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Michigan courts need overhaul, task force says

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Associated Press

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Michigan's court system needs to be overhauled as the population shrinks and tax dollars grow scarce, a State Bar of Michigan task force said in a report Wednesday.

"Our patchwork quilt of overlapping responsibilities, funding and reporting too often results in duplication of effort and costs, widely disparate workloads and confusion," the report said.

The 29-member task force, led by former Oakland County Judge Barry Howard and former State Bar President Edward Pappas, recommends eliminating judgeships when a judge retires or dies, depending on the case load. The Michigan Supreme Court has long proposed dropping some jobs.

"As the report notes, some of our state courts simply have more judges than they need to keep up with their workload," Chief Justice Robert Young Jr. said in a statement.

Some changes, such as a business court, could be ordered by the state Supreme Court. Others would require approval by the Legislature and the governor.

The group said criminal defense for poor people is getting worse and should be replaced with a statewide system. A pending lawsuit seeks to force changes.

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