

Cass County Courts



Retirement of Cass County Probate Court Judge Susan L. Dobrich after 26 years on the bench

Cassopolis, Michigan, October 25, 2021 – Chief Judge Susan L. Dobrich announced that she is retiring effective December 31, 2021. “Serving the citizens of Cass County as the Probate – Family Judge since 1995 has been an amazing honor and wonderful experience.” Judge Dobrich’s greatest passion was to serve the vulnerable population; children, elderly, the developmentally disabled, addicted, and mentally ill. Growing up in the 1960’s, the opportunity to work as a public servant and as a Judge in particular was a childhood dream. She grew up watching Bobby Kennedy and the idea that public service was the only work she wanted to do.

Acting as Chief Judge of the Cass County Courts, Judge Dobrich focused on training the staff in evidence-based practices and best practice approaches to assist in making a difference for families involved with the Cass County Courts. Judge Dobrich founded the Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) program in Cass County in 1995 to provide a “voice” for children in abuse and neglect matters. She was a member of the Governor’s Task Force on Child Neglect & Abuse, appointed by Governor John Engler and subsequently reappointed by Governor Jennifer Granholm.

Having learned about the drug court movement in Florida in 2000, Judge Dobrich brought this innovative approach to Cass County creating the first family dependency treatment court in Michigan. This leadership by Judge Dobrich led to the development of additional problem-solving courts in Cass County. Further, this leadership assisted the Cass County Courts in receiving 11 federal grants totaling \$5,212,802. In addition, Cass County was awarded with many state grants too. Understanding that collaboration was the key to success, a team working with individuals with addiction has transformed lives for program participants, their families, and the communities they live in.

An award-winning jurist and leader, Judge Dobrich was also very active at the state level. She was a leader in the judiciary having served as President of the Michigan Probate Judges Association, President of the Judicial Section of the State Bar, President of the Michigan Association of Treatment Court Professionals, Co-Chair of the Michigan Tribal State Federal Forum, as well as having served on numerous other state committees and authoring state legislation.

Judge Dobrich has received many awards including the Lifetime Achievement Award from the Edwardsburg Public Schools, the Michigan Association of Treatment Court Professionals (MATCP) Honorable William Schma Judicial Leadership Award, the Cass County Youth Council Flame Keeper’s Award, the CASA Judge of the Year Award, the Lifetime Achievement Award from the Edwardsburg Public Schools, Jurist of the Year award from the Foster Care Review Board Award, the Michigan Association of Drug Court Professionals (MADCP) Hero Award, the Women in the Law Award by Michigan Lawyers Weekly, as well as the Daniel J. Wright Lifetime Achievement Award for Exemplary Service to Michigan Children and Families. Judge Dobrich also received the 2020-2021 Champion of Justice Award from the Michigan State Bar for extraordinary professional accomplishments.

Judge Dobrich is a frequent lecturer at judicial education seminars and trainings, and she has served as an editorial writer and advisor for publications including serving as the contributing author for two chapters in a Benchbook for Family Courts on Substance Use Disorders and doing Peer Review for the National Family Treatment Court Best Practice Standards released in 2019.

Judge Dobrich looks forward to spending more time with her husband of many years, retired Dowagiac Chief of Police Tom Atkinson, and her family. She will remain active in the drug courts and advocate for families and children.