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2026 McCree Journalism Awards Announced

Again, this year, Journalism projects that examined, explained, and exposed problems and important issues in law enforcement and the legal system were chosen as the winners of the 52nd annual Wade H. McCree Advancement of Justice Awards, sponsored by the Michigan Press Association Foundation.

The winners were determined by a panel of four judges, representing law and media, who independently reviewed thirteen entries from across Michigan.

The winners are:

- Reporter Violet Ikonomova of the Detroit Free Press for series of stories on “Continuing coverage on a decade of Detroit Police Shootings” Her relentless research has produced a package of reports that reflects the newspaper’s continued commitment to dogged coverage of police shootings. Building on a project published the previous year, the 2025 investigation anchoring this package found many of those shootings that began with a recurring, avoidable set of circumstances – a random, nonviolent stop that escalated with a foot chase because an officer suspected a firearm. Her work exposed how a simple stop can turn dangerous or deadly.
- Reporter Paul Egan of the Detroit Free Press for his reporting on “five deaths and two injuries all streaming from the exact same problem: Out of code railings on the top floors of two state prisons that are too short to prevent falls or suicides.” Prison staff, inmates, and families alike do not feel safe. They have asked courts, prison officials, and Gov. Gretchen Whitmer’s office for help without seeing results. Paul’s consistent questions and reporting brought those results. Because of Paul’s dogged pursuit of these stories, state prison officials were designing the safety improvements in January and expect to select a contractor in spring 2026.
- Reporter/Managing Editor Kristie May, reporter Raine Kuch, audience and engagement editor Reid Williams and editor James Sanford of NowKalamazoo for their story on “Jailhouse Communication.” On the face of it, a contract with a telecommunications company that helped county jail inmates hear and see their family and friends – and read e-books and other tablet activities – would seem like a positive program. We spent a year on document requests, pressure financial disclosures, and interviews with officials in the Sheriff’s office, jail, county government, and incarcerated communities, all to process the implication of this contract. We discovered the underbelly of a system that is common nationwide and known all-too-well by people least able to affect it: ● It was the only way inmates could connect to the outside world, because in-person visits had been all but banned ● Neither the phones nor tablets were accessible, available, or high quality enough to reliably communicate, and nowhere near what the jail or private companies

promised ● The telecom company paid hundreds of thousands of dollars to the county as a bonus payment to add it to its network of affiliate jails ● The county also got a cut of the high fees that inmates and their families had to pay to use any of the equipment

- Reporter Sarah Cwiek of Michigan Public for her two stories “Another Detroit wrongful conviction lawsuit: ‘I have never seen a fabrication of this extent.’ and New Report on a wrongful conviction highlights old missteps in hopes of preventing future mistakes.” Together, these stories inform the public about the workings of the courts, prosecutors, police, and post-conviction review, while demonstrating how accountability and reform can emerge from public-interest journalism. These stories examine the case of Detroit exoneree Duane Williams and the systemic failures that led to his wrongful conviction and imprisonment for more than 11 years. They illuminate how wrongful convictions happen, how they are corrected, and what reforms are needed to prevent future injustices.

The McCree awards are named for Judge Wade H. McCree (1920-87), one of the most distinguished lawyers and jurists in Michigan history. He was a staunch advocate for equal rights and open, accountable government. McCree served as a circuit, federal and U.S. Appeals court judge and, from 1977-81, as solicitor general of the United States.

The coveted McCree awards are based on the significance and informative level of journalism, as well as the impact on changing and improving the legal and law enforcement systems.

The awards were presented to the winners at the 2026 Michigan Journalism Hall of Fame dinner on April 19th at the Kellogg Center.

The Michigan Press Association Foundation was created in 1980 to further the interests of journalism in Michigan. The Foundation’s mission includes serving the public interest by encouraging, fostering, and aiding improvements in the quality, vigor and fairness of Michigan journalism and a free press in the State of Michigan. The Foundation, which also sponsors the Michigan Journalist of the Year competition, has invested more than \$330,000 in Michigan journalism since 1990, including the award of more than 300 scholarships to college-level journalism students.

Learn more about the MPA Foundation at michiganpress.org/mpafoundation.

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