



November 11, 2010

## Give credit, resources to court-appointed defenders

While I agree with almost all of your Oct. 27 editorial on the state's indigent criminal defense system ("It's time Michigan got it right for indigent defendants"), I took umbrage with your description of the attorneys who accept court-appointed defense cases as "incompetent."

The selection processes, training opportunities and attorney pay vary widely for each county. In Ingham County, where I live, practice and serve as a court-appointed defense attorney, many of the bar's finest attorneys take court-appointed clients.

Our court-appointed clients are our clients, period. We don't make distinctions based on how they come to us.

That said, we certainly lack resources, which in turn affects how we are able to defend court-appointed cases. In my county, costs deemed "extra," including a criminal background check, must receive prior approval from a judge or be paid out of pocket. At approximately \$289 for a felony case, sheer economics often forces us to forgo providing anything attorney ethics rules don't already prohibit.

The system is broken. Yet many attorneys, despite daunting conditions (massive workloads, little preparation time, too few resources) work hard to provide high quality representation to their clients.

I am one of many attorneys who support the Campaign for Justice and the legislation lauded in the editorial. Constructive change must include those of us who work in the system daily and know its flaws. Shifting blame onto us and resorting to insults do not, and cannot, accomplish the shared goal of a better system.

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