

Michigan News

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Defending the Poor

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A legislative committee is expected to begin work as soon as this week to fix Michigan's broken system for giving legal representation to defendants who can't afford an attorney.

A subcommittee of the state House Judiciary Committee is supposed to take two to three months to come up with a plan for fixing the indigent defense system.

Critics have complained that little has been done since a report was released last June. It says Michigan has one of the worst indigent defense systems in the country. Right now, counties are responsible for appointing and paying indigent counsel, and fees vary from county to county.

It says fees paid to attorneys are so low that lawyers cobble together more cases than they can handle. And prosecutors say sometimes they have to step in to ensure a fair trial.

The American Civil Liberties Union has also filed a class-action lawsuit against the state on behalf of defendants who say they were denied fair trials. A decision on that case is expected soon from the state Court of Appeals.

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