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Chief Justice Orders Hiring Freeze and Spending Restrictions

Supreme Court, State Court Administrative Office Respond to COVID-19 Challenge

LANSING, MI, April 3, 2020 – Michigan Supreme Court Chief Justice Bridget M. McCormack has ordered a hiring freeze and spending restrictions for judicial branch agencies in response to Governor Whitmer's directives to the executive branch. In a memo to the Supreme Court, the State Court Administrative Office, the State Appellate Defender Office, and the Judicial Tenure Commission, the Chief Justice called for restriction of discretionary spending, identification of additional efficiencies, and deferral of all nonessential hiring for new or existing positions.

"Judicial branch agencies understand the challenge presented by the COVID-19 outbreak and the impact on the state budget," said Chief Justice McCormack. "We are stepping forward to do our part both in decision-making to protect the public and in controlling spending to keep our government running."

Chief Justice McCormack's memo to agency directors and managers directed:

- A freeze in staffing levels, no hiring of employees, no creation of new positions, no filling of existing vacant positions, and no promotions.

- Restriction of all discretionary spending and aggressive implementation of cost containment strategies, including all nonessential contracts, purchases, travel, training, and other expenditures to generate administrative savings. The restriction includes both in-state and out-of-state travel and nonessential training.

- That exceptions may be granted if the position is part of the COVID-19 response, involves protecting the health and safety of Michigan residents, or is required by law, federal mandate, or court order.

- Regular and close monitoring of expenditures to ensure compliance with the spending restrictions and hiring freeze.

In response to the COVID-19 public health emergency, the Supreme Court and State Court Administrative Office have provided extensive and detailed guidance to trial courts to help them maintain essential functions and to continue serving the public. Their immediate focus has been on helping all 242 trial courts hold proceedings via videoconference and other remote technologies in order to protect the health of litigants and court staff. In this regard, a top priority is maintaining public and media access to court proceedings.

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