

# Additional judges to be costly

By MICHAEL MATUSZEWSKI

The expected state-ordered addition of four judges to the 11-man Oakland County Circuit Court bench could cost the county as much as \$9 million, alarmed county officials said last week.

The state legislature is currently considering bills which would add the judges in Oakland County. The circuit court judges last month recommended that four judges be added to their ranks. Oakland currently has 11 circuit judges.

County Executive Daniel T. Murphy and Wallace Gabler (R-Royal Oak), chairman of the board of commissioners, said the cost of adding four judges would severely disrupt the county budget. It would mean no raises, layoffs and cutbacks in county-funded services, they said.

"The state legislature is telling us we need four more judges more than we need a lot of services," said Lillian Moffitt (R-Bloomfield Township), vice-chairwoman of the board.

Speaking after a closed door meeting of the county's top officials, she said, "The citizens want road services, public transportation for the elderly and handicapped (and) jail expansion. We can't fund those things if we're sent four more judges."

TO SOLVE THE cost crunch, county officials said the state should pay for any new costs incurred by the anticipated four new judges.

These costs, they said, would be high and far-reaching.

In addition to paying half of each judge's \$19,000 annual salary, the county pays for all the administrative

costs. Gabler said those costs run as high as \$300,000 per judge.

He said the court's "ancillary services"—the prosecutor's office and friend of the court division, for example—also would have to be expanded.

Even the courthouse, Gabler said, would have to be expanded. Four new judges and their courtrooms could not be accommodated in the present confines of the courthouse. A new wing would have to be added, he said.

That, Gabler said, might cost as much as \$5 million.

OAKLAND COUNTY has its back to the wall with little room to maneuver, said Patrick Nowak, Murphy's deputy for intergovernmental relations.

The state has never agreed to fund costs of the mandated additions, especially to the degree that Oakland County is asking.

Gabler said the county might refuse to fund the new judgeships.

"Down the line," Nowak said, "there's a confrontation of gigantic proportions coming. We're hoping that it never comes to pass."

IN AN EFFORT to head off that confrontation, Gabler and Murphy have formed a "united front" to try to sway the legislature to cut the four judge recommendation.

"We'll try to convince the state senate that we can't afford four judges. We're hoping they'll listen to the board and the executive," Nowak said.

"We're trying to send a message to the state legislature. This is no SEMTA deal. We're not crying wolf," he said. "It's going to cost at least \$5 million and we don't have \$5 million."



JUDGE STEVEN ANDREWS  
'Backlog building up'

THAT IS ONLY the surface of the controversy, however.

Murphy said that Chief Circuit Court Judge Steven Andrews privately tried to negotiate a deal in which the 11 judges would get a substantial pay increase. In return, the judges would recommend that no new judges be sent to Oakland County. federal district court judges.

Murphy said last week that Andrews had approached him and asked for "additional money" and "additional ancillary services."

Andrews replied, "Circuit court judges do not cut deals with county executives. The county executive doesn't pay us, the board of commissioners pays us and they only pay part of our salary."

"This thing has just gotten out of hand," Andrews said.

Oakland County's chief judge did say, however, that he has talked to Murphy many times asking for other court programs. He said the court

needs a security system and additional research clerks, for example.

MURPHY DID NOT mention the amount of the pay increase for which Andrews had asked, but added that Andrews mentioned the pay level for federal district court judges.

Oakland's circuit judges have said publicly they want the same salaries as federal judges—\$44,000.

IN 1976, the county's circuit judges were the highest paid judges in the state. With annual salaries of more than \$44,000 they earned more than federal district court judges, Michigan Court of Appeals judges and Michigan Supreme Court justices.

Since that time, however, the salaries of the other judges have risen past the \$50,000 mark.

"Negotiations for more money are out of the question," Murphy said.

"Even if Dan (Murphy) recommended a \$4,000 or \$5,000 increase," Nowak said, "the board wouldn't give it to them."

THROUGHOUT THE DEBATE, Murphy and the board have opposed any increases in circuit judges.

The board last Dec. 1 voted 23-1 to recommend that no new judges be sent to the county. At that time, the circuit court judges had not made any of their recommendations known.

ANDREWS, QUOTING a lengthy set of statistics, maintains that circuit court needs the four additional judges.

"We're not asking for anything that we don't need," he said. "But there's a backlog building up, and we don't want to go into a crash program."



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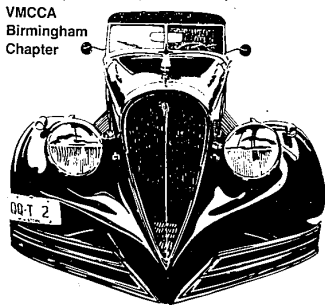
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