

## News

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### Court system needs help

Bar chief visits Esky, addresses concern

By Audrey LaFave

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ESCANABA - The president of the State Bar of Michigan Ed Pappas is touring several cities in the Upper Peninsula this week and stopped in Escanaba Monday.

Pappas said the state bar is working on many projects this year, but one of the main things is in reaction to the recent findings on legal representation for indigent persons in the state.

The report by the National Legal Aid & Defender Association (NLADA) found Michigan fails to provide competent representation to those who cannot afford counsel in its criminal courts.

Pappas said the problem isn't Michigan public defenders, the courts or the prosecutors. It is the system itself that is faulty, he said.

"Everybody under the Constitution has a right to competent trial counsel in a criminal case. What the report found was that many public defenders... are overworked with heavy case loads and don't have the resources, or the training in some cases, to properly defend these cases," said Pappas.

The state bar is now trying to find solutions to the problems, said Pappas. They are planing to work with all the branches of government, as well as with other organizations who have a stake in public defense.

"We're going to try to work with the governor's office, the Legislature, and the courts to see if we can come up with a practical solution that will help solve the problem that's been identified," he said.

Something they will advocate for is funding - for resources like proper facilities and training.

"The first step really is to get people talking about it. I think everyone is recognizing that we have a serious issue (and) if we don't do something now to fix the issue, it could get worse," said Pappas.

The next step, he said, is to put all of their thoughts together to figure out how to move forward.

"The thing that encourages me is that everybody that we've talked to in every branch of government is taking it seriously, from the governor to the legislators, to the courts, as well as all of the other entities that are interested," Pappas said.

Other projects the state bar is working on include the Access to Justice Campaign, civic education and helping struggling lawyers in this time of economic uncertainty.

The Access to Justice Campaign is a partnership of the State Bar of Michigan, the Michigan State Bar Foundation and the state's civil legal services providers. The goal of the Access to Justice Campaign is to raise funds to improve access to justice for low-income people with civil legal needs in Michigan.

"Access to Justice raises money for those who cannot afford counsel in civil cases. Last year, the lawyers devoted more than 32,000 hours of service, and to date we've raised over \$8.5 million to fund legal aid organizations who provide civil legal services for those who cannot afford it," said Pappas.

The state bar association is also interested in continuing to offer civic education, including explaining the importance of the judicial branch of government. On Constitution Day (Sept. 17), most local school districts teach lessons on the Constitution. Statewide, schools have special programs, and the bar association would like to help.

"This year, in the state bar we are going to look at trying to coordinate all those efforts statewide and try to get civic education to as many citizens as possible," said Pappas.

Pappas said one of the things the state bar is concerned with is struggling lawyers, and it is hopeful new technologies in Michigan will lead to more work for all.

"The state is diversifying business and I think that lawyers can hopefully help in the government's effort to try to attract business to the state," he said. "I think we can be a good support system for new businesses (those) that are diversifying."

Pappas graduated from Marquette Senior High School in 1965. He graduated with a bachelor's degree in business administration from the University of Michigan in 1969. He then attended law school at University

#### Article Photos



Ed Pappas

of Michigan and graduated in 1973. Since then he has practiced law for Dickinson Wright PLLC in Oakland County. His position as president of the State Bar of Michigan is voluntary.

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