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BILL



ANALYSIS

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Senate Bills 632 and 633 (as passed by the Senate)
Sponsor: Senator Tonya Schuitmaker
Committee: Judiciary

Date Completed: 1-28-16

RATIONALE

The Michigan Court of Appeals (COA) has jurisdiction on appeals from all final judgments from the circuit court and Court of Claims but only from certain orders of the probate court. Other probate court matters are appealable to the circuit court. This bifurcated system of appeals from the probate court can be confusing to people who have matters before the probate court and to lawyers representing clients in those cases. In addition, in some counties probate court judges and circuit court judges work side-by-side and share jurisdiction, so appeals from probate court to circuit court are essentially heard in the same court as the ruling or order being appealed. Some people believe that all appeals from the probate court should be to the Court of Appeals, just as matters from the circuit court are appealed to the COA.

CONTENT

Senate Bill 632 would amend the Revised Judicature Act (RJA) to do the following:

- **Specify that the Court of Appeals would have jurisdiction on appeals from final judgments and final orders from the probate court, as a matter of right.**
- **Delete certain probate court final judgments or orders from the matters that are appealable to the Court of Appeals only by application for leave to appeal.**
- **Delete a provision under which another court that had concurrent jurisdiction with the probate court may hear the action by appeal or review after the matter was transferred to probate court.**
- **Specify that, after an appeal of right from the probate court was filed with the Court of Appeals, further proceedings in pursuance of the probate court's judgment, order, or sentence, would be stayed for 21 days, or until the appeal was determined if a motion for stay pending appeal were granted.**

The bill also would repeal Sections 861 and 863, which provide for appeals from probate court to the Court of Appeals in certain matters, and to the circuit court in other matters.

Senate Bill 633 would amend the Estates and Protected Individuals Code (EPIC) to delete a provision under which another court that had concurrent jurisdiction with the probate court may hear the action by appeal or review after the matter was transferred to probate court.

The bills are tie-barred and would take effect 90 days after enactment.

Senate Bill 632

Appeals as of Right

Under the RJA, the Court of Appeals has jurisdiction on appeals from all final judgments from the circuit court and Court of Claims, except as otherwise provided. Those matters are appealable to

the Court of Appeals as a matter of right. The Court of Appeals also has jurisdiction on appeals from orders of the probate court from which an appeal as of right may be taken under Section 861.

The bill specifies instead that the Court of Appeals would have jurisdiction on appeals from all final judgments and final orders from the circuit court, Court of Claims, and probate court, except as otherwise provided. A final judgment or final order from those courts would be appealable as a matter of right.

(Section 861, which the bill would repeal, allows a party to a proceeding in the probate court to appeal certain orders as a matter of right to the Court of Appeals. Those include a final order affecting the rights or interests of any interested person in an estate or trust; an order entered before January 1, 1998, in an adoption proceeding under the Michigan Adoption Code; certain orders entered before January 1, 1998, by the former juvenile division of the probate court; and a final order in a condemnation case entered before January 1, 1998, under the Drain Code.)

Appeals by Application

Under the Act, the Court of Appeals has jurisdiction on appeal from certain orders and judgments that are reviewable only on application for leave to appeal granted by the Court of Appeals. These include both of the following:

- A final judgment or order of the circuit court in an appeal from an order, sentence, or judgment of the probate court under Section 863.
- An order, sentence, or judgment of the probate court, if the probate court certified the issue or issues under Section 863(3).

The bill would delete those matters from the orders and judgments that are reviewable by the Court of Appeals only on application for leave to appeal.

(Section 863, which the bill would repeal, allows a person aggrieved by an order, sentence, or judgment of the probate court, other than an order appealable under Section 861, to appeal the matter to the circuit court in the county in which the order, sentence, or judgment is rendered. Under subsection (3), a party may appeal directly to the Court of Appeals upon certification of the issue or issues by the probate judge. Appeals under Section 863 are by application and not as a matter of right.)

Concurrent Jurisdiction

Under the RJA, in an action or proceeding pending in any other Michigan court of which the probate court and the other court have concurrent jurisdiction, the judge of the other court, upon motion of a party and after a finding and order on the jurisdictional issue, may by order remove the action or proceeding to the probate court. If the matter is removed to the probate court, the judge of the other court must forward to the probate court the original of all papers in the action or proceeding and thereafter proceedings may not be had before the other court, except by appeal or review provided by law or Supreme Court rule. The bill would delete that exception for appeal or review.

Stay of Proceedings

Under the RJA, after an appeal is claimed and notice of the appeal is given at the probate court, all further proceedings in pursuance of the appealed judgment, order, or sentence must cease until the appeal is determined, except as otherwise provided for certain cases. The bill provides instead that, after an appeal of right from a judgment or order of the probate court was filed with the Court of Appeals and notice of the appeal was filed with the probate court, all further proceedings in pursuance of the judgment, order, or sentence would be stayed for 21 days or, if a motion for stay pending appeal were granted, until the appeal was determined.

Senate Bill 633

Under EPIC, if the probate court has concurrent jurisdiction of an action or proceeding that is pending in another court, on the motion of a party and after a finding and order on the jurisdictional issue, the other court may order removal of the action or proceeding to the probate court. If the action or proceeding is removed to the probate court, the other court must forward to the probate court the original of all papers in the action or proceeding. After that transfer, the other court may not hear the action or proceeding, except by appeal or review as provided by law or Supreme Court rule. The bill would delete that exception for appeal or review.

MCL 600.308 et al. (S.B. 632)
700.1303 (S.B. 633)

ARGUMENTS

(Please note: The arguments contained in this analysis originate from sources outside the Senate Fiscal Agency. The Senate Fiscal Agency neither supports nor opposes legislation.)

Supporting Argument

The bills would reduce confusion and streamline the appeals process regarding matters appealed from the probate court. The current system, in which some appeals from the probate court go to the COA and some go to the circuit court, is cumbersome and difficult to understand. Some matters in the same case, for instance, are appealable to different courts. In some cases, litigants may miss their filing deadline for an appeal by directing it to the wrong court. In addition, over the years, jurisdiction of the probate court and circuit court has been blurred by various statutory changes and court reforms. For instance, probate judges sometimes act with the authority of circuit court judges by hearing cases before the family division of circuit court. Also, some circuits have plans of concurrent jurisdiction in which probate judges and circuit judges preside over cases in both of those courts. Given these situations, it makes little sense to have matters in probate court proceedings appealed to the circuit court.

By providing that probate court cases are appealable to the COA, and not to circuit court, the bills would simplify the appeals process, make it easier for all interested parties to understand, and make the system more practical and predictable. It also would allow courts to use their resources more efficiently by preventing incorrect appeals filings and avoiding the need to spend time and attention redirecting them to the proper court.

Supporting Argument

Senate Bill 632 would provide clarity and consistency regarding stays pending appeals in probate cases. Stays of circuit court rulings in civil cases are governed by Michigan Court Rule (MCR), while stays of probate court decisions are governed by both court rule and statute. While the court rules provide for an automatic 21-day stay on the enforcement of a civil judgment from circuit court, neither the court rules nor statute provides for an automatic stay for a definite period of time in appeals from the probate court.

Specifically, under MCR Chapter 2 (Civil Procedure), "execution may not issue on a judgment and proceedings may not be taken for its enforcement until 21 days after a final judgment...is entered in the case" (MCR 2.614). (Chapter 2 governs procedure in all civil proceedings in all courts except where the limited jurisdiction of a court makes a rule inherently inapplicable or where a rule applicable to a specific court or specific type of proceeding provides a different procedure.) Under MCR Chapter 5 (Probate Court), orders for certain probate proceedings are not stayed pending appeal unless ordered by the court on motion for good cause (MCR 5.802). Under the RJA, after an appeal is claimed and notice of the appeal is given at the probate court, further proceedings in pursuance of the appealed judgment, order, or sentence must cease until the appeal is determined, except as otherwise provided for certain cases. By providing that, after an appeal of right was filed with the Court of Appeals, further proceedings in pursuance of the judgement, order, or sentence of the probate court would be stayed for 21 days (or until the appeal was granted, if a motion for stay pending appeal were granted), the bill would treat stays of appeals from probate court consistently with how court rules deal with stays of appeal from the circuit court.

Legislative Analyst: Patrick Affholter

FISCAL IMPACT

The bills would have no fiscal impact on State or local government.

Fiscal Analyst: Ryan Bergan

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This analysis was prepared by nonpartisan Senate staff for use by the Senate in its deliberations and does not constitute an official statement of legislative intent.