



## **Top Mich. court takes case about defense lawyers**

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LANSING, Mich. (AP) - The Michigan Supreme Court is jumping into a major dispute over how publicly appointed lawyers represent poor people accused of crimes.

The court has agreed to take an appeal in a case that challenges Michigan's public defender system.

Three counties - Berrien, Genesee and Muskegon - are accused of violating the constitutional rights of defendants through an underfunded system that encourages plea bargains, not a vigorous defense against crimes. The lawsuit names the state of Michigan as the main defendant.

In June, the Michigan Court of Appeals said the lawsuit could go forward. The state Supreme Court agreed Friday to review that decision. Oral arguments are planned for April.

Although the lawsuit centers on three counties, any changes in the defense system would be felt statewide.

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