



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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