



February 1, 2010

Dear Faith Leader,

As a leader in the faith community, you have an important voice in shaping the policies of our state. We know that the pursuit of justice is a fundamental value of faith communities and believe you are committed to the American credo of “liberty and justice for all.” As a respected community leader, we ask that you join us in support of the effort to improve Michigan’s failing public defense system.

We are writing to invite you to sign on to the attached interfaith letter of support for public defense reform.

The Sixth Amendment of the United States Constitution states that every person, regardless of his or her station in life, has the right to an attorney when accused of a crime. Effective defense representation is a crucial element of a working justice system. However, a report by the National Legal Aid and Defender Association, in conjunction with the State Bar of Michigan, found that Michigan’s system of public defense fails to uphold the constitutional right to counsel and fails to meet nationally recognized standards – the American Bar Association’s *Ten Principles of a Public Defense Delivery System*. State legislators are now focused on this crisis and people around the state are asking what can be done to fix our failing system.

The Campaign for Justice is a nonprofit organization that is organizing a broad-based coalition of organizations and individuals from across the political spectrum to fight for a fair and effective public defense system in Michigan. The Campaign is seeking legislative reform that will ensure adequate state funding of public defense services and a system that will ensure that minimum national standards are implemented and maintained. We believe legislative reform is needed to improve cost effectiveness, protect the public’s safety and restore the Constitutional right to an effective defense representation.

We hope that you will make this issue a top priority. We are currently working to broaden our interfaith coalition and we invite you to join the Campaign for Justice and State Bar of Michigan in this effort by lending your name in support of our work toward an effective public defense system. We ask that you sign on to the attached interfaith sign-on letter that will be used in our continued efforts to mobilize Michigan’s various faith communities.

Michigan has been repeatedly singled-out for its deplorable public defense delivery system. It is essential that we stand up for those in our community who have the least resources and ensure that justice doesn’t depend on which side of the county line you happen to live on.

We need your help. If you wish to sign on to the attached letter, please email your name, contact information and the name of your organization or house of worship to Amit Weitzer, Campaign for Justice organizer, at aweitzer@mijjustice.org.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Laura M. Sager".

Laura Sager, *Executive Director*

Campaign for Justice



February 1, 2010

Dear Michigan State Legislator,

We as faith leaders from around the state of Michigan write this letter to urge you to support public defense reform. We have come from various faith traditions to join together in standing for justice. The deplorable state of public defense delivery in Michigan requires comprehensive legislative reform to ensure that Michigan has a justice system that works for all. As you may know, Michigan's public defense system has long been singled out by national and state reports as poorly administered and severely and chronically underfunded.

The pursuit of social justice is a central tenet of communities of faith. As people of faith, we work towards a justice system that does not leave the poor behind. We stand up for those members of our community who have the least and believe that justice should depend neither upon which side of the county line you happen to live on nor the amount of money you have. We believe:

- **The constitutional rights of all Michigan residents must be protected.** The state has the responsibility to promptly provide effective representation to anyone accused of a crime who cannot afford an attorney. Over 40 years ago, in *Gideon v. Wainwright*, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that "the assistance of counsel is a fundamental right essential to a fair trial." But in Michigan, this right is being denied.
- **A broken public defense system fails to keep our communities safe.** Wrongful convictions mean that the innocent go to prison while perpetrators of brutal crimes are free. When mistakes are made, we are all at risk.
- **Ineffective defense representation can be devastating for families and children.** When the right to counsel is not upheld, lives are destroyed. Families and communities are broken up. Children facing delinquency charges without effective representation can end up trapped in the system.
- **Michigan needs a system of public defense that effectively and efficiently uses taxpayer dollars.** Costly errors and often, inappropriate sentences mean that Michigan taxpayers pay millions in wrongful conviction lawsuits and corrections costs, taking away from other critical needs.

It is part of our duty as faith leaders to promote justice for all people. We are proud to support the Campaign for Justice's two main goals: the establishment of a system with adequate state funding, and a system that meets and enforces minimum national standards.

We urge you to support legislation that will fix Michigan's failing public defense system.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



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