May 27

#### Past Presidents’ Luncheon

2:00 - 4:00 p.m.

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)  
Log-in with your user name and password FIRST in order to save time and obtain Member pricing

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