

Should District Courts Handle \$10,000 Cases?

By W. W. EDGAR

With a hope of reducing crowded dockets in the Wayne County Circuit Courts, a bill is now being prepared for presentation to the State Legislature that would upgrade the present District Courts that came into being several years ago.

Under the plan, the civil jurisdiction of the District Courts would be raised from \$3,000 to \$10,000, and district judges could appoint legal counsel for indigent defendants. Aside from this, it would make a probation department mandatory.

The plan is due to meet some stiff barriers along the way, according to danger signs now appearing.

Circuit judges, in many cases, are opposed to granting that much power to the lower courts. And even some

of the District judges are against the move — or at least "lukewarm" toward the idea.

"I THINK it would be a great benefit to the public," Judge Michael Hand of Farmington said.

Present chairman of the rules committee of the District Judges Association, Hand sees the move as one that can provide a more even distribution of justice.

"If adopted," he said, "the upgrading would increase the caseload tremendously in the district courts, but that the increase would bring about a size decrease in circuit courts."

"At the moment, the Oakland County Circuit Court is behind about nine months on its docket, and in Wayne County it is about 36 months behind."

"In my court, I try to keep within 12 days between the time a case is started and then decided. If they go beyond that, it more often than not is the fault of the defendant asking for postponements."

JUDGE HAND also is in favor of the mandatory probation department. At the present time, he is attempting to organize a volunteer group and having considerable success.

He is taking his cue from the work of Judge Keith Lienhauz, in Royal Oak, who has written a pamphlet entitled "Project Misdemeanor" and Judge Hand claims it is one of the best he has reviewed.

"I expect our caseload will

be boosted materially under the new plan," Hand repeated. "At the present time, I am handling approximately 10,000 cases a year in 10 dockets — five in the City of Farmington and five in Farmington Township."

He listed the dockets: General civil, ordinance violations, ordinance violators, landlord and tenant, small claims and traffic violations. In the township, he also handles the cases brought in by the state police.

"It's going to be a battle for time," he concluded, "but the upgrading would be beneficial to all concerned."

IN CONTRAST to Judge Hand's optimistic view, Judge Robert Brang, who shares the Redford District Court with Judge John Dillon, is opposed to the upgrading.

"The district judges are busy enough now," Brang stated with considerable emphasis, "and I certainly am opposed to upgrading the civil jurisdiction to \$10,000. Half that sum would be bad enough."

Judge Brang explained that the caseload in the Redford court is composed of 80% criminal cases. That, added to the fact that it is a traffic court, leaves little time for civil cases.

"I don't care about the prestige that goes with a high court," he stated "and with the added work, the district courts, too, may fall behind."

"It is just a matter of economics in the court, too."

Judge Hammer believes that the Legislature may compromise and set the upgrading at \$5,000.

"In that manner, we will be helping the Circuit Court, and not increasing our own workload too much."

"First and foremost," he stated, "we are a people's court, and we want to serve them as best we can. We can't do it by overcrowding our own courts now."

So, the proposal, in its present form, is going to the State Legislature with mixed feelings among the judges.

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BOB, BEAUTY AND THE BEARD — Michigan's two U.S. Senators, Robert P. Griffin and Philip A. Hart, pose at a Washington gathering honoring Michigan Cherry Blossom Princess Christine Chamberlain. Miss Chamberlain, 19, is the daughter of Michigan Congressman Charles Chamberlain of the 6th District. Christine will represent her state in the annual National Cherry Blossom Princess Festival in Washington in early April.

Census Lists Houses, Prices

Population of Wayne county remained nearly the same in the years since 1960 while the state's population increased 13.4 per cent, according to the U.S. Census Bureau.

Wayne County's population in 1970 was 2,666,751 slightly above the 1960 count of 2,666,297. Michigan's population in 1970 is 8,875,083 while it was 7,823,194 in 1960.

Population figures for cities with over 10,000 residents were listed in the report. From Overland, the cities and populations are: Garden City, 41,864; Livonia, 110,109; Plymouth, 11,758; and Westland, 86,749.

EACH OF the areas has a small number of minority group people.

In Garden City the population includes 10 blacks and 157 other minorities (Mexican-American, Chinese and others); Livonia has 41 blacks and 409 from other races; Plymouth has five blacks and 79 others; and Westland has 2,234 blacks and 416 other minority group people.

The census reports also gives the number of housing units and the estimate value of each.

In Garden City, the housing units number 10,571 with a median figure of 5.1 rooms. The rooms were counted if they were used for living purposes such as the living room, kitchen and bedrooms but not including bathrooms, halls or utility rooms.

The Garden City households have a median figure of 3.9 persons each. The owners estimated their homes value

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